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## Opening Possibility: Activating simultaneous multiple temporalities in the architecture drawing

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Relating Systems Thinking and Design  
2022 Symposium  
University of Brighton, Brighton, UK,  
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## **Opening Possibility: Activating simultaneous multiple temporalities in the architecture drawing**

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As the contemporary condition of design research becomes increasingly more interconnected with neighbouring disciplines of inquiry in an emerging complexity of global systems, notions of temporality take on a more active and uncertain role in the process of knowledge generation and synthesis. Within architectural design practice, complex temporalities are interwoven in the predictive desires of emerging technologies, yet the temporal nature of the architectural drawing – a field (both physical and theoretical) that is rich with the possibility of experimental inquiry – conventionally maintains a linear, sequential time. This normative approach increasingly limits the capacity for the architectural drawing to reflect contemporary concerns, encouraging glossing over the more qualitative and challenging aspects of design.

Through a body of research that reflects both an analytical and creative engagement with complex temporal relationships, this presentation seeks to articulate methods of approaching architectural drawing that have the capacity to address the more elusive conditions often overlooked yet central to the practice of architecture. This presentation focuses on two of the main active agents in the research: the poetic construct, which allows for the neighbouring of conflicting notions, and sustained oscillation, which similarly suspends the need for resolution and has creative consequence. Each of these agents reflects a

temporal and structural engagement relevant to systemic design thinking. The presentation refers theoretically to work by designers, philosophers, historians, writers and artists and seeks to give rise to new possibilities with regard to narrative, context and temporality. The presentation ultimately aims to encourage new conversations and ways of understanding that may activate the potential of simultaneous multiple temporalities (or temporal multiplicities) across disciplines and modes of inquiry.

Keywords: architecture, design research, time, drawing, the poetic, oscillation, design artefacts

RSD TOPIC: Design Over Time, Methods & Methodology

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## **Presentation summary**

With an active interest in the temporal complexity and indeterminacy of architectural drawing, my present practice-based design research is rooted in the findings of my doctoral work, where I grapple with the question of how architectural drawing may reflect on what hasn't happened yet. These findings have been built upon through the development of site-specific drawing methods (which allow for the particularities of the intended location to inform the process of drawing) that work to test out some of the main theoretical speculations in the research. With relevance to systemic design, my focus for this presentation is on the dynamic structural relationships that have manifested through this research and their capacity to invite new knowledge and modes of inquiry. By sharing this work, I propose opening up a dialogue that gives form to the relationships between the more complex, elusive and fleeting components of the research.

The architectural research shared at the RSD11 conference stems from the development of a working method that synthesises the findings of empirical examinations, tested through a series of invented devices and constructs with their poetic speculations. These devices and constructs, which oscillate between the realms of text, drawing, observer/maker and spatial apparatus, allow for a sustained and

complex engagement with simultaneous multiple temporalities. That there is no absolute measure of these multiple temporalities means that the empirical content of the work is subsumed by the poetic measure. This allows for speculation that is unconstrained by a sequential structure—often the default model in conceiving temporality, and especially salient in the narratives associated with architectural convention (think of the architectural design process—its very foundation in pretending the future as present...). This opens new territory for architectural drawing, where the future is literally detailed into the present (what happens when this is challenged?), and for design research practice in general. The process of the original invention of apparatus and methods of working, inclusive of the research findings, also contributes a non-hierarchical account of making that is relevant to contemporary design practice and theory.

There are a variety of approaches from my research that focus on the structural systems at work in the formation of new knowledge. With the initial and persistent question, “How can the architectural drawing reflect on things that haven’t happened yet?,” the form of the research exists as a dynamic play of interconnected experiments and reflections – conversations between shifting perspectives.

As the subject of the inquiry is one that requires a leap into the uncertain, the methods implemented benefit from a robust elasticity in terms of context: the studies that inform the work range over a territory of many disciplines, attitudes, and approaches. That the subject matter involved is fundamentally concerned with the positing and projecting of uncertainties means that many of the investigations in the research are of a nature that resists being isolated or repeated.



Figure 1 and 2. Site-specific drawings from the Interloper exhibition by Author (Halle, Germany 2017).



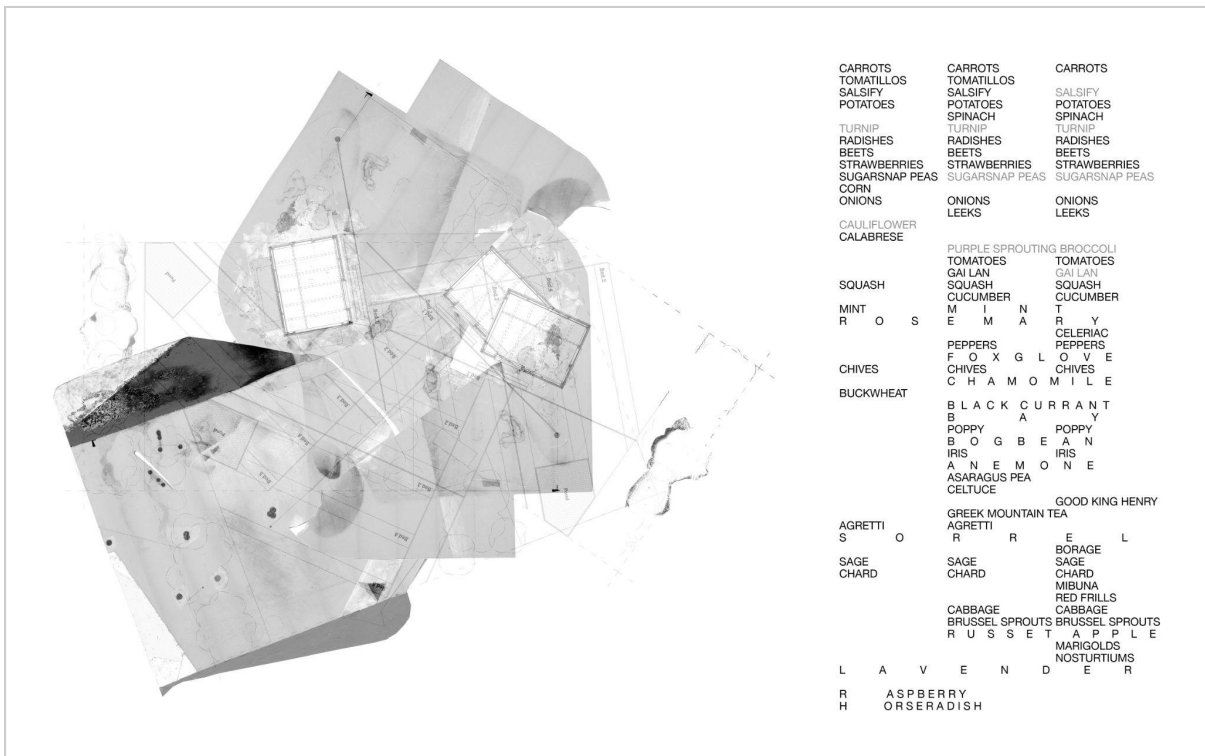
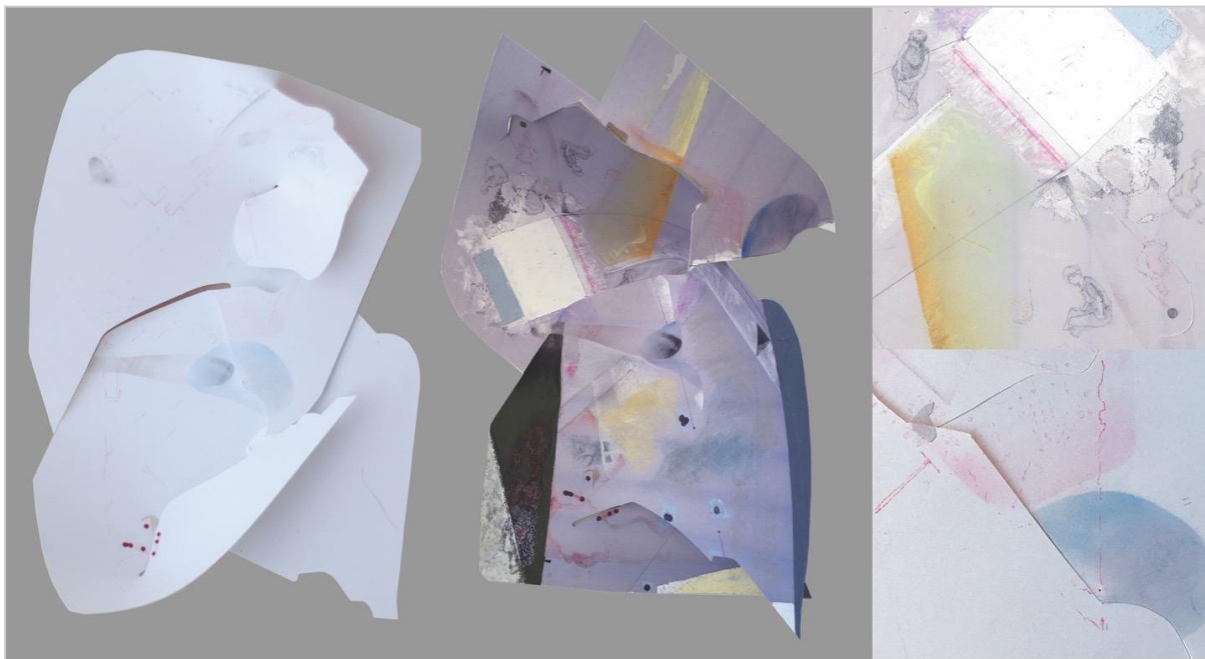


Figure 3 (above). Experiential plan of relationships at an allotment (Brighton, UK), by Author and Lucy-Ann Gilbert, 2022. Figure 4 (below). *Garden Drawing 1* and *Garden Drawing 2* with details, by Author, 2021 (Drawings 25 x 40 cm each).



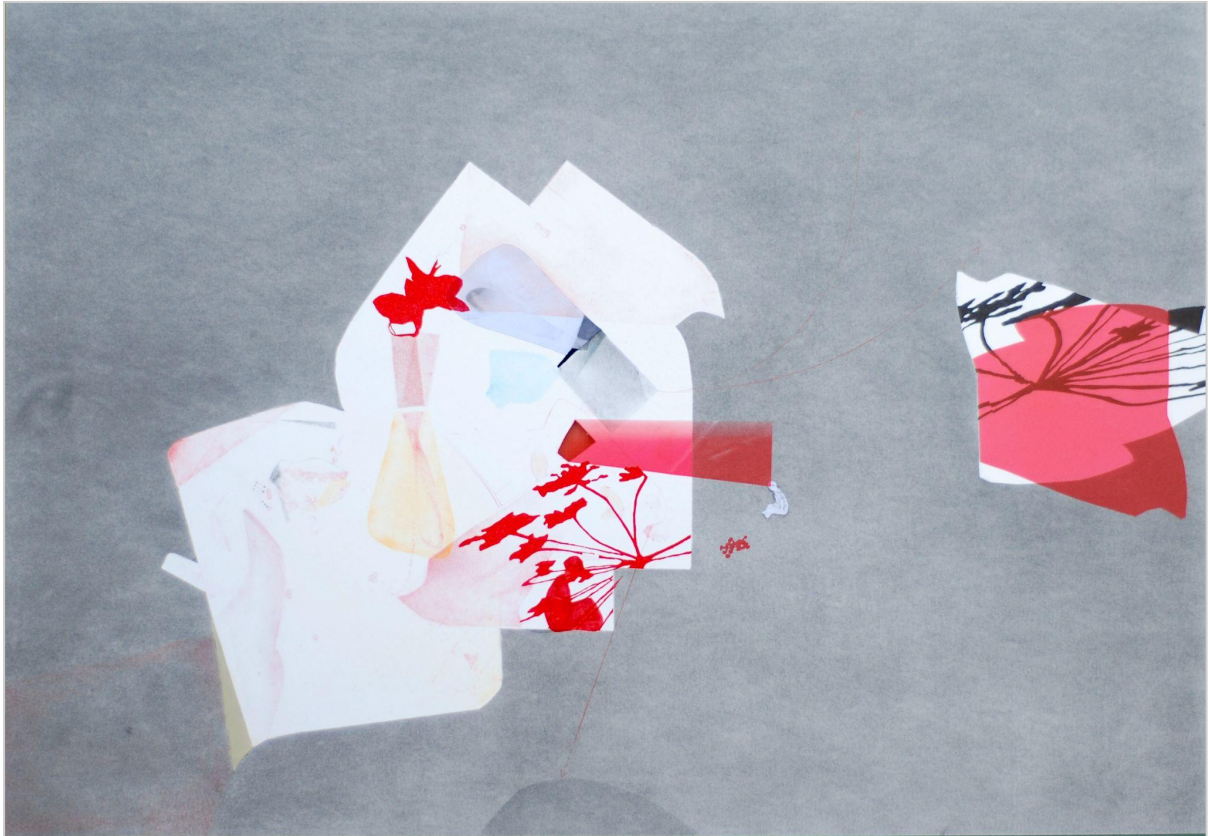


Figure 4. *Garden Drawing 3*, a temporal interplay of multiplicities, by Author, 2022.

## Discussion

### The temporal condition of the architectural drawing and the slipperiness of time

The presentation implicitly focuses on the role of positing in architectural design practice as a potential influence on the content of the inquiry. After a contextual introduction to the entangled time of the architectural drawing, I elucidate upon the nature of the temporality my research enacts, with emphasis on what I describe to be the 'slipperiness of time.' I focus on two main agents in the research that support a direct connection between content and form within the work: *the poetic construct* and *sustained oscillation*. Both of these agents identify beyond the object-ness of presence in the world and instigate an in-betweenness and interconnectedness across fields, as drawn, written and imagined in the research. Activating these agents in the work gives

scope to new, potentially trans-disciplinary conversations that may further open possibilities of inhabiting what I term ***simultaneous multiple temporalities***.

### **The poetic construct**

In discussing the poetic construct as a tool for allowing (even encouraging) impossible corners to remain in the work, I examine the dialogue between the observer and what I term the *made work*– the drawings, devices and apparatus. I introduce the world of simultaneous multiple temporalities (a manifestation in the research process) via these design artefacts and drawings and contextualise them with reference to relevant theory and examples from across literary, philosophical and creative disciplines.

### **Sustained oscillation**

The sustained oscillation, a primary agent (and subject) in my research, acts to maintain the openness of an experiential condition that allows the inhabitation of simultaneous temporal multiplicities. Engaging these multiplicities simultaneously allows for a state of indeterminacy and anticipation that suspends the overriding conception of sequential being in time and destabilises spatial context, resulting in new possibilities for understanding spatial and temporal relationships. This concretely has consequences on ideas of context, place and narrative in the practice of architectural design and links with emerging theoretical ideas in systemic design, philosophy and creative research.

### **Conclusion**

In each section of the presentation – Part I, The temporal condition of the architectural drawing and the slipperiness of time; Part II, The poetic construct; Part III, Sustained oscillation – I refer to specific examples and relevant theoretical positions.

Part I: Sharing a selection of example drawings, I introduce the context and fundamental concerns of the research, beginning with a focus on the relationship between drawings and space. This is discussed using a theoretical framework that crosses the disciplines of art, philosophy and architecture. I use Henry Bergson's experiential stream of time and Vladimir Nabokov's narrative time to frame the notion of temporal slipperiness, as is active in my research.



Theoretical reflections on other contemporary thinkers help to frame the key spatial/temporal relationships, as well as make more explicit the structural concepts that support the research.

Part II: Continuing to build upon relevant theoretical ideas from architecture and neighbouring disciplines, I articulate my position on the research potential for enacting the poetic in design practice alongside applied methods and examples. This offers the potential for new perspectives on how we understand space and enact possibilities.

Part III: With the theoretical framework and potential consequences in play, I explore how the concept and experience of sustained oscillation can open the potential for generating new modes of systemic thinking.

These three parts tie together through the presentation text and are supported by artefacts and drawings shared through slides, integral to my research process and position. I conclude with reflections on contemporary concerns and possibilities in systemic design research.

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