Rural Data

Chances are, if you post a photo to Facebook, you are visiting Prineville, Oregon. This studio interrogates the proliferation of data centers: large, energy-intensive, mostly out of sight and always on, data centers, or computing infrastructures, have more than quintupled in the United States since 1997. With ample supplies of low-cost electricity, cheap land, a mild climate, and tax incentives, Central and Eastern Oregon offer ideal sites for this recent typology. Already home to Facebook in Prineville, Google in the Dalles and Amazon in Boardman, data centers might be becoming Oregon’s new biggest industry, posing an outsized cultural impact in the small Oregon communities where they operate. Blurring the lines between architecture, infrastructure and technology, these mega-buildings typically double the power load of the small towns where they’re sited. With attention now shifting to making servers less energy intensive and spurring innovation in the design and form of the data center itself, how can the design offer ways to connect locally as well as globally?

The studio will explore the physical infrastructure of contemporary data, in order to posit new concepts for this new building typology. What are the physical manifestations of virtual connectivity? What does it mean for architects to design buildings that are not necessarily for human occupancy, but machines and equipment?

The studio is part of a series that explore infrastructural, cultural and environmental issues in rural Oregon communities and how they relate to new linkages with 21st c. networks. The studio series encourages the student architect to take a proactive approach in interrogating existing spatial environments and envisioning future landscapes and linkages.

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