

IN THIS WEEK'S ISSUE we feature architecture student and musician Charles Millot's reflection on the Floating University Berlin, a project by German collective Raumlabor. A temporary educational facility, the Floating University was a joint international venture of several universities and featured a program of workshops, lectures and events that focused on topics including architecture, art, activism and environmental care.—EDS.

#### AT A BEND IN THE FLOATING UNIVERSITY BERLIN

Charles Millot

FROM MAY TO SEPTEMBER THIS YEAR, the

Tempelhofer Feld water reservoir was the site of a collaborative, poetic appropriation: the Floating University Berlin (FUB). Condemned once to pure function, this little blue spot above Berlin's long-fallow airport was transformed through an ambitious pedagogical and architectural endeavour to become a social condenser; the work of the Berlin-based design collective Raumlabor as part their initiative to build a laboratory for spatial and pedagogic experimentation.

The Floating University Berlin was first and foremost a place of critical reflection on contemporary architecture, raising questions on the resources available to the discipline, the fate

of materials in construction, and its impact on the natural environment. This is the special spirit of Raumlabor and their fellow thinkers; preferring to use scaffolding, OSB panels and reused materials, they praised *la vie dans le mouvement*, minimising their presence and that of their materials on site.

Though the physical foundation of the project was the concrete slab of the floor of the reservoir, the FUB spoke to an idea of urbanised nature, to the future of wastelands. Through its program, the FUB sought to arrange new relationships between different actors of the city who had found a spatial locality in common. In parallel, the FUB advanced a pedagogy

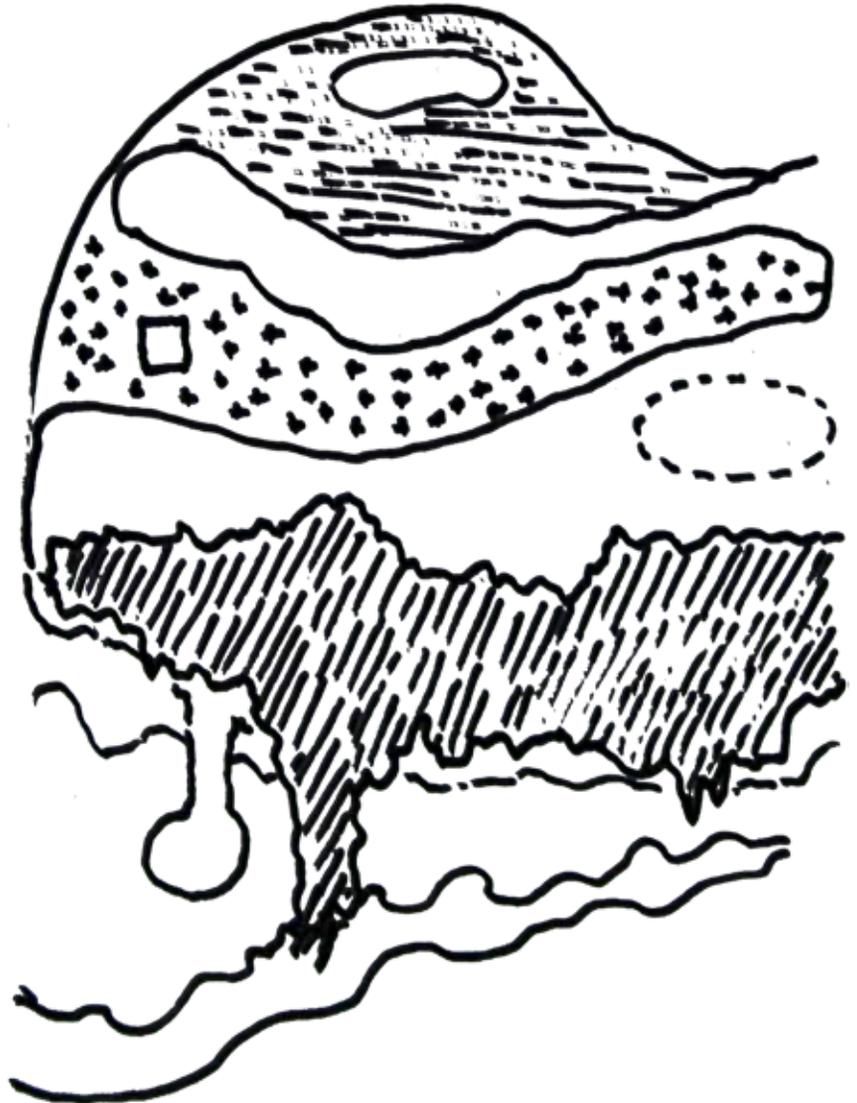
that placed the student at the centre of the project, asking her to shoulder responsibility for its success, making her a key agent in the site's construction and part of an ongoing chain of histories of former students and actors.

During the summer semester at Universität der Künste Berlin, architecture students from the studios of Markus Bade and Anna Kokalanova took over the Floating University as a project site. Students from the first studio, *Floating University Berlin: Entwerfen als Praxis am Küchentisch*, became both the builders and dreamers of its open kitchens and the mediators of the site's program, ensuring proper use of the place during workshops and conferences. Taking turns, they helmed the FUB's ovens and counters to prepare food and drinks for a whole host of guests. Becoming the 'acrobat gardeners' of the FUB, they were participants that both tended to the needs and flows of the University, juggling the roles of architectural actors and architectural directors.

The Floating University is reminiscent of the Ciudad Abierta, founded in 1971 in Ritoque, Chile; a part commune, part teaching experiment, part 1:1 architectural laboratory built by the students of the PUCV School of Architecture of Valparaiso. Over the course of four decades, through a powerful pedagogic program tempered by a lyric consideration of architecture, students built projects throughout the site, most rendered in concrete or wood, drawing inspiration from all aspects of the profession, from the poetic to the purely functional.

During the meetings of the second studio, *Do What You Want*, students were asked to define their own subject of investigation, to elaborate their process and their own project approach. The key questions that emerged included: How do you make decisions? Should not school be the place of their own personal construction? And is it not by first discovering themselves that students will be better placed to execute real change both in their immediate environment and broader profession?

My conclusion, informed by the radical pedagogy of the Floating University is this: it is up to us, as future architects, to rebel and to reinvent ourselves and our profession; to counter the financialisation of higher education.



For as long as it is true, as Stéphane Hessel says, that 'to create is to resist, and to resist is to create' the challenge remains; to anticipate and react to society; to make a project work in one place and have continue it elsewhere; to establish new and radical experiences of which the Floating University this year has been paradigmatic.

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*Malaquais. Charles is currently working on his masters thesis on the concept of Free Spaces [Des espaces libres]. He has previously worked for Hans Walter Müller.*

*For more info on the Floating University Berlin see: [www.floatinguniversity.org](http://www.floatinguniversity.org)*

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**Overleaf:** The Floating University Berlin, photo by Charles Millot (2018).

**Above:** Rêves Flottants, sketch by Charles Millot (2018).