

# STUDIOS

*reflections on research*

## 2025

*An annual publication by the Melbourne School of Design  
Research Students Association*

*The Faculty of Architecture, Building and Planning at  
The University of Melbourne*



2025  
**OCULUS**  
*reflections on research*

An annual publication by the Melbourne School of Design Research Students Association. The Faculty of Architecture, Building and Planning at The University of Melbourne

*We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the unceded land on which we work, learn and live: the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung and Bunurong peoples (Burnley, Fishermans Bend, Parkville, Southbank and Werribee campuses), the Yorta Yorta Nation (Dookie and Shepparton campuses), and the Dja Dja Wurrung people (Creswick campus).*

*We acknowledge and are grateful to the Traditional Owners, Elders and Knowledge Holders of all Indigenous nations and clans who have been instrumental in our reconciliation journey.*

*We recognise the unique place held by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the original owners and custodians of the lands and waterways across the Australian continent, with histories of continuous connection dating back more than 60,000 years. We also acknowledge their enduring cultural practices of caring for Country.*

*We pay respect to Elders past, present and future, and acknowledge the importance of Indigenous knowledge in the Academy. As a community of researchers, teachers, professional staff and students we are privileged to work and learn every day with Indigenous colleagues and partners.*

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# Foreword

“

It's time to celebrate Oculus! It's brought me much joy to be invited to write this forward over the past two years, and this year is no different.

Each year Oculus both showcases and celebrates the research undertaken by our Graduate Researchers in the Faculty of Architecture, Building and Planning (ABP). Thought-provoking, thoughtful and full of passion, what we are treated to in this year's edition are Reflections of Research. The journey one takes through candidature can bring with it lots of emotion, some difficult challenges, new skills and many insights. In my case, it was the friendships I made with my fellow PhD Candidates nearly 20 years ago when I embarked on my PhD that inspired me then and now. Those friendships remain very dear, as I hope will be the case for our current Graduate Researcher Community. It's the connection formed with fellow researchers that can make one's journey through a PhD truly enriching and, and importantly, fun!

Like past years, I am excited to see the excellent research, writing, and visualisations generated by our ABP Graduate Research Community, which are on display in this edition.

Now, can I just say, how much I loved reading this year's edition. I hung off every word. The depth of feeling. The poetry. The style. Every day I learn from our Graduate Researchers and I am often moved, as I was again when I sat down to read this year's edition. Reading through the contributions, every single story made me pause. Reflecting on my own research journey, I felt a kind of solidarity with the contributors this year. I remember the uncertainty, the growth

and the ways our lives – inside and outside the daily activities of PhD research – entwine. As ADGR and a supervisor, I also felt a degree of responsibility. To ensure that there is space for life, and the very many ways a PhD is not just a distinct ‘thing’ that one does. Rather, it interlaces with the life as lived. Present. Powerful. Purposeful.

It is important that I remind the reader that Oculus is a Graduate Researcher-led initiative. It exists because of the commitment held by ABP’s Graduate Research Community to the sharing of big ideas and of the journeys taken.

I’d like to congratulate the editors and contributors of this edition of Oculus. First to the editors. Your time and commitment to the community is deeply valued. I acknowledge the time and energy it takes to bring Oculus together every year; in writing, editing and cheering on your fellow Graduate Researchers who may be sharing their work for the first time. To the contributors. What brilliant work you do! Thank you for taking up the invitation to document part of your research journey and to bring it to light across these pages.

I now invite you – the reader - to jump right in and to enjoy the reading journey that lies ahead.

Enjoy!

**Crystal Legacy**  
Assistant Dean, Graduate Research

## *Remarks from the RSA President*

“

With great pleasure, we present to you the 2025 edition of Oculus.

As a publication of the Melbourne School of Design (MSD) Research Student Association (RSA), Oculus celebrates the diversity of research topics and projects through a selection of stories from our graduate researchers. This year, we share 16 stories of research across architecture, urban planning, urban design, landscape, heritage, history, and geography.

These are stories of reflection, to remind us how far we've come through and how much we've learned through our days in MSD. The journey as a graduate researcher is long and at times, lonely. Some of us came from sectors new to the life of a researcher, while others came from parts of the world thousands of kilometres away. We begin anew as candidates, embarking on a quest that is both challenging and nurturing us as researchers and individuals. It is said that the one who starts the journey is never the same as the one who finishes it; we, too, will be forever changed through the tales we meet along the way. Through the highs and lows of our odyssey, we discover pieces of ourselves mended, questioned, and changed by our curiosity and findings. We found more about ourselves through our PhDs, leaving marks of growth and acceptance of who we truly are.

This Oculus would not be here without the amazing stories from our contributors, who have volunteered their time to share their personal stories about growth and discovery. I would also like to thank the incredible RSA Committee members—Michael Mack and Lorenza Lazzati—for their dedication and hard work as editors and designers of this Oculus 2025 bookazine, putting together this beautiful presentation of the stories shared by our cohorts.

Please feel free to reach out to our contributors if you'd like any further information. I hope you enjoy and appreciate these stories as much as I do, and may the tales of your own journey light your way.

**Eka Darma Kusuma**

RSA President 2025



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*Focused on a short question: "Why did the UGB change so much within the first decade of its establishment?"*



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*This research investigates how architects learn and apply acoustic considerations in architectural design*

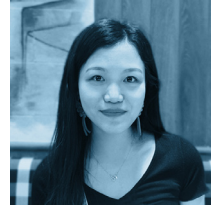


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*How has your research changed  
the way you think, work, or  
understand your discipline?*



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#indigenous-led-participatory-design #digital-cultural-heritage  
#extended-reality

“

My research is interdisciplinary and multi-layered. It fundamentally transformed my thinking and disciplinary understanding, which were once confined within the boundaries of architecture. I used to perceive the world through the lens of architecture, believing in the agency of space and the built environment to address every social problem. However, this research has expanded my understanding and enabled me to move beyond disciplinary confines and embrace diverse perspectives – from digital design to participatory design, participatory capacity building, human–computer interaction, cultural heritage, archaeology, Indigenous studies, and ethnography.

None of these fields alone can fully define my research. Working with a community to address real problems requires complex and



*Figure 1. I am testing Mixed Reality object experience with HoloLens 2.*

situated approaches – beyond technological determinism, which relies solely on technological innovations; beyond the singular scientific ontological standpoint typical of some engineering and technology disciplines; and also beyond social constructivism, which relies merely on social processes while underestimate the power of emerging technology that the project and community highly value. I believe the solution lies somewhere in between – in the negotiation among technology, community, culture, and process.

This has been an exciting intellectual struggle. I often find myself stepping outside any fixed disciplinary home, reaching across multiple communities, and literally walking between MSD, FEIT, museums, and the community. At times, this feels disorienting, and



Figure 2. Testing photos.

I sometimes feel 'homeless', desperately looking for people in the same field. At the same time, I deeply appreciate this process – an ongoing journey of weaving connections and seeking coherence among diverse perspectives, through which I have come to see the value of my interdisciplinary position and the unique and pragmatic contribution I can make. The real world is not made up of disciplines, but also of interdisciplinary realities.

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#collaboration

“

Planning for the unplannable

My PhD journey is summed up by Robert Burns: “The best laid plans of mice and men often go awry.”<sup>1</sup> As a planner of several decades, it is humbling. Nobody tells you that a PhD is completed in the margins between catastrophes— that chapters are written as other endings unfold. Oh, wait, they do – Jane Trewin gave us a map at induction (see wise owls foot)!

My deeply flawed assumption that the PhD journey would be straightforward has instead taken time, twists and turns, and a great deal of self-care; banishment of the word “should”, going slow to go fast, eons away from my early whirling-dervish-like self.

Shifting perspectives that shaped my research, beyond the results? An understanding of human behaviour, power dynamics, the life of ‘we’ versus ‘I’, and impacts on energy levels for research, and life. My PhD journey has certainly been a period of privilege, deep philosophical dives, but also peppered with death (beloved kelpie); coma, cancer, stroke (mum); family dysfunction and divorce. The ‘lessons’ of life alongside the acquisition of deep knowledge.

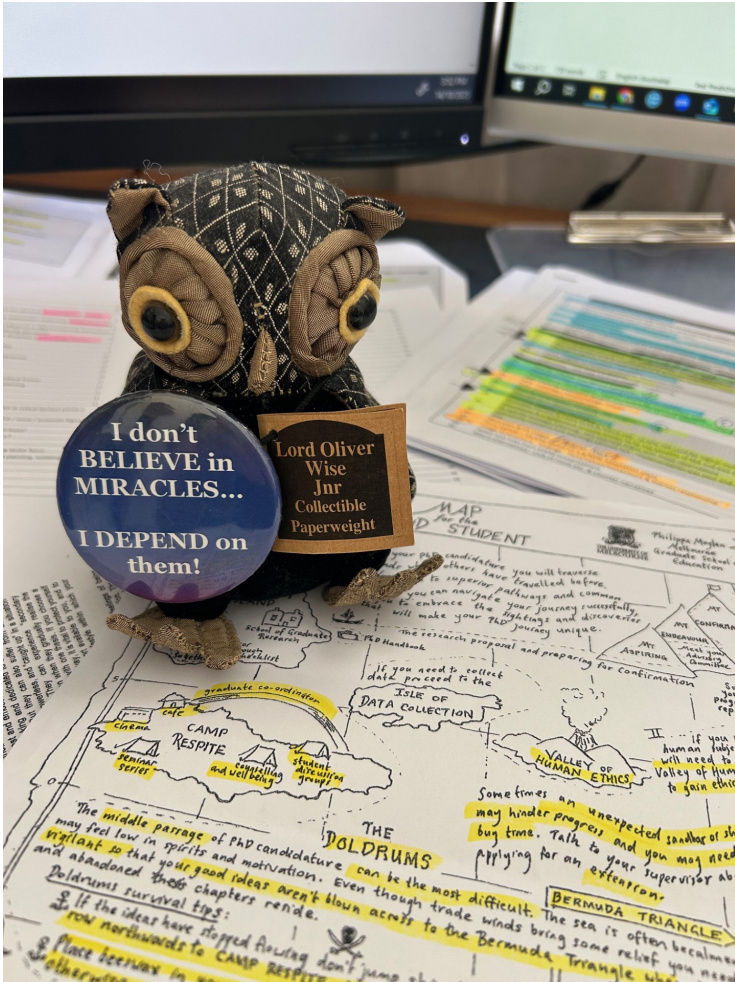


Figure 1. My wise owl from Oxford, navigating the PhD map, but also hoping for some miracles along the way... Photo by Tanya Burdett.

My research transformed: studying decision-making processes— how communities choose futures, weigh trade-offs, navigate complexity... all the while living it: deciding between thesis deadlines and medical needs, between career and care, writing and wheelchair rehab, making impossible choices with incomplete information, time pressures, and always...the trade-offs.

I've learnt that vulnerability isn't abstract, that caregiving infrastructure matters, that isolation is a planning failure. I've also learnt about access, barriers, and who carries the weight when systems don't.

So my thesis became a bridge— between theory and practice, academy and real-life, professional distance and embodied truth. A doctorate in planning, but real life lessons in planning for the human in complex systems, for unplannable moments that highlight how communities truly work, sustain and become resilient.

1. adapted from Burns, Robert. "To a Mouse, on Turning Her Up in Her Nest with the Plough, November, 1785".

2. also as interpreted and adapted by e.g. McGown, George William Thompson. A Primer of Burns, Paisley : A. Gardner, 1907. Fully annotated version of To a Mouse, with historical background. pp. 9–20

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#mental-health #swimming

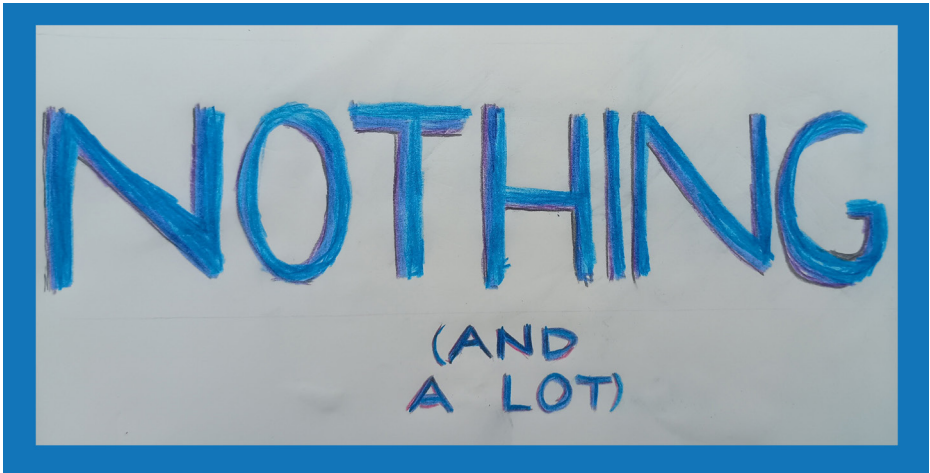
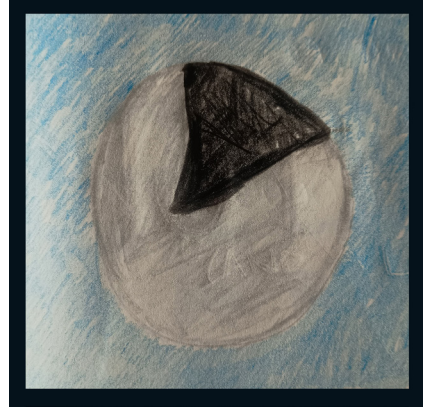


Figure 1: This creative non-fiction piece is about my practice of swimming as a way of coping with huge demands of life outside my research in 2025. 'Nothing' to its much more dramatic partner, 'A Lot', this piece is an ode to the magic and restoration that swimming pools can bring to life.

“

I drop in to the water. I leave the real world, and the chill of winter, behind. Bone conducting headphones stop spilling sound into the atmosphere, and drive music straight into my mind. The only ambient noise is the sometimes clamour of my underwater breath passing my ears. Thoughts - concrete, structured, or worrying - are gone. I am only my senses.

*Figure 2. "As I drift over, shiny circles reflect fragments of my goggles, bathers and body." A later swim revealed the drawing to be wildly inaccurate, but in an underwater world that exists outside the norms of reality, that seems unimportant.*



I'm alone in the best lane. 50 skinny metres of pool to myself, studded with shiny vents releasing the heat for the whole pool. They're my heat therapy, when I glide down to take the chill off the first freezing laps. As I drift over, shiny circles reflect fragments of my goggles, bathers and body.

Dissonant disco envelopes me. Electro clash, with a sideways beat and absurd lyrics. I'm waiting, under the surface, for a track I can't even name with a quote that fits my mood. Stay in Wonderland. I'll show you how deep the rabbit hole goes. The metronomic pulse drives me through the water on the beats so my movement is only automatic. A tiny shiny pain in my muscles strains, in a good way, as my tally rises.

There's a gorgeous scene above, but I'm here for the underwater world. A boundless pattern focused by sunshine ripples on the floor ahead, blurring as my body and shadow move forward. Water is thin but thick, and down here everything is smooth. Slowed down. Speeding slow motion bodies glide through other lanes. Their strokes and kicks flick shoals of silver bubbles into the water. I stay under to watch the air make its way back to the surface in a cinematic burst of effervescence, then blow out my own breath. Not a reflexive act of survival, but a private elemental pleasure show.



*Figure 3: The 'gorgeous scene' of the 50 metre pool at Aquarena, where the story was set, and also written. Swimming pools are adaptable community infrastructure that deliver benefits to mental health, physical fitness, community connection and extreme heat and bushfire resilience, as well as huge amounts of fun and recreation. A generous and pro-active approach can prioritise the delivery of this sort of adaptation infrastructure.*

I can't skip a day of swimming these days or I'll cycle through fight or flight all day, enduring a night where slumber is chased off by worries. On dry land, I'm in the fight of my life. I don't know, I can't say, how things will turn out in this war. But when I fight my battles, I draw on power embodied in the world below.

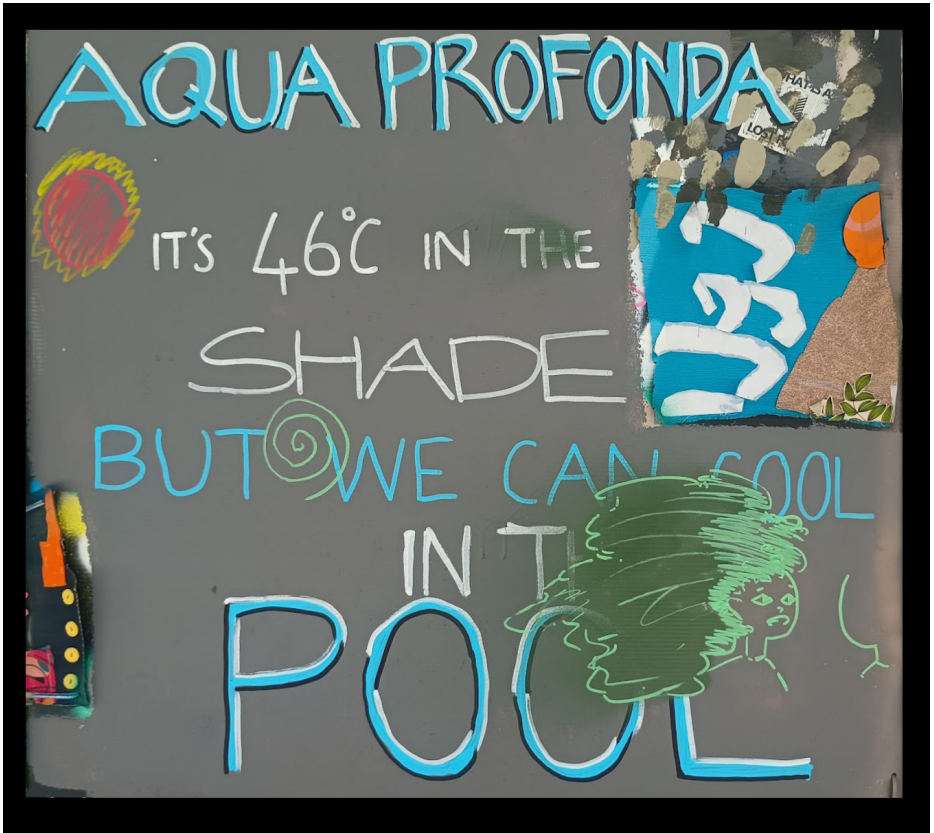


Figure 4. A collaborative work I made (with unknown others) at the 'Surfacity' installation at MPavilion Parkville, October 2025. My graphic text referenced the iconic 'Aqua Profonda'/Deep Water mural at Fitzroy's 50 Metre pool as well as a provocation on the value of pools in extreme weather. Marker pens, paint, textile objects on board. Image by Sarah Hunter October 2025. <https://doi.org/10.26188/30370411>





*What assumptions did you hold  
at the start, and how have they  
changed?*



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#cognitive-affective-dynamics #wearable-sensors  
#wheeled-power-mobility-devices

“

## Everyday Cognitive Somersaulting

What may seem like a mundane street crossing with kerb ramps is, for a wheeled power mobility device (WPMD) user, a high-stakes, multi-layered act demanding precision, vigilance, and relentless attention. My PhD research explores the psycho-emotional experiences of WPMD users in urban public spaces. Years of accompanying my son in a wheelchair had shown me the hidden effort behind urban navigation, but nothing prepared me for the intensity revealed in field studies on Swanston Street in Melbourne’s CBD.

A single pedestrian crossing requires focus on multiple simultaneous tasks: controlling the device, monitoring pedestrian signals, and negotiating narrow, sloping kerb ramps. While descending, users must maintain upper-body balance to avoid being pitched forward; a slipped hand can leave them stranded mid-crossing. They must constantly scan for a clear path as pedestrians often block the way. Tram tracks add further risk, requiring precise approach to prevent



*Figure 1. A WPMD user mid-way through a pedestrian crossing as the signal turns red, highlighting the split-second decisions and heightened cognitive load required to navigate safely. Photo by Puneeta Thakur.*

wheels from becoming lodged. Timing is critical: a red pedestrian signal can appear at any moment, forcing a split-second choice—accelerate and risk losing control, or slow down and risk being trapped (Figure Main-Img). Even minor design flaws, such as a misaligned ramp, demand immediate adjustment, heightening anxiety.

Though these crossings last only seconds, the cognitive load is immense—a sustained, invisible weight with profound psycho-emotional consequences. Repeated across a journey, these moments accumulate into anxiety, eroded confidence, and emotional fatigue. These crossings are fragments of daily journeys. Across a full route, multiple barriers amplify mental effort and emotional strain. Wearable sensor data revealed these experiences to be far more intense than anticipated, showing that even spaces deemed “accessible” impose substantial cognitive–affective demands. Addressing these dynamics is crucial to genuinely support WPMD users’ psycho-emotional wellbeing.

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“

## ***Stay true to the dreams of your youth\****

There is no path before me, only the path taken.

Each new step,

unearthing questions and little answers. This gift,

I can't always tell.

They say it is darkest before the dawn, but did they ever  
complete a RHD thesis?

...

Gleeson, 2014, or was it Legacy, 2023?

Unscheduled madness, solitary thoughts, electricity.

The paradox

to learn for others and lose myself in the process.

And the toll it takes,

On mind, body, and the rest.

Like a phoenix, this end is another beginning,

but we have been transforming for years now.

And let's not forget the coffee is still being made;

this was just an appetizer.

The noise will always be there, so

stay true to the dreams of your youth.



*Figure 1. Image by ChatGPT.*

\*The title originates from my year 12 mathematics teacher, Mr Ryan, who gave this advice on the last day of high school.

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“

At the start of my research, I assumed that improving acoustics education for architects was about finding ways to simplify complex technical ideas, so that students could better understand them. Acoustics is an inherently difficult topic for architects – sound is invisible and its impact on isn't always immediately apparent during the design process. As a musician, I thought that getting students to engage with listening, as well as making the physics of sound more approachable, might lead to better learning. But by observing students, it became clear that the challenge wasn't just learning the knowledge – it was about how different types of knowledge interacted within the design process.

As students apply knowledge to design, they must juggle multiple elements – from architectural form and structure to materials and user experience. According to cognitive load theory, when too many of these elements need to be processed at once, the learning and application process can become overwhelming.

Instead, improving acoustic education was not just about breaking things down into simpler parts - it was about building up learning experiences that associated acoustic knowledge with already known design processes like through model making and visualisation. When elements were well-integrated, students could form richer and deeper connections between old and new knowledge.

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#green-planning #governance

“

At the start of my research on green space planning in Shanghai, I intended to use well-established academic concepts of justice, drawn mainly from Western theory. I assumed that these normative models could be directly applied to analyse park provision, equity, and governance in the Chinese context. However, as I engaged in fieldwork and analysed local policies, my assumptions began to shift.

Through interviews with planners and government officials, I encountered a more complex and pragmatic understanding of justice. While many respondents were clearly aware of spatial inequities and social needs, their capacity to act was shaped by local realities: rigid performance indicators, overlapping institutional mandates, multilevel governance divergence, limited implementation resources, and a broader narrative of growth-oriented development. In such contexts, justice is typically framed in broad terms, such as benefits to the general public, while explicit requirements are rarely found

*Figure 1. Visually open but functionally limited: A park with removed fences but aestheticised design. Image by Yuan Lu.*



*Figure 2. Access denied: A fenced lawn within a neighbourhood park. Image by Yuan Lu.*



*Figure 3. Park in everyday use: weekend leisure and casual camping. Image by Yuan Lu.*



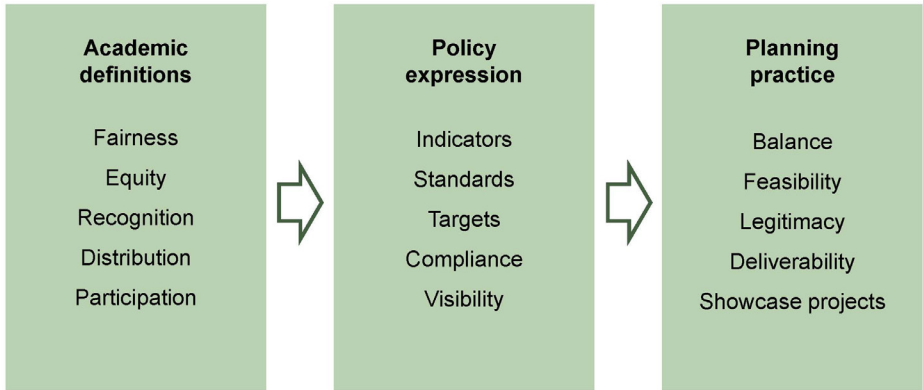


Figure 4. From academic concepts of justice to their policy and planning expressions.  
Figure by Yuan Lu.

in regulatory documents. Concerns about fairness, inclusion, and distribution were instead expressed through alternative vocabularies such as feasibility, balance, manageability, or policy responsiveness.

Rather than applying the ready-made Western concept, I came to see that the meaning of justice must be interpreted through local contexts: embedded in governance structures, development stages, regulatory frameworks, and policy discourses. This experience did not diminish the relevance of academic concepts like justice; instead, it revealed how their expression is shaped by institutional and cultural conditions. As a researcher, this required stepping back from rigid theoretical positions and listening more carefully to how people articulate fairness in their own terms. It reminded me that research is not simply about applying frameworks, but about integrating theoretical insights, professional experience, and local knowledge to co-produce contextually grounded understandings.







*Why is your research important  
- to you, your field, and to the  
world?*



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keywords: [#energy](#) [#vulnerability](#) [#infrastructure](#) [#relations](#)

“

A year ago, I began this PhD. I knew I'd be researching others, and I knew I'd learn about myself as well. My research looks at the vulnerability people experience in how they use energy – their place in interconnected systems and the policies that shape them.

But vulnerability is confusing. It's an aspirational way of being – a way to connect more honestly with others – and it's also a label for populations we're told should be protected. It can mean being emotionally open or materially at risk. We admire it in art and relationships, but policymakers try to fix it. Sometimes it humanises, other times it depoliticises.

To study vulnerability, I've had to sit with this ambiguity and trace what ties these meanings together: an openness to being affected. From



*Figure 1. Sunset hits the ABP building. Photograph by Jan Wisniewski*

this foundation, I've started to see the outlines of interdependence running through our society, surroundings, and homes. Vulnerability is universal and shared, but it turns harmful when some people carry more of its weight than others in this web of interdependence.

I fit in this web too – sharing some of the same risks and responsibilities, though not all and not to the same extent. As a researcher and a person (one and the same, really), I'm now thinking about what flows between us in terms of care and mutual obligation. Even as I'm studying infrastructures and policy, I'm studying relationships – the fragile, necessary ones that make life possible. It's helped me understand my pull towards kindness – to myself and others – it's part of the same work of sustaining interdependence that my research is looking into.

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keywords: #remittance-architecture #vernacularity #flexible-citizenship  
#circular-migration #cultural-landscape

“

Can a house tell the story of its owners who don't even live inside it? Can architecture denote the emblematic presence of displaced migrants despite their absence in their homeland?

In Bangladesh, diasporic migrant workers invest their hard-earned lifetime savings to build luxurious houses at home, even though they may never return to live. Known as 'Remittance Houses', these houses are more than a dwelling but a physical embodiment of the owner's aspiration, desire and transnational life. Negotiating through absence and presence, these houses tell the psychosomatic journey of a successful migration story of diasporic dual existence. In a broader perspective, these houses are driving a new socio-spatial order of remittance power, vernacular and the concept of domesticity in rural Bangladesh.



Figure 1. A collection of Remittance houses in Sylhet, Bangladesh. Figure by Kawshik Saha

	<p><b>VERNACULAR ARCHITECTURE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lower scale and humble design approach</li> <li>• Significantly low cost structure</li> <li>• Use of local technology</li> <li>• Multifunctional modular spaces</li> <li>• Courtyard centric semi outdoor spaces</li> </ul>	<p><b>REMITTANCE ARCHITECTURE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Large scale structure-</li> <li>• Complex internal planning-</li> <li>• Featuring Neoclassic order-</li> <li>• Strong appearance</li> <li>• Expensive construction-</li> <li>• Use of contemporary-</li> <li>• materials</li> <li>• Driven by personal desire-</li> <li>• of immigrant</li> </ul>	
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Figure 2. Vernacular houses vs Remittance houses of Sylhet. Figure by Kawshik Saha

### Vernacular Landscape

- Traditional layout is open, informal, flexible, continuous, shared landscape show collective norms.
- Internal shared roads for communication
- Individual housing plots are absent, small houses are connected with semi outdoor and courtyards.
- Houses are associated with traditional landscape, agricultural practice of owners, cattle houses, crop storage.

### Post migrant Remittance Landscape

- Over time and through successive generations of remittance-sending family members, homes evolve through various stages
- Discontinuity of spaces for walled and gated houses
- Isolated buildings constructed on individual plots with strong sense of territory
- Individual family road to connect with houses, these roads tend to impede the natural flow of water and replace the traditional mud paths with concrete slabs.



Figure 3. Spatial transformation of traditional village to remittance village. Figure by Kawshik Saha

My research looks into the complex symbiotic relationship between migrants' psychology and architectural typologies, which are translated through remittance houses. I see my research as an ethnographic exploration of home making, where the idea of home comes from the owner's poetic resistance of displacement and sense of identity. As a practicing architect, I also find myself in a critical position of both observer and participant, being a part of this seemingly transformative process of remittance driven vernacular landscape.

Moreover, remittance houses can be valued as a symptom of Global flow of racial capital, where economic activities in western nations are shifting the vernacular landscape of the Global South. In a global scale, this research is very crucial to understand how Global racial economy is promoting circular migration, transforming architectural aesthetic, even in the remotest village of Bangladesh by creating 'flexible citizenship'.

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Whilst researching Melbourne’s late nineteenth-century commercial architecture, I found numerous photographs of streetscapes from the period that reveal the clusters of grand financial institutions that once lined Collins Street. These images illustrate the wealth of the city from the 1850s gold rush to the land boom of the 1880s and early 1890s as well as the great talent of Victorian-era Melbourne architects.

Contemplating these streetscapes reinforces that the destruction of Victorian-era architecture in Melbourne during the twentieth century was on a huge scale. In the 1920s photograph of Collins Street (Figure 1), all but two of the buildings on the southern side between Queen and Elizabeth Streets have been entirely demolished (Figure 2). Only remnants remain of the Mercantile Bank (Figure 3) of 1888 and the Commercial Bank (Figure 4) of 1891 to 1893. Only the Mercantile’s façade survives intact and the Commercial’s glorious internal banking chamber is all that remains of the 1890s structure, serving as a foyer for the surrounding office tower development completed in 1990.



Figure 1. Photograph, 'Oblique view of south side of Collins Street between Queen and Elizabeth Streets', c.1920, PCLTGN 181, State Library of Victoria.



Figure 2. 'Oblique view of south Collins Street between Queen and Elizabeth Streets', 13 September 2025.  
Photograph by Jennifer Fowler

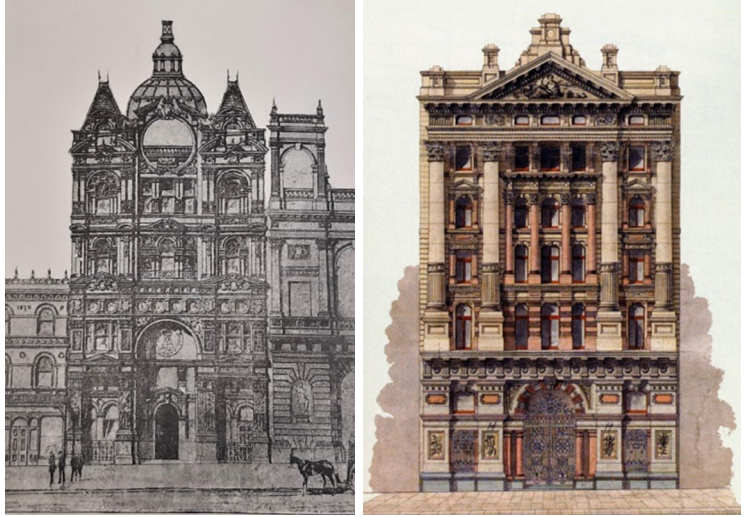


Figure 3 (Left). William Salway, Gerard Wight and William Lucas, Mercantile Bank, 1888, Collins Street. Detail of engraving, 'New Banking Premises for the Mercantile Bank, Melbourne', *Australasian Builder and Contractor's News*, 28 July 1888, 72.

Figure 4 (Right). Lloyd Tayler and Alfred Dunn, Commercial Bank, 1891 – 1893, Collins Street. Rendered drawing of 1891 – 1983 Commercial Bank of Australia façade. URL: <https://www.urban.com.au/forum/333-collins-street-former-cba-banking-chamber>.

This widespread loss has given my research added impetus to bring together information regarding the heritage of the city for future generations. Late Victorian-era architecture in Australia has been an under-studied area hence my research has broad implications for local and national architecture history. As a Melburnian, my research is important to me, as by adding to the knowledge of Victorian-era commercial architecture, I hope that the examples still in existence within the CBD will be all the more treasured and survive well into the future.





*What lessons have you  
learned from research?*



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With the guidance of my supervisors and support from my community, I have been able to integrate my longstanding interest in healthcare with my architectural training to examine national histories through a relatively underexplored lens. While initially grounded in colonial medicine and development, the scope of this thesis expanded to the shared independence era (1945 to 1965) of Kuala Lumpur, Sarawak, and Singapore—a period when key general hospitals were commissioned and constructed but not examined for their nation-building contributions. As a result, locating and accessing the architectural archival material necessary for analysis was not a straightforward process.

A key lesson from my research and fieldwork is the importance of recognising and engaging with the different research/archival priorities and institutional structures present in various disciplines when conducting interdisciplinary research. Although this thesis is grounded in architectural history, studies involving hospitals require an understanding of the administrative frameworks, ethical considerations, and material constraints specific to medical buildings and their documentation.



*Figure 1. The Kuala Lumpur General Hospital case study building: The Maternity Hospital.  
Photograph by Catherine Woo, 2023*

In addition to examining this distinctive architectural typology, the development of this thesis was only made possible thanks to the access and generosity afforded by the institutions across five cities: Kuala Lumpur, Kuching, Singapore, Canberra, and London. Their collaboration and trust have been integral to the research process, and learning to navigate a multidisciplinary, inter-city study has been challenging yet rewarding. Ultimately, this experience has reinforced the significance of methodological adaptability and inter-disciplinary respect in the development of rigorous, contextually grounded scholarship that I hope to communicate through this thesis.

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## **CHAOS**

The findings were fighting,  
I was stressed, confused, frustrating.

Doing a PhD, we're meant to cope,  
with tides of doubt, then waves of hope.

When this work finds its display,  
may chaos finally drift away.

(Msdx, 11th November 2024)

And the chaos did drift away

(Completion seminar, 3rd September 2025)

Struggle is part of the process. Be patient. It does pass.



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The case studies I've selected for my research are L'Aquila (Italy) and Bungamati (Nepal). Since I chose these case studies from the outset, I always knew when I would go on fieldwork. This made planning easier but also added pressure to ensure I handled confirmation and ethics smoothly. Funding was another concern, as the availability of grants and application process requirements limited the window of opportunities. With all of that in mind, and with sizable experience as a project manager, I drafted my year-two plan, inclusive of contingency and a potential 'Plan B', because 'you never know'. As planned, I conducted fieldwork in Italy in April and May this year, but I had to cancel the Nepal trip due to civil unrest.

What this eventful year has shown me is the significance of having a solid plan that considers potential risks and pitfalls. I couldn't have predicted that Nepal's protests would unfold as they did, but I had considered adjusting my plans due to financial constraints. Preparing for risks doesn't just involve considering the worst-case scenario; it also requires being adaptable and making decisions, trusting that all possible options have been reviewed and weighed.

Time, financial resources, and established connections and networks are factors that significantly influence planning and preparing for fieldwork. I had an abundance of those when I planned for Nepal, while I had far more constraints for Italy. Yet, contextual knowledge, familiarity with the language, and adaptability helped compensate for what was missing. Would I have been able to do the same had it been Nepal? Unlikely. Securing as many resources as possible and taking as much time as necessary to prepare should be a priority for anyone conducting fieldwork, particularly if it is overseas. On a personal note, a caring cohort that offered 'venting' time and advice, along with supportive supervisors, was key to navigating the highs and lows of fieldwork planning and execution.

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Six months in Melbourne and a flânerie of mind

It's been six months since I started my PhD journey. I miss my home, my cat, and my time being a 'flâneur' in my hometown and in Jakarta, to stroll around many places, mosques, blusukan kampung, talking with people, observing people, absorbing the mood and the vibes. During this first six months of PhD journey, instead of being in an actual 'flâneur' mode, I have been more in a virtual 'flânerie of mind' mode, wandering space and time through texts in books/papers, reading and reading, writing and writing, academically calibrating and recalibrating myself, trying to find my own best position within the discipline to start my research. Through this episode of life, I'm thankful of my supervisors, A/Prof Amanda Achmadi and Dr. Ash Alam, and my virtual guideposts who show me signs so that I won't do the reading aimlessly. One of my favourite guideposts is Abidin Kusno, by reading just three-pages of his book, his writing guides

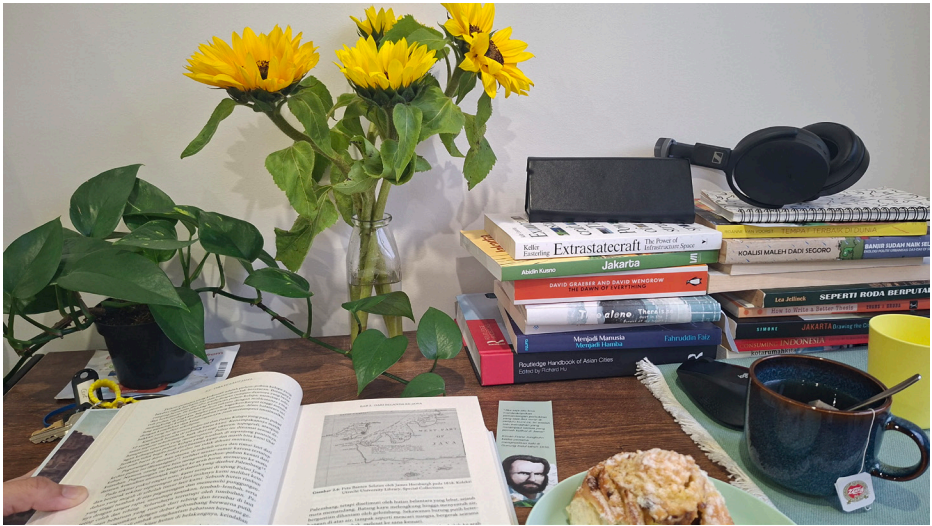


Figure 1. Reading on my desk, 3 September 2025.

me to explore Aihwa Ong, Gayatri Spivak, Bruno Latour, Deleuze & Guattari, Antoine Artaud, and Gregory Bateson. As someone who did not have formal background in social science disciplines and did not have any philosophical training, diving these literatures is a new thing for me. Through the process, I realized this famous quote: the more you learn, the more you realize that you do not really know. I feel like I knew things but turned out I don't. During this process, I also recall Al-Ghazali's ten duties of the students, learning etiquettes from 900-years ago but still useful and relevant for me as a PhD student. I was reminded about purity of intention, humility, the need to focus, and the capability of being methodical. PhD journey is not going to be easy, they said. But I know this is going to be worth it. I hope Allah will make it easy for all of us. Aamiin.

Note: This is adapted from the long-version reflection published on my personal Medium, 16 October 2025.

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From April to July 2025, I carried out fieldwork in Gedebage, Bandung, to explore how social media data might inform landscape architecture in the face of urban flooding. This reflection traces the methods I used, the assumptions I carried, and the shifts in perspective that emerged. Walking through flood-prone streets (Figure 2), I observed people’s responses during floods (Figure 1) and visited places recently affected by major flooding (Figures 3 and 4). I spoke with academics, professionals, officials, and residents, hearing stories ranging from technical explanations to personal memories. At the same time, I gathered flood-related posts on Twitter and Instagram—brief glimpses of crisis and resilience. Juxtaposing these two sources revealed both echoes and silences.

Before fieldwork, my understanding came from literature, desk studies, and my own perspective as a Bandung citizen who has faced floods, though never in the worst-hit areas. With Bandung’s large number of social media users and the government’s active presence online, I assumed digital platforms would play a central role in flood communication, echoing global discussions on data in disaster

*Figure 1. After heavy rain, a spontaneous service emerged: carrying motorbikes to higher ground for 2,000–5,000 rupiahs. Image by Asep Darmana.*



*Figure 2. Water ponding on several roads in Gedebage after heavy rain. Image by Asep Darmana.*



*Figure 3. View from Rancabolang with the high-speed rail bridge in the background. Image by Asep Darmana.*





*Figure 4. Drone orthophoto of Rancabolang, a flood-prone ward in the Gedebage Sub-district, illustrating the interface between built-up areas and open spaces. Most of the remaining open spaces are wetlands—remnants of Gedebage's original landscape that once formed the base of the ancient Bandung Lake. Image by Asep Darmana.*

management. I expected interviews and observations to confirm this neat link between online narratives and lived realities.

Instead, the field unsettled my assumptions. Social media was present but inconsistent—posts were uneven, fleeting, and often absent at peak moments. Digital traces proved valuable but partial, shaped by access and attention. This reminded me that data, however vast, is always incomplete, and lived experience cannot be reduced to hashtags. My thesis now shifts: not to celebrate social media uncritically, but to examine its limits and possibilities in Bandung's messy realities, and to ask how it might support—rather than overshadow—existing flood-responsive practices.

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Informal settlements are arguably among the most interesting and insightful places to learn about urban design and planning, yet they are, at the same time, difficult urban environments in which to conduct research. Gaining access to the site, keeping safe, and navigating power dynamics between different actors were some of the many challenges I faced during my fieldwork in three Latin American cities: Greater Valparaiso (Chile), Rosario (Argentina) and Montevideo (Uruguay). Then, it is worth reflecting on how those tensions, particularly in the field, push for an intense and continuous dialogue between theory and methods (Pink & Morgan, 2013).

For example, we can take interviews as a rich and complex process for



*Figure 1. Parcela 11. semi-formal settlement in Greater Valparaiso, Chile.  
Photograph by Felipe Labra*

gaining qualitative data, where cooperation is constantly negotiated. This involves continually navigating local norms and assessing the political implications of reaching certain people, spaces and locations (Shafique, 2025, p. 10). In that sense, walking interviews with residents proved invaluable to me, as the physical environment served as a prompt to unpack the social dynamics, events, and practices that significantly shape public space. Curiously, as a PhD student from an international university, I provided an excuse for many community leaders to walk along and encounter their neighbours, share concerns, and even assess possible actions to advocate for upgrades from the state. In other words, the boundaries, roles, and expectations are negotiated on an ongoing basis in the field, requiring me to build trust and flexibility along the process.



*Figure 2. Parcela 11, Greater Valparaiso, Chile.  
Photograph by Víctor Alegría Corona*

Theory and methods work in a constant dialogue, persistently confronting the conceptual tools with the empirical reality. What Mills (1970) coined as ‘intellectual craftsmanship,’ implies there is no such thing as a linear, mechanical process of inquiry, but rather a more entangled, messy assemblage emerging from the experience of doing research—and particularly fieldwork—in a broader sense.

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