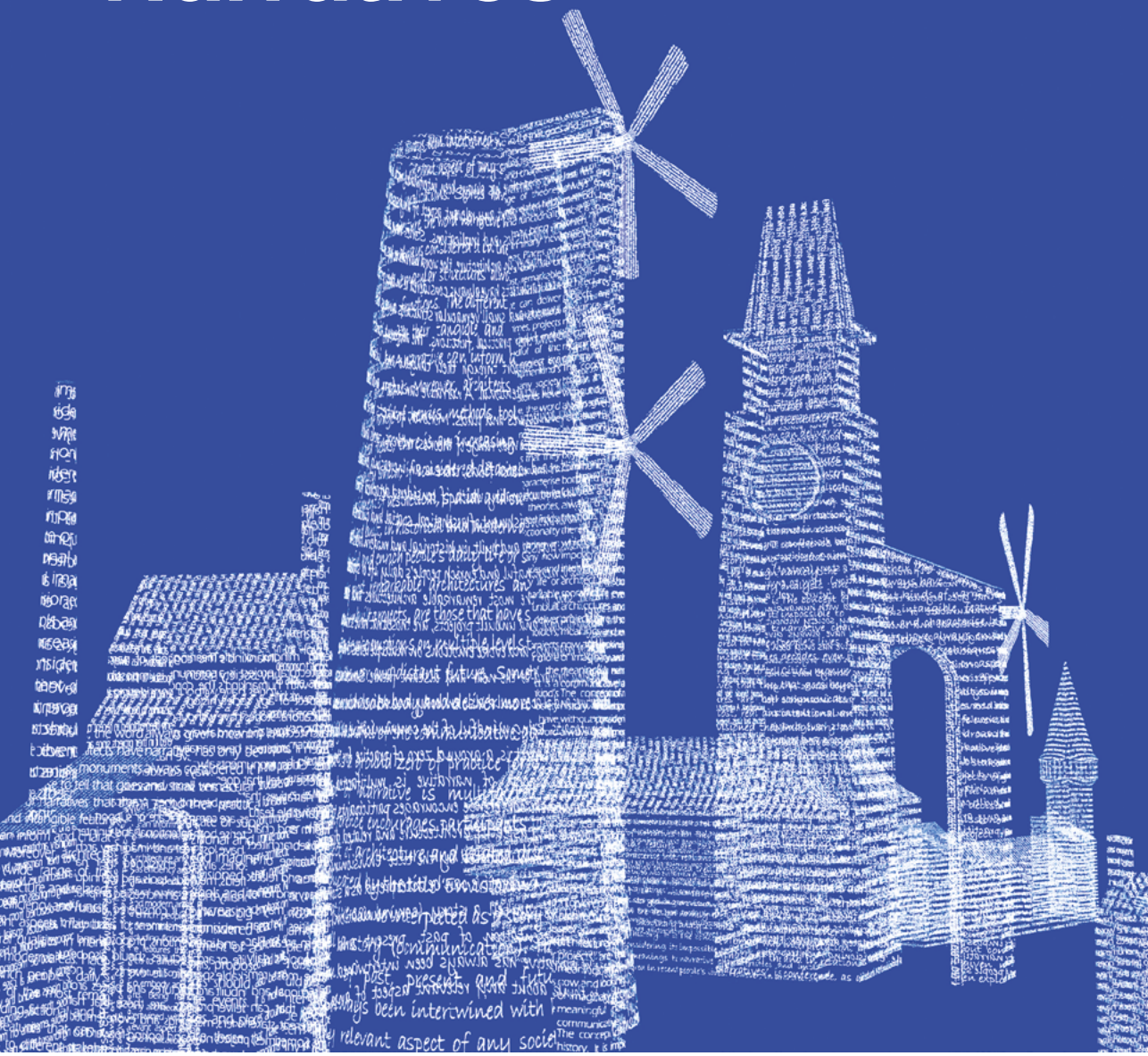
Envisioning Architectural Narratives



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Danilo Di Mascio

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Narrative and Representation

Yianna Moustaka, Luke Murray, Piotr Smiechowicz
Research Architecture in Design (RAiD), Division of Architecture, London South Bank University, London, United Kingdom

Architectural Narrative and the Promise of the *Not Yet*

Introduction

This paper discusses the importance of narrative in an architectural design project, as an enabler of hope, the not yet conscious revealed through processes of drawing and making. This paper primarily focuses on the academic design project, as ideas and positive thinking are necessary to embellish the requirements of the design studio. We will discuss hope in line with the work of German Philosopher, Ernst Bloch and his magnum opus, *The Philosophy of Hope* (1954, 1955, 1959). We have utilised Bloch's expressionist view of hope and aligned this with the postgraduate architectural design project, as a space for design innovation to manifest and as an illuminator of a better future through imagination (Leach, 1997: 39). The academic studio benefits from the lack of budgetary and client constraints, but allows the student to critically assess a brief, what we considered, hope. The design studio offers a space for unburdened questioning of a future not yet or never to be but enables creative expression and exploration to thrive. The main objectives of this paper are:

- Present the link between representation and hope
- Hope as design studio methodology, connecting social values and creative expression
- Case study projects with hope as an agenda, presented through drawing and making.

For the purposes of this paper, narrative and hope are indistinct, serving social, political, or technological agendas.

Any good architectural project, conceptual or built typically draws upon recognisable motifs and/or historical reference. For example, Niall Mclaughlin's Bishop Edward King Chapel derives a narrative from the poetry of Seamus Heaney's Lightening's viii, and the nave, closely related to the *navis* of a ship. A subtle, yet elegant motif to reinforce the design. Such narratives are drawn from recollection, a reproduction of the past in combination with existing elements (Bloch, 1995: 196). Architectural design involves a personal grappling to develop an idea, therefore requires research, experimentation, and imagination. However, the former two are nothing without the latter, as imagination opens an anticipatory opportunity, transforming at each stage of the design process from i) sketch(es), ii) concept, iii) technical and iv) construction. In this paper, i) and ii) are the key stages of the design studio, as forebearers of hope.

Promise of the *Not Yet*

The architectural design studio is a for dialogue to flourish. However, dialogue is not narrative through spoken word, but a representational dialogue through drawing and making, a longer means of communication, stretching as far back as 3400BC from cave paintings in Indonesia, the first evidence of a graphical language using pictographs and symbols. The beauty of drawing is its almost 'universal language' yet, may not be interpreted in the way an author intends. The architectural project is by nature an act of progressive perception that can surpass itself through creative thinking. This is because the act of drawing involved looking again, the not yet and perhaps the never to be, *a posse ad esse non valet consequentia*[1]. It is the environment for discussion hermeneutics, the relationship between many discourses of the possible (Rorty, 1979). It is not considered as a common ground between student and critic, but as a space for constructive disagreement and an opportunity to celebrate transformative ideas. Most design projects begin with the sketch, typically quick, intuitive reaction to a brief. The architectural sketch reveals a designer's imagination, something not yet manifest but (at least), initially defined, as Bloch (1995: 119) defines "intellectual productivity, creation, as full of not yet conscious material" particularly found in youth creativity. Imagination opens the possibility to change the world, a description of a possible future, for the architect, sketching is an emancipatory exercise, a germinal vision for something more. The making conscious of an idea is entrenched in neurological research, the initiator of an idea, "the waking dream" of a design (Bloch, 2000: 104). As asserted by Bloch, the sketch is the moment where warm (passion) and cold (reason) streams of consciousness merge to produce a synthesis. However, this synthesis is finite for satisfying an initial waking conscious. This affords a feedback loop or iterations, as Psarra (1998: 1) states "the relationship between the cognitive process and drawings as based on the eye reinterpreting what the hand has done." The speed of sketches is inherent to the need to surrender the waking dream to paper, yet each time reinterpreted anew. The nature of the sketch is but its undefinition, both defining the undefined and an undefined definition, but a record (Goldschmidt, 1994: 162). These records undergo a process of radical refinement through a design process that need not be an interpretation of the existing world, but instead a way to change it Hope, at this stage of a design is the ability to think through that which is not yet.

Notable architectural works have sparked such debate, including Yokohama Ferry terminal (FOA architects), Vitra Fire Station (Zaha Hadid), Sendai Mediateque (Toyo Ito). Each of these projects emphasises the drawing as a purveyor of hope. The drawing forth of contestation and debate is a positive act of significant design, or as posited by Kwinter (2004: 3) "the [projects] perpetual instability". Thus, the conceptual sketch is an opportunity for disagreement. The paradox then is that hope needs abandon to be close by. The ability to challenge the

[1] there is no necessary development from potential to being.

"traditionally"[2] pleasing would be unattainable without questioning the present, in search for something new, to challenge that which we know. Each of the projects mentioned above had to take its share of risks, challenging convention, and offering hope for something more. It may be argued that the design process is intrinsically esoteric curating debate. Yet this revolution is the act that can change the world, "overturning of all circumstances in which humanity is degraded, subjugated, forsaken, contemptible being". (Bloch, 1995: 1355). Properly understood, the Not-Yet-Conscious in the design may initiate real possibilities for social development and potentials for human liberation. The manifestation of the final design is not necessarily the end of the project's potentiality, but simply a marker to instigate critique and debate, allowing further exploration and potentiality. The final project is still the "not yet become", the hermeneutics of design still call forth a longing, expectation, and hope. (Abusaada and Elshater, 2016: 4).

This study will now examine a few design projects from our postgraduate studio, presenting their narrative and the possibility of hope for the future.

01 – The Moon Catcher (Student 01)

Fig. 01. Architectural narrative representation – The Moon Catcher.

Source: Piotr Smiechowicz, Studio 23

The Moon Catcher is a response to key contemporary challenges facing 21st century London, namely loneliness and mental wellbeing. One of urbanity's most prevalent issues is the nefarious use of technology and social media to intimidate and bully others. This anonymous platform enables the generation of social hate crimes without accountability. This, coupled with addictive use patterns, has led to social media having a severe detrimental impact on the health and wellbeing of individuals, predominately young people. It has caused anxiety, depression

[2] We use traditionally in a loose way, to depict anything that has come prior to the present.

and devastatingly, even suicide, and affects around 2 million Londoners each year, almost 25% of the city's population, isolating even the most intimate aspects of our lives. Pairing this with the current global pandemic and extended periods of isolation the problem is only exacerbated. The Loneliness Experiment conducted by Radio 4 (2018) reported that 40% of people aged 16-24 feel lonely and disconnected despite the large number of online friends that social media platforms promote, such as Facebook or Instagram. We close ourselves off into proverbial "bubbles of loneliness", abandoning our nature in favour of virtual reality.

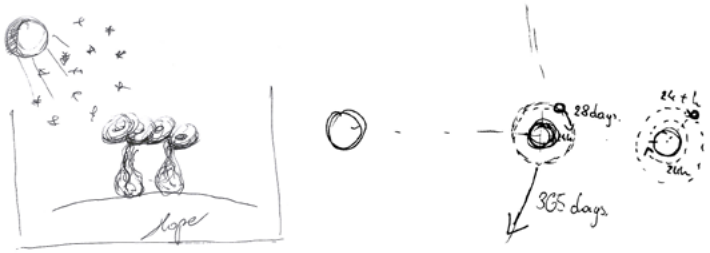

Fig. 02. Sketches - the thinking process.

Source: Piotr Smiechowicz, Studio 23

The goal of The Moon Catcher was to develop a symbiosis between building and user, between atmosphere and feeling, enabling young people to connect with the beauty of nature and escape from the blue light of the screen for a reconstructed social collective. The historic significance of the site, namely Soho's 24hour nightlife culture and its internationally recognised sex industry become crucial in a redefinition of the meaning of 'pleasure', to breakdown walls of loneliness and offer hope for new human release. Epicureanism defines two types of pleasure, for the body and the mind. Following this philosophy, the moon, in its celestial nature proved capable of interacting with both these human factors in literal and metaphorical form. The moon has an enormous influence on human well-being, as well as their behaviour and mood. The moon became the main driver for the project, interacting with the building functionally, aesthetically, and atmospherically, informing the narrative and realisation of the project. Research into the moon's specific impact on human behaviour is difficult to define due to the large number of possible variables.

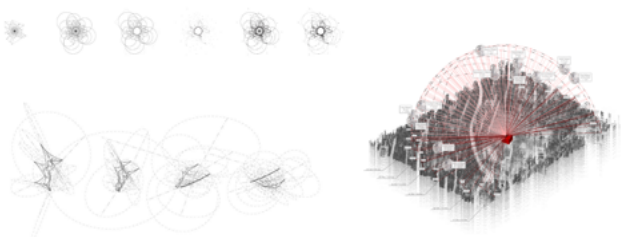

Fig. 03. Analysis of the lunar impact on Earth.

Source: Piotr Smiechowicz, Studio 23

This is discussed by Professor Wehr (2018) who explains the phases of the moon and its impact on our well-being causing detrimental health conditions such as depression and sleep deprivation. Certain hypotheses believe this is because of the intensity of the light reflected from the moon's surface, correlated with fluctuations from the electromagnetic field surrounding the Earth. These disturbances correspond, inter alia, to the influence of lunar gravity, which also determines the ebb and flow of the sea. This project defines these relationships and, in turn their negative influences into fully controlled positive experiences. This is a critical element to determine the success of the project. The experiences attributed to the moon phase can be divided into 4 main influences, New Moon[3], First Quarter[4], Full Moon[5], Last Quarter[6]

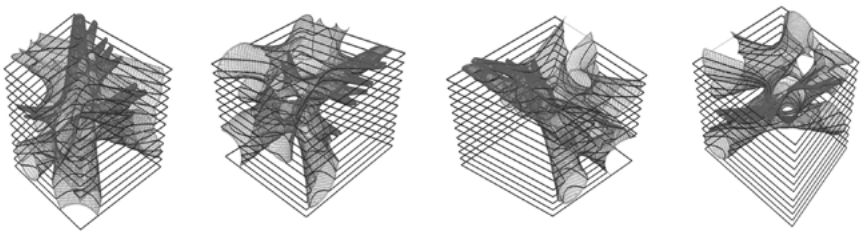

Fig. 04. Model of captured moonlight.
Source: Piotr Smiechowicz, Studio 23

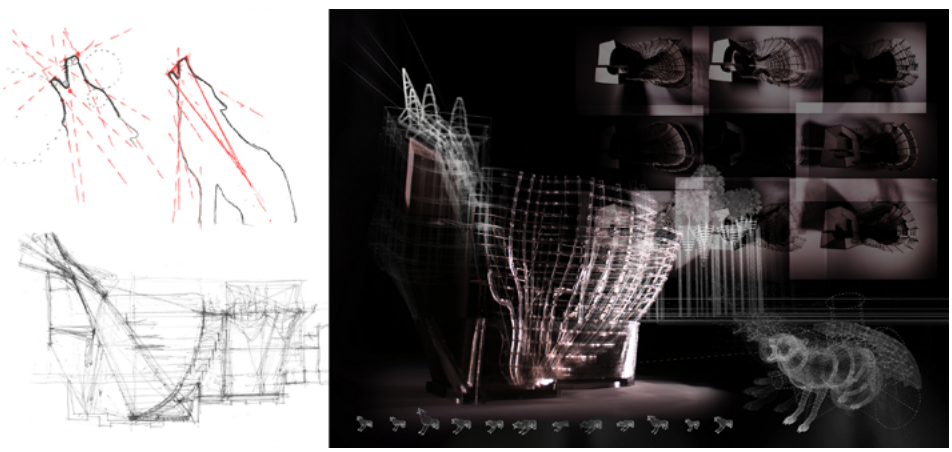

Fig. 05. Development of moon catchers.
Source: Piotr Smiechowicz, Studio 23

[3] a time favourable for the new beginning, new relationship

[4] a time to commutation the energy, right moment to start a diet

[5] high libido, disturbed hormones, the sleepwalker will go for a long walk at night

[6] a time for reflection and rest, we are less tired of physical and mental activity, food taste much better

The Moon Catcher attempts a detailed analysis of the tides caused by the moons' location and its relationship to the River Thames. The design makes effort to celebrate this phenomenon as a forebearer of hope for an architecture that learns from nature to improve social well-being. Combining invisible energy with technological innovations such as programmable materials and 4D printing. It opens the possibility of designing architectural components able to infer movements from lunar gravity, whilst finding real reflection in tangible form. The architecture set to the 24hour life in Soho and was further reinforced by way of a double entendre, using the wolf as a symbolic metaphor. This nocturnal animal not only evokes visual reference to the moon, but the wolf's ritualistic howling stances informed the individual mood catchers, whilst aligning with the location of the moon at specific points in its cycle, reflecting direct moonlight onto the users within the lunar beach, releasing their inner wolf.

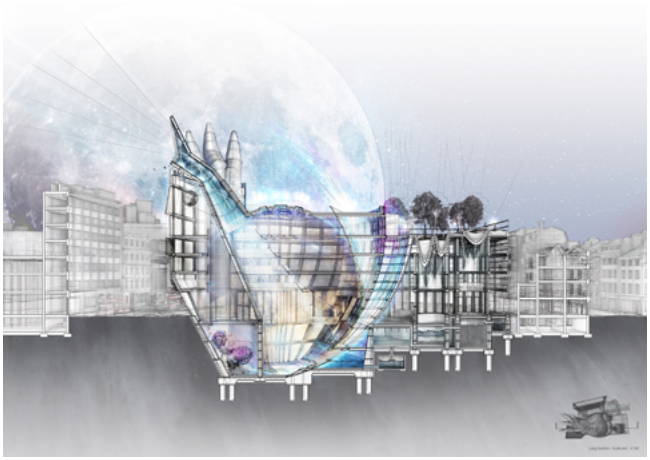

Fig. 06. Final cross-section of proposed building.
Source: Piotr Smiechowicz, Studio 23

During the day, users can broaden their knowledge of the relationship between cosmology and mental health, whilst stretching-out on the craterous urban beach. At dusk, collective moon bathing becomes the dernier cri in Soho, welcoming extra-terrestrial pleasures across the moon's 8-phase cycle, before retiring to a private hotel room at the first light of dawn. This project exemplifies the notion of an architectural narrative as the progenitor of hope, celebrating a natural phenomenon for the betterment of its users. This architecture was driven by a need to serve society, emotionally and physically. Only then was it possible to supplement the idea with expressive tools to achieve its desired intentions. It offers a hopeful future to revivify a care for the self, so lost in urban life.

02 - Light sucker / star energy (Student 02)

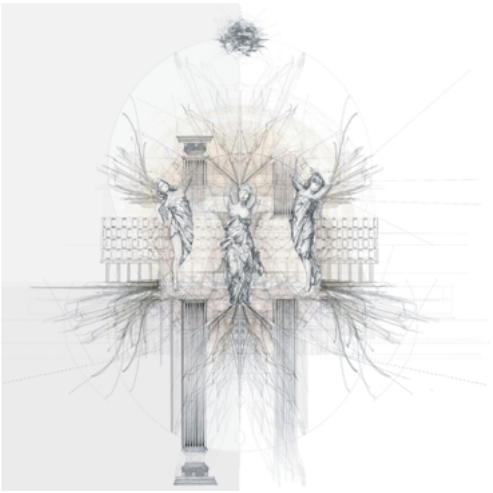

Fig. 07. Architectural narrative representation – The Light Palace.

Source: Yianna Moustaka, Studio 23

This project intertwines hope and light. The benefits of natural light have been widely researched in architectural projects from Louis Kahn, Le Corbusier, and Tadao Ando. The Light Sucker derives from extensive research into the hierarchy of natural light, the sun, and the stars. Architecturally, the power of the sun has been an influencer for positive well-being and health. The solarium is an established typology, celebrating the benefits of passive light and heat on its users. Whereas, this typology is rarely seen in the UK, advances in affordable technologies are enabling questioning toward personal solariums across the city, a new power network for individuals to collect and emit, Londoners need light showers! Further to this, the project celebrates the night sky by limiting the number of artificial lights illuminating the city, reducing light pollution, and allowing the stars to reveal themselves once again. This follows the Dark Sky Movement's agenda to preserve our natural sky in urban areas. Hence, The Light Suckers were formed, a cluster of spheres acting within a giant network, modulating the exposure of the sunlight, and working collectively to absorb and store light. This project focuses on the theme of power and vitality of sunlight, and the beauty of darkness.

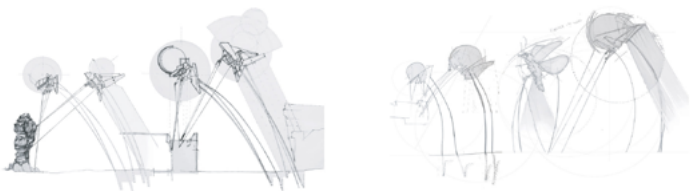

Fig. 08. Sketches and thinking process of Light Suckers.

Source: Yianna Moustaka, Studio 23

The project initiated with a detailed analysis into the human proportions and its relationship with architecture. A timeless study dating as far back as the Egyptian cubit, one of the most widely used measurements in the ancient world (Morrison, 2010), which time and again has been revisited by architects. An analysis of the Greek proportions ensued, specifically, the 9 muse Goddesses, each as a personification of the arts. This unpacking of universal geometries led to the narrative drawing to present prosperity for the future from history. The beauty found in the bodily proportions exemplify a natural perfection. The body's symmetry and structure create a sense of *eurythmia*. The initial research into natural light revealed that natural sunlight appears differently in different global contexts, for instance, the light in the UK is much more diffuse than the sun in Cyprus. Primarily, this led to initial sketches to question the power of light as an enforcing nature of good, although the same sun sheds light and warmth across the globe, can light be transferred through a network of Light Suckers? Ultimately, creating a new way of living and interacting with the sun. This opened the opportunity to redefine the night sky, using the natural light, supporting a healthier city and a source of Vitamin D, reducing depression, and strengthening our immune systems.

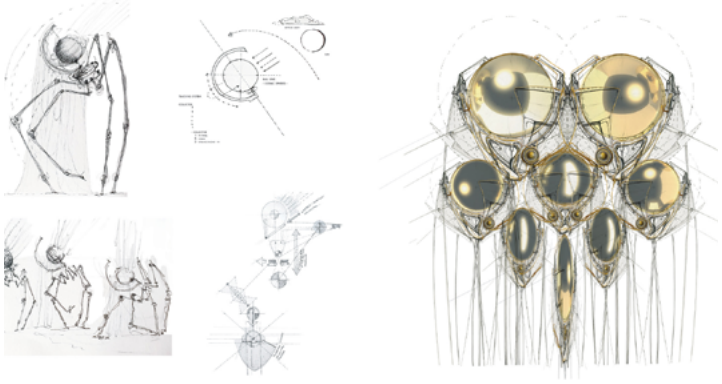

Fig. 09.Design development of Light Suckers.

Source: Yianna Moustaka, Studio 23

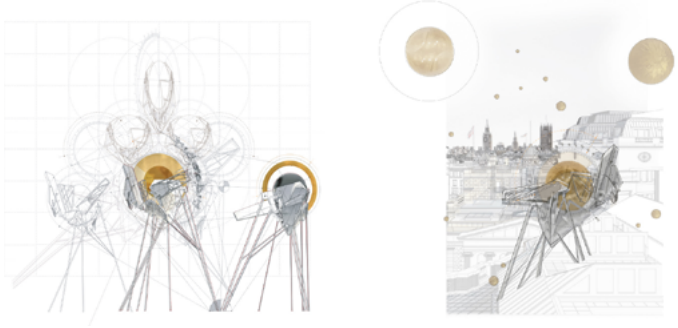

Fig. 10. Experimental models of light suckers.

Source: Yianna Moustaka, Studio 23

Following cosmic studies of the ecosystem and the dancing between planets, notably Venus, the project researched the movement and patterns of the planets to generate architectural drawings and models. These studies led to various recordings to measure and record star light. The observations on the brightness and quality of light in different geographic locations led to the studies into evolutionary cosmic golden spheres. The context of Grosvenor Square was the perfect testbed for this new environmental and social architecture. The now defunct US embassy, as designed by Eero Saarinen, no longer houses the diplomatic body of the "land of hope and dreams" (Springsteen, 1999), but instead welcomes reinterpretation as a 21st century light solarium for the city. The analysis from studies of the existing Saarinen façade and structure, along with the context of Grosvenor Square, led to the concept of light suckers integrated to the façade of the palace. This not only floods the internal spaces with natural light, collected from each sucker, but also supports a more democratic sustainable approach to light and its benefits to society. The Light Suckers are more than independent solar panels, and work as a network to store, share and emit light, when and where needed. Behind this the mechanics of the light sucker architecture, manufacturing spaces, light storage, and social resting spaces. Spatially the project responds on local level to the needs of the users and their interaction with the quality of light across seasons and locations.

Fig. 11. Body proportion action drawing.
Source: Yianna Moustaka, Studio 23

Conclusion

This paper has discussed how hope is structured into the academic design studio through a particular design methodology presented within the context of two postgraduate projects. The architectural design studio is the space for drawing and making and thus where hope may manifest. We have suggested that although imagination is inherent within a designer, a design process is critical for a project to be realised, moving between visual representation and formal diagrams, through to functional application within a particular context, developed through a process of iteration. We have argued that the initial material sketch or maquette is a condition for an architecturally sound thinking process, whereby the open-endedness of the sketch or maquette allows a student's imagination to flourish, undergoing a process of *looking again*. This freedom is that of the *not yet*, we suggest that a sketch has no definite qualities, material, or details, yet it presents a potential to bring forth a developed design idea through to visual representation and critical thinking.

Further to this, we have also mentioned the challenge faced when confidence in the first idea wanes early on, such that sketches, and maquettes may be shelved if the student does not recognise this potential or see their own idea as naïve and uninformative for the lay observer. This is a primary concern in the process of design, as under-confidence can deny a student from realising their full potential, but also reduce the project's conceptual development, and ultimately lead to a gradual loss of hope. At each stage of the process, hope may continue to be lost and rediscovered as each overlay entitles the student to continue their questioning and the resolution of an idea. Indeed, the sketch will inevitably be formalised as the process continues, yet there is no tried and tested one size fits all approach to success, as each project may be interpreted differently, aligned to individual preferences and abilities.

From the two projects discussed it is apparent that the sketch or maquette is not necessarily an object with aesthetic qualities; rather a means to an end, a way to represent initial intent with unincumbered potential. Such first attempts to consolidate an idea is what we term as hope, and this paper has shown how two projects experimented with ideas and sketches to elevate hope into a proposal for the viewer or, as Dernie (2013) has noted about drawing, as a method to engage the observer in material space, "open and completed in 'unreal' objects" existing between the imagination and the sketch. On this basis, the sketch entitles itself to be esoteric, an allusion to an idea, a conversation between the paper, ink, and student, before material decisions are made and indelible to the design process.

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Danilo Di Mascio *Editor*

Envisioning Architectural Narratives

This monograph documents the 15th European Architectural Envisioning Association Conference, entitled 'Envisioning Architectural Narratives', hosted (virtually) by the Department of Architecture and 3D Design, School of Art Design and Architecture, The University of Huddersfield, United Kingdom, from the 1st to the 3rd of September 2021. The event has continued the mission of the European Architectural Envisioning Association, namely, to create a valuable opportunity for communication and exchange of ideas and experiences in teaching, research and practice, with a particular focus, for this 15th edition, on envisioning the multiple and multifaceted relationships and applications between architecture and narrative. By considering the importance of narrative in humankind's history, the theme has invited participants to reflect upon three main topics: narrative and analysis, narrative and design, and narrative and representation.

This publication presents the papers accepted after two double-blind peer review processes. Each submission was assessed by three reviewers from the EAEA15 International Scientific Review committee, which is constituted by scholars from 12 countries. The authors of the accepted papers are from 20 different countries worldwide.

Dr Danilo Di Mascio is a Senior Lecturer in Architecture at the University of Huddersfield, and is a researcher, registered architect (ARB) and Fellow of the Higher Education Academy (FHEA). As author and speaker, he participated at various international conferences in Europe, the Middle East, and the Far East.

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