

Land, air and water: Reclaiming the Anthropocene through Bristol's infrastructural megastructures

Dr Sophia Banou (sophia.banou@uwe.ac.uk), Dr Matthew Hynam (matthew2.hynam@uwe.ac.uk)
Department of Architecture and the Built Environment, University of the West of England, Bristol

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The paper will present work developed across a series of architectural design studios at the Department of Architecture and the Built in Environment at UWE Bristol, and the specific techniques of representation they have tested and refined towards combining diverse forms of social and environmental data. Over the course of three years, the design briefs developed by Matthew Hynam and Sophia Banou have framed a discussion of social and environmental sustainability from a design perspective that proposes intervening within existing infrastructural megastructures as sites of latent possibility for the rehabilitation of the relationship between nature and the built environment. Framed by the discourse pertaining to the Anthropocene (Turpin, 2013) as a geological period within which manmade intervention has registered itself in the composition of our planet, the design approach developed in the context of these studios embraces the appropriation of the built by the natural to propose new considerations of site within architectural practice.

The paper will present and discuss student work that concerns design interventions within large-scale manmade constructs such as the Bristol Floating Harbour, Bristol Temple Meads Railway Station, Portbury Docks, Filton Airfield and the M32 motorway. In doing so it will address, firstly, how the built has unequivocally and permanently conditioned the natural and, secondly, how a design approach based on a process of survey and modelling, can allow for the study and intervention in such sites towards the pursuit of social and environmental sustainability. Through a series of techniques of 'expanded drawing' (Banou, 2020) and mapping, enriched by media such as film and installation, the brief and works presented propose an extended understanding of landscape and the capability of urban and suburban sites to act as representational registers of the negotiation between the built and the natural. The representational processes of survey examined through this body of work, are proposed here as a way of bringing into the "field of visibility" (Evans, 1997) of the architect a range of technological and scientific data on a level playing field with the social and cultural significance of the sites they examine.

References

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