

On Temporality

A conversation between
the Editorial Committee members

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Citation: Alvado Bañón, J.; Devereux, M.; Łatka, J.; Morales-Beltran, M.; Nobile, M.L.; Stevens, S. (2023). "Temporality" UOU scientific journal #06, 20-23.

ISSN: 2697-1518. <https://doi.org/10.14198/UOU.2023.6.03>

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MMB Temporality encompasses the relationship between architecture and time. In order to make it tangible - or describable, or even measurable - we need a reference point. When we anchor it to an object, temporality acquires meaning as the merging of past, present, and future. When architectural work transcends the limits of its time, it is reinvented and reborn, as many times as needed, to remain in the 'present'. Time is thus the mere reflection of successive changes made to survive, to avoid demise. When we fix the reference point to time itself, temporality speaks of temporary acts, of the ephemeral, which takes shape in the form of physical interventions in the built environment.

JŁ Here, I would like to refer to Polish philosopher and sociologist Zygmunt Bauman, who created a notion of 'liquid modernity'. In his eyes, contemporaneity is not a single continuation of events but a series of new beginnings (Bauman, 2000). These new sequences are ephemeral and subject to constant change, so temporality can be understood as a series of elements of constancy. So time may be relative, but not in the sense of Einstein's theory, but of our condition as societies.

MLN Time is and has always been a fundamental theme in architecture. In the essay 'The beginning, the end and the beginning again', Peter Eisenman (1984) identifies two types of absence: "'was' or 'has been'; and 'will be' or 'becoming'. The first can be called memory and the second immanence. Every presence therefore contains an absence; this absence is the absence of its previous presence: its memory and the presence of a future absence, that is, its immanence" (Mei, 2015). Time in architecture can also be interpreted as that "in between" time, and it is when instead of time we consider temporary and transitory intervention as an approach to architecture, that is what we can probably define as ephemeral design. What do we mean when we talk about ephemeral design?

JAB I must remark that ephemeral design was distant from the core of our architectural learning, and the theory of temporality projects was pushed into the periphery of our knowledge.

MMB Regardless of scale, temporality helps describe those works in terms of measures of time: a day, a week, a season. All dimensions of time embrace architectural space.

JŁ On the other hand, a building that was perceived as an eternal symbol of Paris, the cathedral of Notre Dame, almost disappeared from the earth in a matter of hours, as a result of a few coincidences and such a mundane and temporary act as the lighting of a cigarette by one of the workers.

JAB Ephemeral design, as a dimension of time, is a probability and it is shown as a dominion of the region of possibility. Temporality transcends the notion of architecture as an "object". It is time to think about architecture differently, architecture as a "non-object" can redefine the aim of the design project including the notion of time.

The clue for a sustainable future is to establish a relationship between architecture and time. The history of the architecture, in the past, has been written with a principal belief, namely that the city is a static structure.

Under this premise, do we talk about innovation, social behaviour, nature, growth, time, change, sustainability, weather, citizenship, atmosphere, water, adaptability, welfare, environment..., when we talk about architecture nowadays?

What would have happened if had we thought of the city as a dynamic system, if we had spoken from the beginning about temporality?

MD We're encouraged to make our designs capable of standing the 'test of time'; of being, at least in their physical capacity, durable and long-lasting. In some ways this pushes back against ideas of temporality, suggesting that somehow the ephemeral is now counter intuitive when viewed against agendas that address climate change and the need to reduce waste. The longer lasting it is, it seems the better it is. Of course, the problem with this

thesis is that it dismisses the impact of time on our relationship with changing technologies, costs and fashions. The buildings of even 50 or 20 years ago are now 'outdated' when measured against all three of these criteria. It assumes that as the clock ticks on the ideas and components embedded into (previously) good buildings somehow tick on with it. They don't. This is where the architect (and others) needs to acknowledge the 'temporality' of all that goes into the design, building, occupancy and post occupancy stages of a project. Good design is therefore 'temporary' design - I would even go so far as to say it is, not just 'temporary' but even 'short term'. I don't mean that badly. I mean that we need to build-in dilapidation on a realistic timeframe - that is a short time frame - to our design efforts and to our teaching of architecture. Students, all too often, produce meaningful propositions for the present, and we assess them on that basis. But we (academics) pay too little attention to the teaching and assessing of resilience to time as a quality in our studios.

JAB I totally agree. The University has many things to say about real change and the real need for a move to sustainability. If we had thought of the city as a dynamic structure, we would have learnt from the beginning that architecture was related to innovation and ephemeral conditions. The city is a real dynamic system with temporal real transformations.

JL Moreover, as Shigeru Ban points out in the interview published in this Issue of the UOU Scientific Journal, temporary architecture at events such as Worlds Expo have been catalysts for innovation and development in architecture.

MLN Can we talk about a shift in the way we approach the discipline of architecture?

MD hat is not simply a building's ability to stand up for a long time, it is much more complex and explores the intricate question of easy adaptability. In a sense it means designing for all the things that you are not actually designing for when you pick up the pencil on a new project. We feel shy about discussing 'death' but we need to discuss the 'death' of a building before it has even come alive - and design for it. All buildings and their uses are temporary - let's teach students how to design 'temporality.'

SS I In the global north, stories of permanence are woven around us, playing out in both our bodies and our cities. Faces and facades scraped clean of the marks of time reflect an engrained chronophobia, what Karsten Harries (1982) termed the terror of time. Design keeps on designing, further instilling these fantasies of permanence within our temporal world with problematic consequences for both ourselves and our planet. We ravage the earth in an ever increasing search for resources to fulfil demand for the ever new, destroying habitats and ecosystems. Whilst an inability to accept impermanence psychologically scars us, furthering suffering.

Despite all our ambitions to deny it, our architectures and ourselves are ongoing process. Fixed form is just a fantasy, all architectures are kinetic and are ongoing processes moving through time. To clean or repair is never to step back in time, but to add another layer to an ongoing story.

JAB Moving through time by temporality, architectural design has to be clarified by the kinetic relationship between citizens and city life. We have the possibility to use democratic tools to give architecture a real quality of representation. We must work with the possibility that the issue is dynamic perception.

"Nonlinear dynamics needs nonlinear equations to be solved. Nonlinear equations often involves a pattern of solutions and are difficult to solve" (Morrison, 1991).

Ephemeral design has no-references, changes constantly and often involve a pattern of solutions that are difficult to resolve. Design with time and indeterminacy uses design research, as a technical tool to work with diversity, open future, emotion, imagination and a complete project to establish a dynamic process. This process tries to formulate concepts concerning architecture and life.

SS Our architectures are narratives written across time, their surfaces evolving palimpsests of events that Morton has described as poems (Morton, 2013). Ruskin famously said that to remove the stain of time was a crime (Ruskin, 1880). As Leatherbarrow writes, buildings are time and as such can aid our temporal understanding (Leatherbarrow, 2020).

MLN Absolutely, the analogy with the palimpsest in architecture has been introduced thirty years before Morton's text. Architecture is described in its potential of being understood "as subject to a constant process of change through time", where different traces and signs overlap and define the territories, cities, and our built environment as we know it today (Corboz, 1983). And it is obviously embedded in the notion of cities growing over time by building on existing traces: Napoli can be an example. The relationship between architecture and time implies a shift in the reading of the role of the architect as the one who is capable of designing the process, enabling the future dimension, imagining an open framework rather than predicting a fixed outcome. Cities and, therefore, architecture are to be seen as the scenery for transitions, capable of building strategies in which the physical data of the architectural project takes into account its inhabitation, management and life cycle. A holistic approach to architecture that takes into account the notion of time. The architectural object is considered to be part of a broader context which includes several parameters involving not only physical, but social and economic aspects.

JAB As you mention, cities need to be thought of as dynamic structures, where time is the focus for designing new intelligent realities. As a dynamic system (Gunaratne, 2003), we must work with iteration. In order to understand the new situations mathematical formulae are needed. In a dynamic system there is an interdependence between time and space. Dynamic systems exhibit three necessary conditions: iteration, nonlinearity and sensitivity to initial conditions. The iteration speaks about the notion of traces as signs of physical space.

Sensitivity to initial conditions means that the system's asymptotic behaviour varies when the initial conditions are changed by even a small amount: the butterfly effect. As we understood in the university, we need to be precise, in terms of education, to the initial conditions.

MLN This operation in architecture is close to the notion of montage. This construction involves, as in any design process, a selective memory and therefore the removal of some of the traces and the overwriting of new ones (Deleuze, Guattari, 1996). This reading phase coincides with that of identifying the signs of physical space, to extract them from their stratifications, interpret them, reorder them and recompose them into systems that are significant for us. Reading must be done with a planning mind, to reveal the past and glimpse the future (De Carlo Bunčuga, 2014).

JL An interesting example of such an approach is the idea of Open Building, created by Habraken. He divided the built environment into frame and infill. The frame consists of an analysis of an urban plot, necessary infrastructure and basic structure. The infill is composed of a facade and internal spatial layout, which is influenced by inhabitants but also influences them. The Open Building involves the creation of buildings (especially housing) that can be adapted to your needs at the infill stage and also changed in the future. This implies a considerable technical and organisational challenge, but on the other hand, offers the potential to adapt over time to changing needs. It was an interesting experience during the pandemic when our flats had to turn into workplaces. A small study was carried out which showed that almost 10% of people worked ... from the bathroom because they didn't have necessary spatial conditions. Shouldn't we therefore be thinking about adaptive architecture from 2020 onwards?