The concept of dimension is not restricted to physical objects. Time, a temporal dimension often referred to as the fourth dimension, is one way to measure physical change. It is perceived differently from the three spatial dimensions in that there is only one of it, and that we cannot move freely in time but subjectively move in one direction.

The architecture of the Ephemeral City might be described as a negotiation between planes of time. The continual exchange between personal experience and collective frames of reference can be understood as layers of events overlaid onto the many ‘times’ of a site - some of these times are significant, many are inconsequential, and others may never actualise - however they are all drawn together into an experience that is highly contextual. These specific experiences then allow architecture to accrue meaning, significance and value. A realised building may begin as per an architect’s intention, however it is only through being inhabited, lived, settled, that architecture finds its role among the urban fabric.

Unit 9 is interested in an architecture that mediates matter and form, and the relation between design and occupation. We are interested in the celebratory, the continually reconfiguring and reinvented. The Ephemeral City is a constellation of settings for human activity, encouraging short-term inventiveness as a testing ground for the permanency of future projects, both social and architectural. We will consider the consequences of the transitory nature of the city for environmental, organisation, spatial and social aspects of urban life, acknowledging its parts as spatially distinct, yet connected by the continuous unfolding of lived experience. Such an order is mostly implicit; partly found, partly made, always in the process of being re-made. Acknowledging the accumulated times of a place can be the precondition for design, traces of previous occupation acting as a conduit to future transformation.

In acknowledging that technology has always informed the way in which architects work, the use of computational tools is actively encouraged and on-going support will be offered to students in professional photography, filming, editing and post production.

Frank Gilbreth 1917: Applied motion study for hand motion paths (chronocyclegraphs)

The difference between a piece of architecture and an image is that people can move through architecture, meaning the element of time is the crucial difference. Architecture is the opposite of an image. Architecture is not about space but about time.

Vito Acconci
The Ephemeral City

London - Mexico City

Apparition  •  Project 1, Device  |  Oct – Nov 2016  |  10 wks

Project 1 explores the conscious act of time-based event-registration of place. The task will be to study Mexico from afar, taking the form of a spatially embedded device or a 1:1 installation that occupies a space in London. It will be directly informed by your research of Mexican culture. Whilst speculative in nature, your project will be bound by a series of determined roles and relationships, such as user occupation and the urban context.

We expect Project 1 explorations to employ Making as a design process to rigorously test ideas through physical models. Workshop fabrication, both analogue and digital craftsmanship, is all actively encouraged not only in order to convey the language of one’s architecture but to feedback into the design thinking itself.

We expect these design processes to become an analysis - measuring choreographically defined qualities of space such as rhythm, tempo, and speed, to describe kinetic representations of place closely related to its inhabitants’ performance. The final documentation of the project will be through a short film to capture the exploration over time.

Field Trip  •  Mexico City  |  Jan 2017  |  1 wk

This year we will consider Mexican culture across multiple planes of time in Mexico City - the modern-day capital, the Spanish-colonial influence, and the ancient sites of the Aztecs - the combination of which creates the vibrant, complex and overflowing metropolis that is Mexico City today. We will consider the Pace Layers of Mexico City - its fashion, commerce, infrastructure, governance, culture, and nature - and closely examine the life between the layers of the city, to deepen our understanding of architecture as both space and what happens in the space.

Pace Layers  •  Projects 2 + 3, Main Building  |  Jan - May 2017  |  18 wks

The main architectural project of the year will be sited in Mexico City. We will use investigations from Project 1 to inform the architectural language for Project 2. The building will form a new urban hub within Mexico City that will act as a generator for future change or as a resource for forgotten communities. You will be required to design a complex building for a public programme (eg. education, cultural, transport, trade, energy, etc). Your design will speculate and will suggest new forms of the Ephemeral City, proposing a new urban typology. Your architecture will consider inhabitants not as passive receptors but instead as active elements in the definition of architecture.

The design of your building will challenge the conventions of the production of architecture. Drawings can serve as instruction to build but they are much more than that - it can create the 'void' for imagination and projection of space and experience. We are keen to continue to push the boundaries of architectural representation and the craftsmanship of the multidimensional drawing to bring the viewer or occupier as close as possible to the sensation of architecture.

For all its bravura, Latin American is where the modernist utopia went to die. Estates such as Tlatelolco are paradigmatic for the problems that beset this single-minded vision. Around and in-between the superblocks, a carpet of slum has grown, an organism that now seems to bind the blocks together in some symbiotic relationship. These are the kinds of hybrid forms that are developing in Latin American cities, where the rationalist vision of the mid-twentieth century is giving way to the ineluctable logic of the informal city.

Justin McGuirk

Culture’s vast slow-motion dance keeps century and millennium time. Slower than political and economic history, it moves at the pace of language and religion. Culture is the work of whole peoples.

Stewart Brand

The craftsman’s savoir faire is very real and still present in Mexico, although this may be changing. This is one of the aspects that makes contemporary architecture in Mexico such a fascinating thing. The craftsman takes pride in his work, the work is not just labour, there is love for the craft; and that of course is what post industrial countries have a very hard time finding. That gives, in my view, a quality to the building environment in general that has nothing to do with now many bright ideas anybody had, or how theoretical or sophisticated the maestro de obras may be.

Alberto Pérez-Gómez