

# Interloper: Activating the Possible

multiple temporalities  
architecture  
drawing  
mapping  
education

This article seeks to open a dialogue on encouraging creative possibility in architectural education, with particular focus on the architecture studio. Although discussed through the practice of design, I present experimental methods that are adaptable across creative and speculative disciplines. Rooted in the conceptual difference between *possible* and *probable* thinking as identified by philosophers Didier Debaise and Isabelle Stengers, this article positions the role of the architect as being interstitially located in multiple temporalities (as well as occupying the liminal space between the real and the imagined) in such a way that this difference between possible and probable is seen to be potentially critical to the future of the built environment. Focusing on *non-linear time* (investigated through temporal mapping), situating the imagined architecture in the *dynamic conditions of site* (site studies/development of architecture), and through the *introduction of an interloper* (chance/event), this article acts as a framework for examining potential methods for nurturing and sustaining possibility in the space of the architecture studio.

**Lynch, Samantha Jane<sup>1</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> School of Architecture, Technology and Engineering, University of Brighton, Brighton, UK.  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5364-0090>  
S.Lynch2@brighton.ac.uk

Citation: Lynch, S. J. (2024). "Interloper: Activating the Possible", UOU scientific journal #07, 64-71.

ISSN: 2697-1518. <https://doi.org/10.14198/UOU.2024.7.09>  
This document is under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license (CC BY 4.0)

Critical Essay Received: 02/03/2024  
Received in revised form: 09/05/2024  
Accepted: 15/05/2024



## INTRODUCTION

"What we need to activate today is a thinking that commits to a possible, by means of resisting the probable..." (Debaise, Stengers, 2017, 18).

I keep a list, roughly shorthanded to the title of magic. It is a rambling document, with multiple versions, that has collected little rifts in my experience of reality, from childhood through to the present.<sup>1</sup> These 'rifts' are moments that disturb expectation and evoke possibilities, indelibly co-existing in my understanding of being alive. The list does not attempt explanation, as but a few words act to connect me (vividly and immediately) to the experience of each. Though it has been over a year since I have added to it, the list acts as a protest to narratives (whether they be grand or tentative, social or personal) that do not allow room for the possibility of the unexpected. In today's algorithm-based social landscape this possibility, with no predictable form (the surprise of something completely unforeseen...), is increasingly eclipsed by the pressing and intensified narratives of the probable.<sup>2</sup> I begin here with the position that architectural education has not escaped this qualitative shift – that mistake and error, imbalance, embracing the unknown in the design process (all essential elements of creative practice) – are at risk of being compromised in light of a more to-hand, solution-based thinking.<sup>3</sup> Notions of responsibility (what is actually at stake here?) appear increasingly unquestioned, taken for granted as part and parcel of specific agendas (an example being the loose application of the term sustainability, where thoughtfulness may be construed as implicit). As new architectures emerge, how the future is imagined and discussed within education plays a role of critical concern. In writing this article I seek to bring attention to the notions of 'possible' and 'probable' – as described by Debaise and Stengers – with regard to the practice of the architecture studio.<sup>4</sup> The operational differences between these ways of projecting the future appear subtle in the



Fig.1 – Brighton Marina Seawall with glitch, photograph by author, 2023.

early stages of imagining, yet may have far-reaching implications for the built environment. Though discussed through the particular lens of architecture, this article intends to have potential resonance with other speculative disciplines. In the attempt to open this dialogue, I share some of the research and experimental methods for encouraging possibles in the studio.

In the architecture design studio this year (run vertically and at masters level), the brief is entitled *Interloper*.<sup>5</sup> This is a direct and bold invitation for the students to welcome the unpredictable, be thrown off balance, and to be challenged through the design process in surprising ways. It is the dynamic capacity that such a condition may bring to the studio work that is of particular interest, alongside the invitation for a varied and indeterminate theoretical groundwork. The studio begins with this question: How can the possible (rather than the probable) be reinvigorated in design practice? Each student's practice, both collective and individual, is encouraged by the brief to explore experimental methods, testing out ideas that allow room for error and surprise. Though engagement is with fluctuating and at times unstable conditions, the student investigations are firmly rooted in site, which this year is the Brighton Marina, UK (Fig.1).

In order to counteract the dominant narratives of the probable, the brief is set up to require a multiplicitous approach to the design work, where dynamic qualities of site are rigorously explored. Their situation is intensified through an

implicit embodiment of multiple temporalities within the work. Methods for approaching this intention are discovered through temporal mapping (drawing), the interjection of the interloper (an unexpected narrative/material dynamic) and the siting of an architecture. The site in this case is not simply spatial (the marina) but accrues through the layers of studies over time.<sup>6</sup> Allowing room for the possible to develop, the material conjuring of temporal multiplicity forms the foundation for the architectural investigations and studio development.

## TEMPORAL PROJECTIONS: MULTIPLE TEMPORALITIES AND TIME MAPPING

"There would, without the future, be no more history, and there would be no more future, no event to come, without the very possibility of an absolute surprise..." (Derrida, 2005, xiii)

The process of designing architecture is fundamentally creative, acting to enfold possible futures into the place of now. This happens when architects imagine a future building, whether conceptualised through the digital space of their screens, at the drawing board, or modelled into a bit of folded card. The practice of the architect inhabits a critical junction that lies between imagination and manifestation: an oscillating (dynamic) realm where the linearity of time dissolves and new possibilities emerge. Creative spans of time are where the seeds

of the built form originate. The built form itself does not come to be in this time, but comes instead in the future. The architect makes plans. This is part of the essential nature of the architectural process and is responsible for the range and complexity of temporal strands that form the architectural process. Through this play of process and form, architecture as a practice not only reflects societal investment in moral and ethical priorities, logistics, invention and desire, but it also holds a significant influence upon it. Architecture can be a tool of control, of communication, and of reification. It can also challenge and extend the limits of the known and offer up the wondrous; it is where we have the spark of a daydream, and where we comprehend what is possible. As the process of design entwines method with material thinking, making, and drawing, new possibilities can take form. As touched on earlier, in today's media-thick environment of speculation we find the vital nature of this crystallisation increasingly overshadowed by the weight of the probable—the 'rearrangement' of what is and was that follows a logic of conformity.<sup>7</sup>

The earliest intuitive engagements with the Brighton Marina in studio experimented with capturing the dynamism of the site through the process of creating *Time Maps* (Figs. 2, 3, 6 and 7). Findings from my own research practice, aspiring to permeate the temporal field of the architectural drawing with a new gravity, root the initial territory of the studio in a drawing-based language.

The *Time Maps* (each student made multiple maps) act as carefully drawn studies of changeable site conditions, identified by the student's experience and drawn observations of the marina. Making multiple maps sets the stage for understanding a range of temporalities with a spatial, potentially topological, language. Through the intensification and conflation of multiplicities of time, one is able to absorb that a *simultaneity of differing* times is possible.<sup>8</sup> The oscillations that can

arise through drawing allow time to take on a presence that is non-linear and unquantifiable. Beginning a drawing becomes not only a gesture towards an unknown target but is *already the target*: the process itself an oscillation that registers and marks the unified condition between.

The qualitative understandings of site temporalities in the *Time Maps* are then intensified through the *Hybrid Maps* (Figs. 4 and 5), where ideas from multiple maps are explored together, without need of quantifiable resolution. In understanding the conceptualisation of multiple temporalities, historian Helge Jordheim uses the lenses of "nonsynchronicities", "layers of time", and natural and historical times. These differing approaches take physical consequence through "practices of synchronisation", which Jordheim sees as giving rise to the homogeneous, linear, and teleological time of modernity (Jordheim, 2014, 498). The Hybrid Maps do not seek to synchronise differing temporalities but to counteract this notion of like-for-like by drawing attention to the shared realm where differentiations occur, whether narrative, sublime, intuitive, or operational. The resistance of differing temporalities to merge coincides with the presence of their simultaneous nature – an experienced paradox,

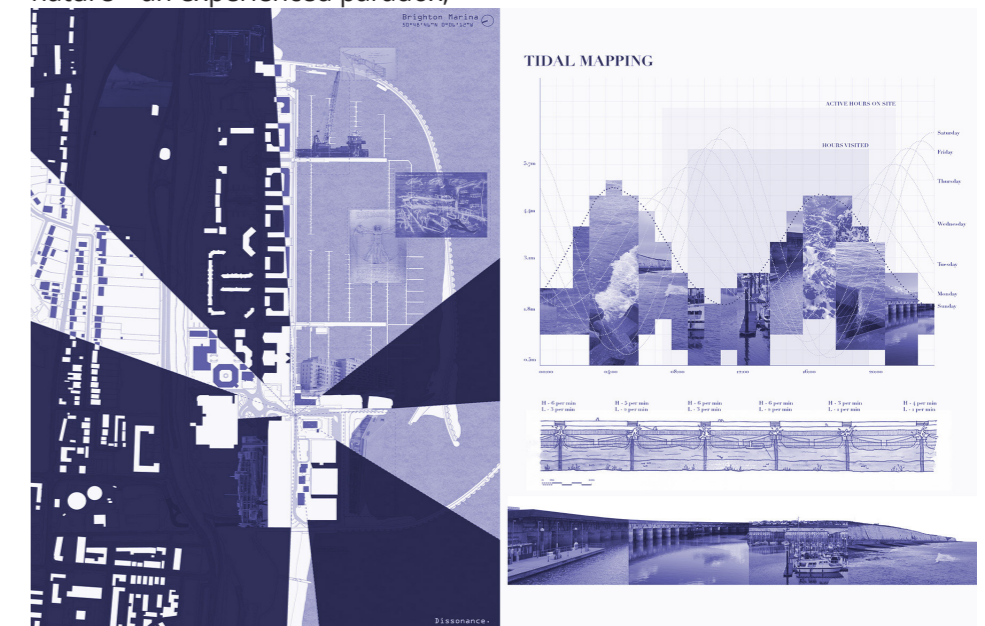


Fig.2 and 3 - Examples of Temporal Mapping. Ege Oztaysi's map of 'warp points' at marina entrance, in response to particularities of site threshold (Year 1, left) and Charlotte Ledger's mapping of tidal splashes and rhythms (Year 1, right), 2023.

intensified through the practice of the mapping, that encourages the arousal of the possible (the probable being short-circuited by both the slippery, multiplicitous nature of the dynamic subject matter and the fragmentation/reinvention of overarching narratives).

Sustaining the state of possibility is a key focus of the studio brief. Akin to Derrida's 'absolute surprise', the creative act is at times experienced as a suddenness—a moment of realization which gains its power through the ability to *reflect and project anew*. Though this is a desired condition, it is only a partial aspect of how possibility arises. The non-linear, pulsating presence of temporal disturbance, as the architect inhabits future/past/present at once, is the unified condition where, as long as cause-and-effect is operationally suspended, one can *sustain* the possibility of these eruptions.

In the architecture studio, these eruptions both arrive and express themselves *materially*. Architectural theorist Sanford Kwinter describes temporal phenomena as being "disturbances and irregularities" that remain "untrackable" because mathematical equations lack the capacity to be sensitive to changes in material conditions (Kwinter, 2002, 22). To converse with this dynamic realm takes another kind

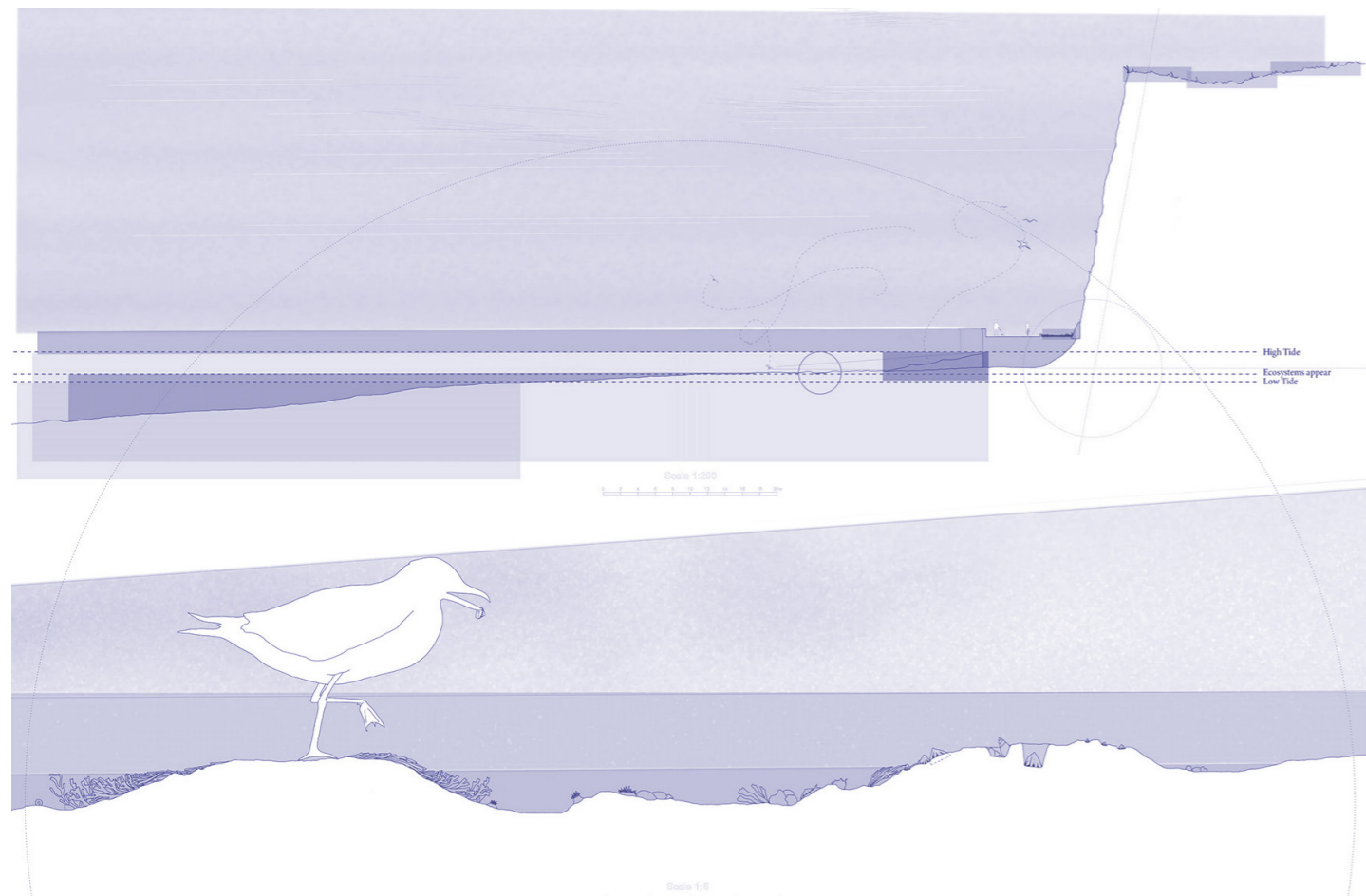


Fig.4 - Example of Hybrid Mapping. Kim Lau's Micro/macro map of tide pools and erosion of chalk cliffs at the marina (Year 1) 2023.

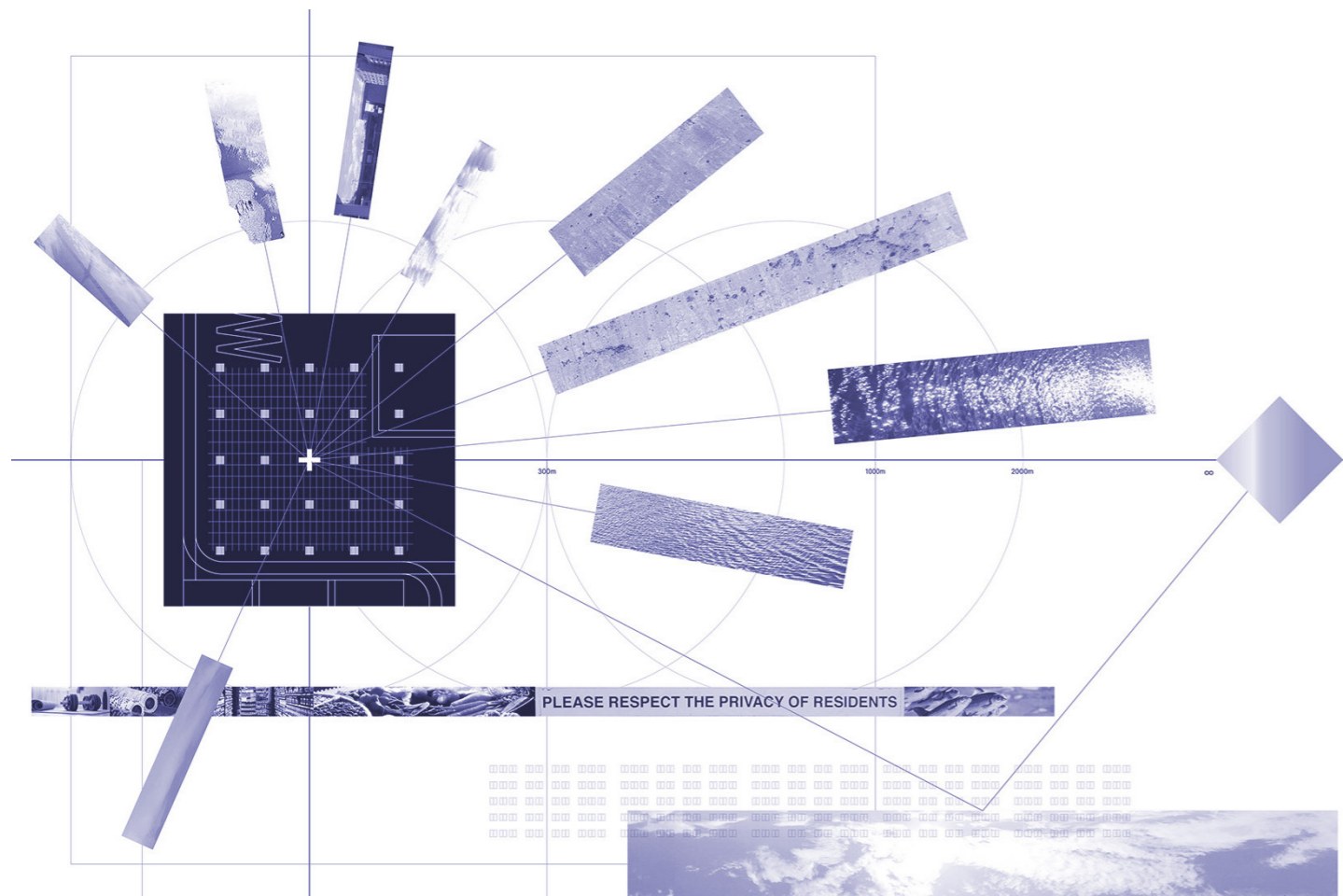


Fig.5 - Example of Hybrid Mapping. Wilson Ng's mapping of site-specific poetic and physical reflections (Year 2), 2023.

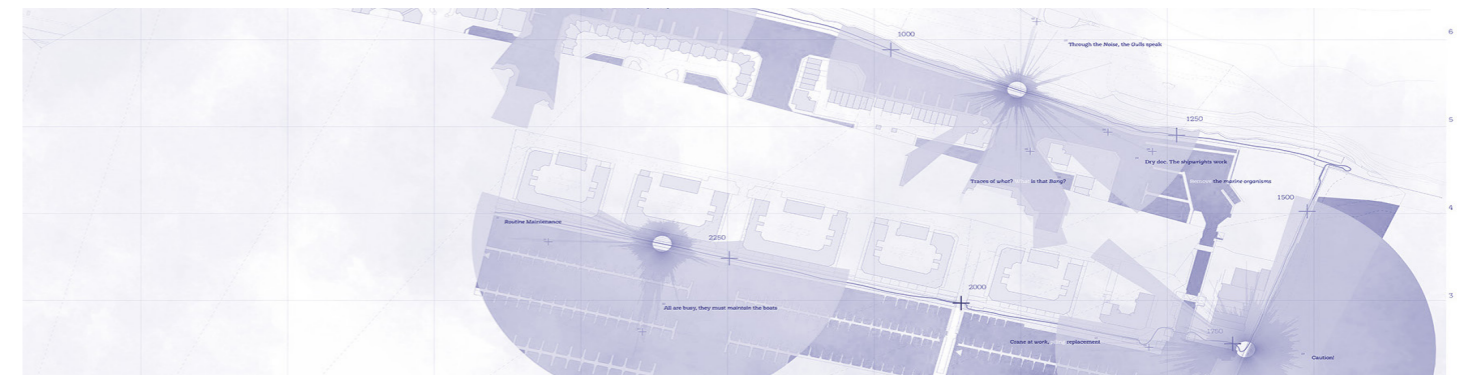


Fig.6 - Detail of Carl Delacruz's marina sound mapping (Year 1), 2023.

of approach than the measured. What arises from the temporal mappings by nature welcomes a poetic and spatial dialogue with what cannot be tracked, and harbours exactly the sensitivity necessary to investigate and proposition this material realm (a critical component of architectural possibility). Donna Haraway's 'tentacular thinking,' based on the Latin tentacular (meaning as 'to feel' and 'to try'), acts as an appropriate lens for approaching the complex oscillations between the imagined and manifest, as the students navigate the changeable site conditions and their spatial possibilities (Haraway, 2016, 31). Haraway's tentacular thinking also offers a way of being able to sit with the complexity of our environment, a set of relationships that cannot be broken into parts or understood in a linear way. Inhabiting the thickness of this complexity helps to relax the narrative trajectories of the probable and encourages new perspectives (Schatzki, 2002, 123).<sup>9</sup>

### GROUNDING THE POSSIBLE: SITING THE INTERLOPER

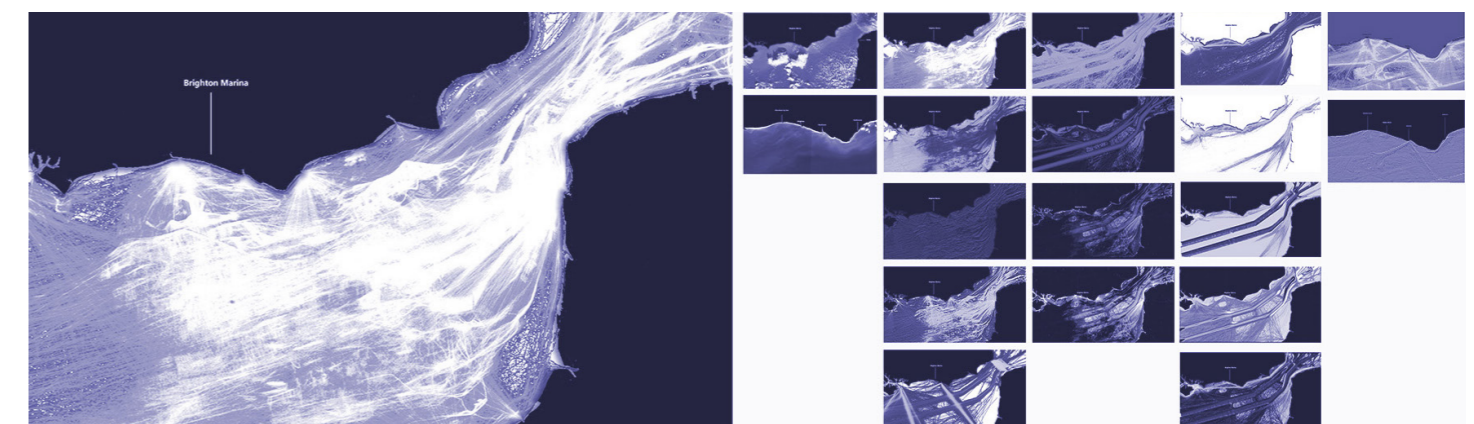


Fig.7 - Using intensification of colour and light to reveal new understanding of site, Asmaa Saadi El Hassani's attunement of traffic through the English Channel (Year 2).

*"The trouble with many theories of causality is that they edit out a quintessential element of mystery... A theory of cause and effect shows you how the magic trick is done. But what if something crucial about causality resided at the level of the magic trick itself?"* (Morton, 2013, 17).

As elucidated earlier, the studio brief constructs dynamic relationships of site through a two-part temporal/hybrid mapping, and then garners disturbance through the introduction of an interloper. The Interloper is introduced in a few guises, the first being through development of narratives using chance, the second through an event (installation and exhibition), where students' design decisions thus far site them in neighbouring conditions at a 1:1 scale. For Stengers and Debaise, conferring to the possible the power of "rooting out imposture, condemning that which is not a legitimate pointer to what lies ahead", undermines the necessary intensification that situates the possible and allows its importance (Debaise, Stengers, 2017, 18). The studio takes this forward, encouraging the entwining of 'imposture' as an opening to the possible. The interloper acts

as an aggravant; a destabilant that inhabits each project. Its nature is temporally mutliplicitous, ambiguous, glitchy, entropic. This allows the studio to perform as a critical site of experimentation, opening the opportunity to reflect on how the destabilising dynamic may inform new material, and ultimately architectural, relationships. The site is an integral part of this.

Brighton Marina inhabits an interstitial space between land and sea, acting as a gateway from the city to the rambling rural landscape of eroding cliff. As a territory it defies description, occupying a perimeter condition that is in flux in a range of ways. Historically rich and biologically diverse, the marina's interstitial nature offers multiple opportunity for approaching the studio agenda. It is a dynamic and changeable site; a neighbourhood inhabited by complex histories, diverse ecosystems and conflicting cultural aspirations. Physically, it splits the churning sea with its harbour wall, blinding visitors from the vistas of horizon and passing craft. It crams its partially-realised building projects against the beauty of prehistoric and crumbling chalk,

and erects a labyrinth of concrete between its commercial spaces and the easy air of the nearby tidepools. The centre of action, the great gap of parking lot, spreads itself from the base of another five-story car park. Pedestrians risk the underbelly of dark passages and convoluted descents to enter or exit. Yet there is a thriving tide of people in good weather, and a daily core of residents, restaurants, commercial fishing boats and dogwalkers.

The daily life of the marina – enmeshed by its deep-time slipping cliffs and harboured from the knife-edge of approaching seasons, forms the rhythms, nourishment and detritus of site and plants the ‘untrackable’ seeds of the Time Maps. In *The Anthropology of the Future*, authors Rebecca Bryant and Daniel M. Knight argue that the limit of knowledge, as defined by the future, is what forms our “perception of the familiarity of everyday life,” which they equate with our temporal orientations (Bryant, Knight, 2019, 19). The marina, as interstitial, as obfuscation, as *incomplete*, offers a disorienting and curious future orientation. On projecting the future, Bryant and Knight write:

*Speculation, we suggest, by taking us into the realm of the gap, takes us into the realm of the unknown, the withdrawn, the immanent. The gap or interval is the point at which the weirdness of the world, our inability to penetrate and pin it down, leads to conjecture, fantasy, and imaginations of the Other...* (Bryant, Knight, 2019, 82).

According to the philosopher Bruno Latour, our present orientations have been destabilised; where in the ancient past we inhabited the ‘Land,’ and in the modern era we inhabited the ‘Globe,’ we now find ourselves on an ‘Earth’ that corresponds with neither – having not the limitless resources promised (Latour, 2016, 354). This fretful state, rife with the probable (that for Debaise and Stengers links, through the application of being ‘right’ [in the sense of correct], to desertification and capitalist appropriation), influences the speculative landscape (Debaise, Stengers, 2017,19).

Sociologist Zigmunt Bauman reflects on this: “These days we tend to fear the future, having lost trust in our collective ability to mitigate its excesses, to render it less frightful and repellent... More often than not, it evokes the fear of an impending catastrophe instead of the joy of more comfort...” (Bauman, 2017, 58). Designing into this realm of the gap – not as the future of linear time but as the space of possibility, allows for narratives to slip beyond the assemblages of the past, and material relationships to reflect and attune to the present.

## CONCLUSION

*“The possible, however, makes important the possible eruption of other way [sic] of feeling, thinking, acting, which can only be envisaged in the form of an insistence, undermining the authority of the present as regards the definition of the future.”* (Debaise, Stengers, 2017,18).

Architecture is fundamentally a creative discipline, where each designer’s particular way of seeing the world holds immense value in informing the built environment and establishing new modes of practice. Architects attune with a myriad of aspirations, from those of the client(s) to the larger organism of the city (and beyond). Through the process of design, they imagine the immediate simultaneously alongside futures that are yet to unfold. The practice of the architect thus negotiates an interstitial, dynamic and unpredictable territory, of which they are a part.

The distinct ways designers interpret and navigate such complexity is informed by their own unique experiences and imaginings in the world; their own projected possibility. With the growing fear of social and ecological collapse in a postcarbon future, how can architectural education face the challenge of protecting the conditions which allow for possibility to arise? If the critical narratives need to break from the conformity of the ‘probable,’ the constraints of the past, what methods can nurture this in the space of the architecture studio? The power of the possible to loosen the constraints of contemporary future narratives is critical to the studio brief this year, and is encouraged through a multiplicitous enfolding of temporalities into the very site of the imagined architecture. The invitation of the interloper becomes a dynamic condition that challenges the attunement of each project to the site itself.

Reaching beyond the geographic context of the Brighton Marina, the site of the proposed architecture is framed by the studio brief as a complex entwining of ecologies, histories, artefacts, and systems of daily life. Each students’ practice grows out of a non-linear hybrid of temporal conditions. The potential interstitial relationships of these studied temporalities, whether rhythmic, unpredictable, measurable or elusive, are tested out and challenged by unforeseen events and conditions. Through the introduction of an ‘interloper,’ each student applies a critical positioning, informed by individual research, to the design of an architecture sensitive to dynamic future possibilities. The experimental nature of the studio process is fundamental. Although unsettling at times, not knowing what may arise is a condition that encourages a materialisation of possibilities.

Design work and research are inseparable, reciprocally informing each other and driven by a shared intention. Drawing and making lead to new knowledge, naturally embodied by the intentions/ imaginings of the projects. Through the breakdown of temporal linearity, the studio inquiry opens a site where convolutions and occlusions can coalesce, where the potential of the unknown target can reside at the crux of the design work. New narratives can emerge from the engagement of being intermittently lost within, and this can apply across disciplines, as Rebecca Solnit suggests in her discussion on narrative:

*“It seems to be an art of recognizing the role of the unforeseen, of keeping your balance amid surprises, of collaborating with chance, of recognizing that there are some essential mysteries in the world and thereby a limit to calculation...”* (Solnit, 2006, 5).

By their very nature, probabilities are calculated, and mystery eludes this. Leaving room for the unexpected to arrive, Morton’s ‘quintessential element’ of mystery attests to a non-linear approach to time, unhinged from the causal

relationships that underpin probable future speculations. My own list (*magic*) acts to remind me of this and helps to affirm the possibility of new methods toward knowledge creation, in the architecture studio and beyond.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

BAUMAN, Zigmunt. *Retrotopia*. Cambridge: Polity P, 2017. ISBN: 9781509515318.

BRYANT, Rebecca and Daniel M. KNIGHT. *The Anthropology of the Future*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2019. ISBN 9781108434379.

DEBAISE, Didier and Isabelle STENGERS. “The Insistence of Possibles: Toward a Speculative Pragmatism.” Translated by Angela Brewer. *Parse Journal* (Issue 7, 2017): 12-19.

DERRIDA, Jacques. “Preface: A Time for Farewells: Heidegger (Read by) Hegel (Read by) Malabou.” Translated by J.D. Vohen, from *The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality and Dialectic* by Catherine Malabou. New York: Routledge, 2005. ISBN 9780415287203.

HARAWAY, Donna J. *Staying with the Trouble*. Durham NC: Duke P, 2016. ISBN 9780822362241.

JORDHEIM, Helge. “Multiple Times and the Work of Synchronization.” In *History and Theory* (Vol. 53 No. 4, 2014): 498-518. DOI: 10.1111/hith.10728.

KWINTER, Sanford. *Architectures of Time: Toward a Theory of Event in Modernist Culture*. Cambridge, MA: MIT P, 2002.

LATOUR, Bruno, and others. “There is No Earth Corresponding to the Globe”: An Interview with Bruno Latour by Lars Gertenbach, Sven Opitz and Ute Tellmann.’ *Soziale Welt* (67. Jahrg., H. 3, Themenheft: Bruno Latours neue politische Soziologie 2016): 353-363.

LYNCH, Samantha Jane *The Dark Mirror: Engaging Multiple Temporalities Through Drawing*, PhD completed 2017, unpublished.

LYOTARD, Jean-François. “The Sublime and the Avant-Garde,” *The Sublime*, ed. S. Morley, London: Whitechapel Gallery and MIT P, 2010. ISBN 9780262513913.

MORTON, Timothy. *Realist Magic: Objects, Ontology, Causality*. Ann Arbor: Open Humanities P, 2013.

SCHATZKI, Theodore. *The Site of the Social: A Philosophical Account of Social Life and Change*. University Park PA: The Pennsylvania SP, 2002.

SOLNIT, Rebecca. *A Field Guide to Getting Lost*. Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2006.

## NOTES

1. The burning rock, the red bag in the trees, the stone gate map, the golden rod shadow, riding in the bow of the boat, the snake/breast dream painting, GO, temperature fading black, the bear in the berries/vortex, Moosejaw, luna moth/

cecropia, Italian trees, Minerva, the clouds when I drank the red tea... examples from the list.

2. On the ‘probable,’ Debaise and Stengers write: “We can never be too prudent when faced with the risk of confusion between the sense of the possible and the reference to the probable, which must be distinguished as different in nature. By definition the probable has to do with a transposition or a rearrangement of what has already taken place or what is ongoing, as shown by the calculation of probabilities. The probable belongs to a logic of conformity: that which was important in the past, making it possible to characterise it, will preserve this importance in the future” (Debaise, Stengers, 2017, 19-18).

3. In “The Sublime and the Avant-Garde,” Jean-François Lyotard writes well on this state of not knowing, the “and what now?” experience that he describes as both the ‘misery’ of the artist when faced with waiting (or the blank canvas), and the pleasure that comes with welcoming the unknown (Lyotard, 2010, 29).

4. The studio is a common format in architectural education. It is both a physical space, for working on designs, and a tutor-led framework for a cohort of students, investigating chosen concepts, practices and/or contemporary issues.

5. The studio brief is based on a site-specific installation (Interloper) made as part of my own research practice, created for the Black Horses Association for Speculative Architecture (Triftstraße 19A Gallery) in Halle, Germany, 2017. Relationships between drawings, mirror worlds, planes and corners of the space dynamically occupied the exhibition, intensifying the presence of site and unhinging orientation, encouraging a multiple awareness of the space. This multiplicity was also inherent in the process of designing the exhibition, in the content of the research and artifacts, and in the material and spatial consequences. This multiplicitous approach acts as the foundation for the architecture studio’s working methods towards this year’s brief.

6. There is another component to this layering not discussed in this article, which is the superposition of site into the space of a gallery as a group event/exhibition (the Marina is reconstructed poetically).

7. See footnote 2.

8. In my PhD what I describe as the slippery character of time activates a condition of possibility; a territory in which I am able to sustain differing temporalities simultaneously through drawing. The research questions how the act of drawing might allow one to reflect on things that haven’t happened yet (Lynch, 2017).

9. Philosopher Theodore Schatzki describes this complexity and dynamic essence of site in a way that resonates with the studio brief: “Social life transpires through human activity and is caught up in the orders of people, artifacts, organisms, and things. As such, it is not just immersed in a mesh of practices and orders, but also exists only as so entangled. The mesh of practices and orders is the site where social life takes place” (Schatzki, 2002,123).



Fig.8 - Situated times of day (sourced from photos if site from Instagram), Asmaa Saadi El Hassani (Year 2), 2023.