Interview

Edited by Eunice Seng

October 4, 2021

Abstract
Within two months of WHO declaring the Covid-19 outbreak a pandemic on March 30, 2020, articles on architectural and urban design practice and education, planning, building construction, technology, and sustainability, speculated on how the coronavirus pandemic could change the built environment. By summer 2020, the "post-pandemic" was the most frequently used descriptor in architectural events and publications. As Covid-19 raged on, producing variants from Delta to Omicron to Deltacron, the pandemic made the inequalities and injustices in different places, including campuses, workplaces, and homes, ever more glaring. For architectural students, the pandemic has meant canceling studio travel, field trips, the end of access to libraries and fabrication labs, presenting in reviews via video, and no commencement celebrations.
In *Inhabiting the Negative Space,* artist and writer Jenny Odell ruminates how periods of inactivity can be reimagined as fertile spaces for design predicated less on relentless production and more on a deeper, careful look at what is demanding our time and attention and how we might use this "strange moment" to

respond (Odell, Whiting, 2021). In her foreword, Whiting expresses that Odell's talk drew each person attending the event inward to identify "our individual roles in defining our attitudes, our roles, and our possibilities" (Whiting, 2021). How do we meaningfully discuss competency in a world overturned by a pandemic and systemic exclusion? In conversation with Seng, Whiting and Ho deliberate on the challenges and changing expectations on competency in architectural education and practice amid the latency of the historical moment.

History and situatedness

1 **Eunice Seng**: *In your conversation with Giorgio Angelini, director of the documentary film, Owned, Sarah, you foregrounded the importance of understanding history and its currency regarding housing. At one point in the interview, you said that because you are speaking from a historian's perspective, you appreciate that the film attempts to go back and further into historical time to identify the genealogies of the present housing situation and discover more and other kinds of stakeholders. Given that you are both proponents of historical consciousness, maybe we can begin with how far back we should go regarding history and its currency to architectural education.*

Sarah Whiting: This is a good question for both of us. It is something we grapple with daily. My father was an academic and completed his Ph.D. studies in the early fifties. My sister did her dissertation in the eighties, and I did mine in the late nineties. When my father was working on his dissertation, he used card catalogs in the library and visited archives. My sister was at a transition with interlibrary access as libraries became a mechanism for information exchange. And, when I did mine, you had the Internet, and now the Internet is replacing the archive. For some, it is already the archive itself. So, I think it's an important question for teaching history and the situating of history in any discipline because materials – facts, stats, records, etc. – are now so accessible. And it's not just history; it's that all information is seemingly endless. It's the Google rabbit hole.

I've written about this in *Log* and *Architectural Journal*, using a term I call "engaged autonomy" (Eisenman, Whiting, 2013; Whiting, Zhou, 2014) I'm very interested in the reading of the object and the understanding of the discipline. But I believe we must always situate both in a broader engagement, to read the relationship between an object and its context, and also to its history, the discipline's history. Context is important, although I don't believe in pure contextualism.

For the questions that Giorgio was engaging in the movie *Owned*, where he's looking at the repercussions of policies that determined where black Americans could live in U.S. cities, you need to look at the history of those policies; you need to go back to the 1930s, 1950s, and 1960s. You always need to know what history you need to know to situate your questions. You always need to understand how to frame them. Teaching this awareness is a big part of what I do as an educator – how you frame what you do, whether that means knowing how many line weights you need in your drawing or knowing how many examples you need to look at before you feel comfortable creating your own project.

Ho Puay Peng: I appreciate your highlighting why and how history matters, Sarah. The history I engage in is very particular and very old – ancient architectural history – even though I have recently turned my attention to the modern period, especially in China and Hong Kong[1]. We've recently worked on many projects studying the heritage buildings of twentieth-century Singapore. We are also conducting a conservation study on the Golden Mile complex. As a historian and educator, I am acutely aware that history teaches our students a way of thinking. Whether it's regarding context or the various components that go into designing, using, and experiencing the architecture, we practice this mode of thinking. We learn to observe and understand buildings and how to design buildings within their contexts or situated experience.
I, too, used to thumb through drawers upon drawers and put my finger

1 – Keynote address by Ho Puay Peng, "Immersing in the Past, Mediating the Present: Ontological Framing of Digital Space in Traditional Environments".

or a pencil between the cards to avoid missing a card. I teach history from experience, in that all the buildings examples would be those I have visited and experienced myself. I will not use any example that I have not had any physical or tactile experience. I'm writing a paper on the transmission of Buddhism in the seventh century and the twelfth century in China and Japan. I conducted all my research using the many digitized copies of primary and secondary sources. Lately, physicality is receding in the background for me as a historian and my students. They are not visiting places or buildings. When they visit buildings, they do not see, feel nor think about all that had happened in the building's history, when it was built, and its subsequent life. These are fundamental lessons for students. History is ever so relevant in the way we experience the building with the rich tapestry of information that accounts for its design, use, etc.

SW: This is super important - the hands-on experience and the capacity to read a building *in situ*. One thing that's happened with the World Wide Web is that everything has become flattened on our screens. While we feel like the world is at our fingertips on our screen, we no longer have effective ways of reading space. Let's say we bring our students on these trips and take them to see buildings, thinking, if they come and see it with me, they'll understand it. But showing up is just a prerequisite as we have to teach them *how* to look at the building. The critical question is: how do we teach the competency of reading a building?

HPP: I begin with the sensory experience of seeing, smelling, feeling *in situ*. When I visit buildings in Japan, such as a house designed by Tadao Ando, I feel the wall. When I take students to buildings, I say to them,

Fig. 1 - A space in Chichu Museum, Naoshima, Japan, Tadao Ando, 2004, Puay-peng Ho.

Cats, Octopuses, and Barnacles: A Conversation on Architectural Competency
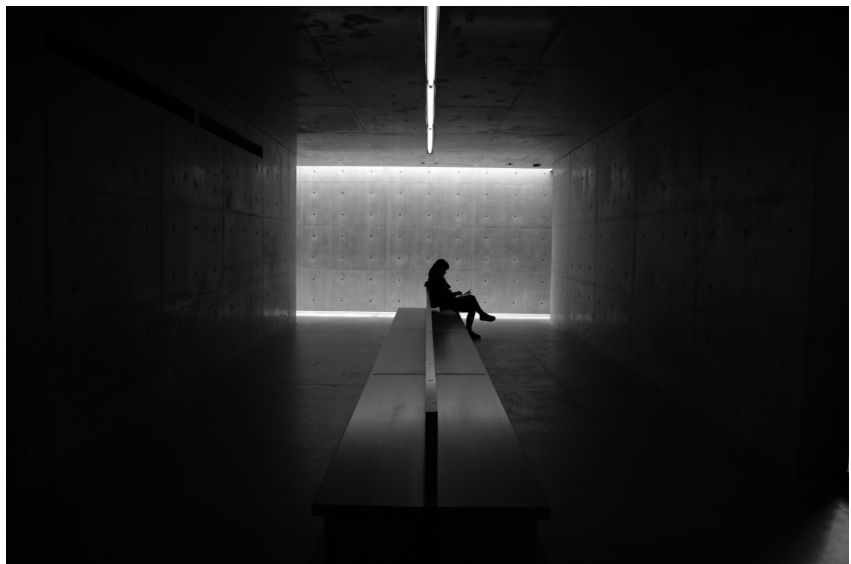
now touch this wall. I ask: Can you see and feel the material? Can you sense what the building conveys? I ask students to feel the sensation of the light, smell, tactility, and volume of the space and how these affect them. You cannot get these sensorial experiences from an image of the building. Under the pandemic circumstances, we were over-relying on the World Wide Web, Google Maps, and Google Street views. Now that we can travel again, I think being present is essential.

SW: I would add that we also have to teach to balance that experience with the experience of reading what has been written about the building before, its history, and the physical, social, and intellectual contexts surrounding it. In other words, I think the physical experience of the senses risks taking over and pushing out the possibility of reading the building otherwise.

HPP: Yes, but I differentiate intentionality and experience. I think the two can overlap and be consequential, but the former should not over-determine the latter. Intention and experience are distinct because the knowledge from what you read about a building and what you encounter firsthand can sometimes be opposing and contradicting.

Travel, contexts and labor

ES: *This discussion on the history and the architectural experience brings up two interrelated issues. One is the privilege of travel as part of architectural education, which has been quite a challenge these last two years. However, before the pandemic hit, travel depended on affordability for some while never an issue for others. Since "the (grand) architectural tour, "this inherent inequality has existed." However, it has been addressed through various creative ways by different schools, such as subsidies and funded joint-studio travel, and so on. And now there are added levels of pandemic border controls, quarantines, and social control measures, which are modifying even curbing these. Arguably, these controls have placed an equalizer to architectural travel.*

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The other issue raised is the chance to re-situate that travel. To Sarah's point on acquiring in situ knowledge, we often have the idea of travel to touch and feel, to read the building and the site through the senses. With the ongoing inability to and inconvenience of travel, we are starting to discover and rediscover the histories here in Hong Kong. "We" refers to academics and educators, professional institutes, arts development districts, design-related NGOs, and local interest groups. We see a marked increase in local in-city trips and off-to-the-countryside travel to places and buildings. For this part of the world where literature on buildings is scarce, and research is still emerging, the architects may not be known, much less their intentions for the projects. We must persist in finding creative ways to learn about them.

SW: Even then, you can find the records of a building addressing zoning requirements or submitted for amendments; in other words, there are texts that you can find on buildings. These texts are out there. The question is where and how to find them. I'll offer two points on the issue you raised about travel.

First, we've had no studio travel in the last two years. In spring 2020, Marc Angélil taught a studio on Addis Ababa for us. He had previously taught versions of this studio at the ETH in Zurich for some ten years. He would take his Swiss students to Ethiopia to visit their sites. This time, the students couldn't travel because of Covid. Instead, he paired our students with students at Addis Ababa University. And what's interesting is that he says that for the first time, he felt the students got a more in-depth understanding of context, instead of the superficial travel log where you

go and think you're an expert because you spent four days in a city. It was a different way of building knowledge, partly through people on the ground and partly through tools like drones and live streaming systems, which students can now use with help from people on site. My point here is that you can build a different kind of expertise, which perhaps should have been the case in the first place. It simulates to a large extent how an overseas office would collaborate with a local office to study, develop, and execute a project.

My second point concerns local travel and local context. Some schools here in the US are more rural, and the issues they are dealing with are state-based. For example, at the University of Kentucky, where I once

Fig. 3 - Marc Angelil's spring 2021 studio at the GSD, "Quo Vadis, Addis". Jack Cheng and Zheng Lei project's rendering.

CATS

Within the site, we identified four cats living in relative comfort for a long time. Upon closer observation, we began to see clearly, each cat's personal territory and also the social structure in place. To facilitate the research, we gave each cat a name for easy identification.

SISTER

Sister is the biggest and most notorious cat in the area. She does not run away when approached, but hisses and snarls instead. Be careful.

HUA MAO

A dirty-faced cat, Hua Mao enjoys taking naps under the motorcycle cover as if it is a curtain billowing in the wind.

FRIEND

A friend of Goma's, Friend does not like human beings and does not consider them to be her friends.

GOMA

The only cat who is unafraid of human beings, Goma sleeps all day, does nothing and is the most indifferent cat amongst all.

Fig. 4 - excerpt from the HABIT©AT project report.

RANGE

A cat's territory consists of an area that is patrolled regularly on a fairly fixed schedule. By scratching, spraying, rubbing and depositing urine or faeces, the cat marks her territory while providing other cats with information about the individual cat (e.g. sex, age, health) as well as when she was last there. In this way, the cats 'read' these marking posts much like how we read the newspaper on a daily basis!

In the above diagram, we marked out the territorial range belonging to the four cats and it became apparent that Goma has the largest territorial claim, this is largely attributed to his friendly and uncautious disposition.

KEY:

⬤ Hua Mao

⬤ Friend

⬤ Sister

⬤ Goma

2 – An Ode to Smell [Online]. https://to-gather.sg/an-ode-to-smell/ [Accessed 1 February 2023].

3 –An Ode to Smell [Online]. https://to-gather.sg/habitcat [Accessed 1 February 2023].

taught, the school engaged with the entire state, which constitutes its "local context." But all three of our schools are in these major cities. Like Hong Kong or Singapore, Boston offers enormous material at our fingertips. Since our students come from all over the world, it is valuable for them to study Boston, as they're not from this city. Realizing that we do not need to pitch an international site to attract students to engage in a studio, we suddenly have the luxury of learning from what's around us.

HPP: Now that's very interesting. With the recent Venice Biennale, we held a workshop where students from Cambridge, England, located in Venice and NUS students in Singapore came together to produce a film about Venice and Singapore. Despite the inability to travel, we can find creative ideas to bring that to bear in our living room literally. Travel has a long history, as we all know with the Grand Tour. I think in the future travel, at least in the next three to five years, will be even more expensive. For my recent trip to Hong Kong, I had to prepare at least four hundred US dollars for all the tests I needed to go through. If travel is going to be expensive, what is a good substitute?

Recently I gave a keynote speech at the IASTE conference on immersive technology and questioned whether the immersive environment could reproduce the aura of physical traveling. Though my feeling is that it cannot, I think one day it may. In the 2021 Venice Biennale, we read intriguing proposals of the sixteen participating teams. One of them is *Ode to Smell* by a young Singapore practice and their collaborators. They collected eight different scents from materials across eight locations under various weather conditions in the atmosphere – the smell when the rain hit the leaves, the aftermath smell with the sun shining, and so on.[2] These smells are curated and presented at the Singapore pavilion.

The other is a book project about cats. The researchers followed the routines of four community cats as they wandered around a block of public housing flats in Singapore.[3] Each of the four cats has a name. The team presented the cats in different situations, their interaction among their feline community and with humans. The book presents the cats' view of the built environment, how they see and use the gutter, the apron, the curb, etc. I feel it is meaningful that we can reach out more to the community. We can reintroduce the in-situ experience through such a presentation.

SW: Clients now expect to do a whole test drive of a project before construction. Rather than claiming to reproduce reality, if we use augmented reality, whether it's different smells or perceptions, you could "see" through the cat's eye. We're offering new perceptions and realities that add to the ones we already know. We're at a moment where we should make sure that we're not pretending to be simulating reality because we're just going to create more work for ourselves. And reproducing reality is much less exciting and meaningful than researching *aspects* of reality. To describe this as augmented reality is more appropriate.

HPP: Exactly. One of the points that I made was that regardless of whether we are using AR, VR, or immersive environments, the tool must produce a different material experience. Whether you go up to the Parthenon or visit the cats in the gutter, we must realize that it constructs a different experience. To say that it's a reproduction of the in-situ experience would not be giving credit to curatorship or the creativity in producing this augmented reality.

SW: This conversation brings up the question of labor that is part of *AR-DETH*'s mandate. What kinds of labor go into producing the architecture in the city? Again, if we simulate reality, we give the impression that it's easy, that what we do is easy and can be done at a computer. The point then is not just the value for research but also for understanding labor and what we do.

ES: *Architects and designers earlier in the 20th century – El Lissitzky, Laszlo and Sibyl Moholy-Nagy, Katt Both, and others – combined photography, film, and other art forms architecture as experiments and expressions, rather than attempting to simulate any reality. Are we approaching augmented reality in similar ways?*

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SW: Let's consider the way film comes into our discipline. Many people think, "I have to become a filmmaker like Steven Spielberg," instead of saying, "I should become a film experimenter," or, "how should I use this medium in ways that help further my project?" Historically, it has always been a minority who took different media and used it in research. I think the parallel is the same. It is a mistake to teach video as a filmmaker would in architecture schools. We are not training filmmakers, we are training designers who can use film as a medium.

Giorgio Angelini studied architecture at Rice during the depths of the 2008 real estate crisis. Now a filmmaker, he has taken his architectural training and previous creative arts education and incorporated them into his work. This combination makes him a compelling filmmaker instead of simply an architect who works through film.

Design, knowledge, and synthesis

ES: *The film and architecture connection brings us back to the discussion on history as a practice of rigor. You even referred to line weights, which is not typically a subject of historical analysis. And Puay Peng has reiterated history as a way of thinking, which brings me to my second point: the idea of the fundamentals in architectural education. Is the distinction of core and elective subjects still relevant today? If we understand history as a practice of rigor and self-awareness, should it not be insisted on in every taught subject? Should this be the premise to reconceive the architectural curriculum, or is this process already ongoing where you are?*

4

HPP: We are reducing our core subjects gradually and integrating them into the design studios so that students engage in the design of a broader scope. When I first arrived at NUS, the professional degree comprised a four-year undergraduate and one-year graduate program. I worked with the faculty to revamp it into a three and two-year program and reduced the core courses in the foundational undergraduate study.

The accreditation body reinforces this idea of core subjects where knowledge is in discreet segments. The accreditation board and the Institute have remained relatively unchanged in the last twenty to thirty years. The school checks these accreditation boxes by building these specialized parcels of expertise as core subjects in our curriculum.

The studio design work and process fulfill the other parts of knowledge. However, it is problematic when knowledge is so fragmented that the students cannot synthesize it in their projects. We counteract this by introducing a different theme in each semester of the undergraduate design studios. The knowledge acquired and the studio process constitute the core. Then in the first semester of MArch study, we offer various option studios to take students into different spaces and spheres to work on highly realistic or profoundly speculative projects.

SW: You use one of my favorite words for architectural education - *synthesis*. It's like an octopus that has tentacles reaching in so many ways and then has to be combined. I use the octopus deliberately as a metaphor because they have three brains. They are highly intelligent, and I think the synthetic nature is essential. I like the idea that the core knowledge and expertise are demonstrated through design synthesis, that the design studio is where technology, history, and practice come together. I agree that the competence of history or technology should be visible in the design. It is important to discuss how design can reveal those things so that it doesn't become a checkbox in a studio.

HPP: Absolutely. The new curriculum has been running for three years, and I see the focus on integration in the design studio every semester. The design studios tackle topics like sustainability and energy and the urban living environment. In the sixth studio, the second semester of the third year of undergraduate study, they bring them together in a more comprehensive project, which is challenging because they prioritize specific ideas and knowledge over others. Third-year studios also incorporate consultants.

SW: That's interesting. You could even have a history consultant teaching with a studio instructor in the earlier years. If you take what you're describing to the extreme, you will only be teaching design studio. Everything else would be like barnacles attached to it.

ES: *It's intriguing to think of cats, octopuses, and barnacles as metaphors for synthetic knowledge acquisition.*

5

HPP: All three go together! A core course instructor will also lead the studio of that year, bringing the components together. I was pleasantly surprised by a technologist of the greenhouse effect and urban warming teaching a core course for 150 students. His second-year studio students appreciate his teaching and insights.

ES: *Do you see this model going back to a 21st-century version of the Bauhaus studio, where each fragment of knowledge feeds back into a larger integrated studio? Or rather, within the current imperative of decolonizing the curriculum, it would be more pertinent to question the relevance of canons in architectural education.*

6

SW: It is similar to the Bauhaus studio in terms of its value in the mode of teaching. If anything, it is spreading to other disciplines, where they call it problem-based teaching. Regarding the canon, this point returns us to the card catalog question and the Google rabbit hole: that is, how to frame what we expect our students to know so that we can have a shared conversation in the school.

What to know and how to learn is constantly changing. But I think there should be things that we agree our students should know. If I am in a design review and I make a reference to something, it would help if the student has had some knowledge of it. How do we ensure this and find consensus among the faculty of what gets tossed out to make room for something new to be part of the discussions? For example, structural racism has put different models on the table, but we have to agree on what gets removed, which is hard.

HPP: I agree that conversation is vital. How to have a conversation is something that we must cultivate. I see history as a series of accidents, and buildings that happened to remain to this day do not mean that they stood the test of time well. Their survival may be due to some historical accidents. We celebrate some of those buildings, even canonize them as exemplary cases. In so doing, we overlook many more works. Just this year, UNESCO added the architecture of Jože Plečnik in Slovenia to its list of world heritage sites. I have visited his buildings thrice in the past ten years and am captivated by their designs. However, Plečnik's work was not part of the historical modernist canon.
We should discuss each building from the standpoint of the experiential and intentional and consider its ability to engage in broader conversations. These are all part of teaching what a building embodies and communicates.

SW: I agree that one day it would be great to focus on Plečnik. I think there is a tendency now to say, "let's replace the canon with the vernacular." But I don't think that's the necessary move. Instead, we should ensure that we teach our students how to read a building and why it's worth interpreting. We analyze certain vernacular buildings because they offer something meaningful, but not all do. We should not be focusing on many poorly designed buildings in the few years when we are in architecture school. The justification for what to teach is that any architectural work we discuss should have a *project*, which points back to *ARDETH*'s aim to focus on the power of the project.

7   **ES**: *A project also assumes intentionality, which presupposes an author. Perhaps, canon is not the best word to speak on what is happening. In architecture schools in different places, we learn of attempts to decolonize the curriculum, colonize the practice in the spirit of inclusion, and the US, more so than in Hong Kong, the de-racializing of modern architecture. How do we infuse this into our thinking about the project?*

SW: A project can come out of a community's desire to do something in its neighborhood. It can come out of an architect's desire to do something with a building or an office's willingness to engage. Some offices operate with a lead person saying to the team, "this is the project, and you help me figure it out." Other offices are more collaborative though this does not mean that there is no authorship. Authorship is complex, and even with a single author, it moves.
My husband Ron Witte and I have a design practice, WW Architecture. We are currently working on a house in Austin, Texas. Sometimes our employees bring things to us that are changing the project, and other times we say, "no, do this and do this." I think authorship can have different forms, even within a single project. But you can't say there's no authorship. Projects come from some ambition.

HPP: I have been working with the other side for the last few years. That's the side of the community, the client, the recipient. Intentionality is on one side, and the people using the architecture are on the other side. The division is stark, especially with projects like the Golden Mile Complex, where the Singaporean society does not see the value of conserving brutalist buildings (Ives, 2019).

SW: It is always crowded inside. Isn't there recognition in the value of the world it creates?

HPP: Most Singaporeans think that the world inside belongs to the Thai people, not them (Chan, 2020). The important question is, how do you make society understand the value of that building? (Wee, 2020a; Wee, 2020b) How do we get people's views on brutalist architecture? Besides

the residents and tenants, for people seeing the building outside or visiting for a hearty Thai meal, how can they understand the relevance of the architecture to the city?

The other aspect concerns decolonization. Unlike in Hong Kong, conservation projects in Singapore bear the overarching weight of the national narrative. I am relearning this after living away for three decades. In this project, which ended in November 2021, we are still grappling with this national narrative. The two sides, the community, and the state, may agree on one point but maintain separate views on another. As historians and professionals, how do we bring these disparate attitudes together? That's my present conundrum.

SW: This is super interesting. The U.S. is characterized as a melting pot of different ethnicities. Yet this is where we are hitting a challenge now. Think of France, where there's a sense that if you're French, it matters less that you come from different backgrounds. But of course, it matters. The frictions you are witnessing here and there add complexity to the questions you raise when forms of immigration or ethnicity render states complex. With UNESCO, for example, there is this assumption of a body, an institution that can claim to understand heritage as something stable though it is not.

Empathy competence

ES: *What about the market? In cities like Hong Kong, or New York, the market plays a more dominant role than the state. To the Hong Kong Chinese, the five-block Chungking Mansions in Tsim Sha Tsui, Kowloon, is like the Golden Mile Complex to the Singapore citizenry. "We don't go there," they will say. However, it has a visible place in the global cultural imagination of urban Hong Kong. Many Hong Kongers now acknowledge the significance of a building beyond its real estate value.*

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SW: Hong Kong is fascinating to watch right now to see where the control of that market will lead. You are at a pertinent cultural moment that everyone is watching. The market is dominant globally in giving value and deeming value. It goes back to what we discussed at the beginning, of flattening architecture to two-dimensions.

The market is another form of flattening that we must find ways to resist. Still, we must also understand that architecture is one of its most complicit fields because we depend on clients who invest and supply chains that are complex economic engines. When people say, "we have to resist the market," I agree, and I think we need to figure out how to work within it. But it's naive to believe that we can all operate as little revolutionaries and keep the field going.

HPP: I thoroughly agree that we must work with the market. In Hong Kong, there aren't many privately owned projects we could preserve. One project, the State Theater in North Point on Hong Kong Island, is a surprising exception. I was able to be part of the entire process to convince the client. The developer made a drastic move to feature the brutalist theater building as a gem in his portfolio of a thousand other development projects. He supported everything the team proposes, from engaging WilkinsonEyre as the architect, Purcell as the conservation architect, and engaging the community in a big way by inviting them to share their comments and staging an exhibition to present the history of the building and its tenants. I must say I was surprised. I hope the Hong Kong market can be turned in some ways.

9   **ES**: *Relatedly, one of the most overlooked and under-discussed aspects of architecture is the tremendous labor that goes into a project. Labor rarely appears in the curriculum as a subject or criteria for consideration in the design studio. We don't talk about labor. Could this be because we do not have the methods to understand it or the terms to discuss it?*

In each of the projects we have discussed, tremendous labor was involved in their conception, construction, management, maintenance, and in some cases, conservation. I have witnessed the tireless efforts to save the Golden Mile Complex and the involvement of the different stakeholders, from the state entities to professionals, academics, conservation advocates, and tenants. How then do we elevate the urgency in design to include labor and the processes? Doing so will call upon our empathy and train us to harness it better, putting us in a stronger position as facilitators and intermediaries in negotiations.

SW: We have this synthetic ambition with each studio assignment. And yet, in fourteen weeks, if you think of what it takes to design and build an actual project in an office, it's crazy to think that synthesis can be achieved. I would love for faculty to pause and figure out how to bring labor into the conversation. When I was in my first year of architecture school, I knew very little. I remember my professor saying, "do you know where that steel came from, why it took this dimension, and how it traveled to the site." I was going, "huh, what?"

He wasn't saying you can't build it in steel, but he was saying, if this were real, you would have to think that through. That's the same thing we should do as educators, to zoom in and out at times and be able to say to students: "to get this through, you'd have to go through zoning; you'd need to obtain these approvals." But we should not say, "I will stop you from dreaming or scheming while you're here in school."

In the same way, how a wall meets the floor takes thought. Someone thought about it and thought it through. No one talks about that. But

the amount of labor that goes into designing the details of how materials meet other materials could constitute an entire curriculum. But it shouldn't mean that you become just a technical expert. Acknowledging these different levels of labor and practice is essential.

ES: *One of my cultural adjustments coming to Hong Kong after a decade in New York City was how few students knew what an architectural reveal is. In a city where the urban built environment consists mainly of concrete buildings – the public now knows them as brutalist architecture – a reveal is an almost irrelevant and unfamiliar term in the vernacular construction lexicon.*

How do you explain a reveal, its uses, and meanings to someone who has not seen one? I used props and illustrated the reveal through various "canonical works," particularly modernist houses. In the process, I rediscovered the limitations of institutional knowledge and the unevenness of access to that knowledge. For example, when teaching materiality in my modern architecture history course, it was starkly apparent that concrete is not a universal material.

HPP: I have said to students in Hong Kong, "No, this is not concrete. It's a brick wall with plaster." I shall offer another take on labor. In the last year, because of the pandemic, the stress level of our students has been very high. When we speak of architectural labor, we often call it a labor of love, the pursuit of passion doing what we enjoy to the extent that we don't mind spending the time, energy, and more to do what we want to do. However, for the students, architectural culture is changing now. They find that there is insufficient work-life balance. A student I interviewed entering her first year of architectural study said, "I need work-life balance."

SW: Or you say, work-life balance is recognizing that part of your life is what you get out of work. I admit that there are days when I think I would love to be a cashier in a grocery store. Then I could go home, read novels, and cook. I could talk to my cats, and I wouldn't have to worry about all the deadlines I was missing. We have to explain to students that being in school is a privilege, in that you are surrounding yourself with what you want to know, and that is incredibly self-indulgent and should be savored.

HPP: We had a session on empathy in teaching with all our tutors. We were asked to consider the students' perspective, not the professional standpoint. It was a great session, with about sixty faculty members in attendance. We broke out into rooms to discuss issues on empathy in teaching. The challenge in education is how to strike a balance between empathy and maintaining a high standard in the design studio.

SW: Absolutely. You put it beautifully. Empathy is not like a Ted talk. It's not something that you learn in a business model. I love how you advocate putting ourselves in the students' perspective. I remember how naive I was as a student. I didn't know the things that I should have. It's helpful for us to remember that our students come into architecture from many different viewpoints and what it is like to be them in architectural school. We should do this in all classes.

11 **ES**: *A recent session on method at an architectural history workshop on caregiving touched on the historian's degree of empathy for the subjects and the issues we are raising here.⁴ Likewise, the design studio instructor is called upon to extend compassion to the students, the subject, the physical site, the community, and its inhabitants. In light of the present global situation, it is purposeful that we begin our introspection on competency with the recognition of historical consciousness and conclude with an emphasis on empathy competence.*

Bios
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