

Becoming an Architect:  
Narratives of Architectural Education

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A dissertation

submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

University of Washington

2016

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Program Authorized to Offer Degree:

College of Built Environments

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**Abstract**

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**Abstract**

This dissertation examines the personal narratives of several aspiring architects to investigate the emergence of “occupational identities”—or how individuals navigate their education to construct a sense of themselves within the architectural community. By interpreting the content of these narratives in relation to several relevant strains of contemporary discourse, this project exposes and foregrounds features of architectural education rarely considered by educators and scholars in the field. Becoming an architect is presented as a holistic experience that requires psychological resilience and meaning-making strategies in the face of various challenges that undermine personal investment and wellbeing. I argue that adopting such an approach towards architectural education is essential to understanding, informing, and improving the profession’s fundamental (yet historically problematic) objective of cultural

reproduction. This project is thus meant to set the groundwork for future studies that focus on how aspiring architects navigate the more human dimensions of their education.

Twenty-five years ago, in 1991, Dana Cuff published *Architecture: A Story of Practice* in which she asked “What is the metamorphic transformation of the layperson into the architect?” Interviewing members of the architectural community across the United States, she crafted a compelling narrative that described architecture’s sociocultural milieu. Most notably, she revealed certain schisms, dilemmas, and contradictions integral to the architectural community and the architect’s role in society. For instance, individuals are often initially attracted to architecture based on images of professional practice that they later learn are illusory. This project revisits many of the themes from Cuff’s book, although the story is set in a new historical context. The central tension in architectural culture that she exposed between ideology and action, belief and practice, continues to hold. Yet, a host of structural and cultural changes within and beyond architecture over the past 25 years necessitates a reexamination of architectural education. While the purview and boundaries of architectural practice have broadened and blurred, the profession is increasingly worried about becoming obsolete. The demand on architecture schools, therefore, is to continue attracting future practitioners and educate them to practice competently, on the one hand, and imagine unprecedented modes of practice, on the other.

In order to enrich and update Cuff’s story, this project incorporates new understandings of higher education and professional development that foreground holistic and transformative dimensions. For instance, I apply occupational therapy’s notion of “occupation” as a framework to conceptualize how humans engage in activities, make commitments, and belong to various

social communities in various ways that form self-identities and shape their future trajectories. Adopting these perspectives demands a more grounded understanding of architectural education that takes into account how aspiring architects grapple with the “occupation” of architecture to develop occupational identities. Borrowing theoretical and methodological approaches from research on narrative identity and occupational engagement, I designed the project as a case study of the University of Washington’s Masters of Architecture program. In-depth interviews with cross-sectional cohorts of participants (including current students, recent graduates, and emerging professionals) elicited narratives of their experience before, during, and after architecture school. I then analyzed and assembled these personal narratives, crafting a composite narrative that ultimately evokes architectural education as a process of personal transformation and meaning-making. In and through their narratives, aspiring architects render themselves as navigating and actively contributing to architecture’s dualistic nature. This understanding directs our attention to the strategies that students and young professionals use to gain entry into and remain invested in an architectural career path. Through analysis of this composite narrative, I reveal how participants view their education as encompassing more than just “learning” in formal institutional settings. Moreover, it became clear that forming a coherent and resilient architectural identity required that one’s narrative integrates aspects of *doing*, *being*, *becoming*, and *belonging*—or all four dimensions of occupational engagement.

This project continues the tradition of demystifying architectural education, by Cuff and other scholars, by foregrounding the voices of aspiring architects. It also challenges educators to redefine “architectural education” more holistically as a set of interrelated commitments, experiences, and relationships. These vectors extend over long periods of one’s life, requiring

periodic recalibration of architecture as an occupational identity. Such a perspective is not expected to be met with resistance within the architectural community. Indeed, it resonates with many of the field's traditions and stated goals, such as self-education and lifelong learning. Yet, it does imply that teaching and mentorship practices, as well as curricular and licensure requirements set by institutional and professional bodies, undergo reevaluation to ensure that architecture's practices align with its beliefs. It also suggests that narratives of aspiring architects—insofar as they reflect the meaning-making and human dimensions of becoming an architect—be taken into account when evaluating architectural education (rather than only considering products as demonstrations of acquired skills or knowledge). Then, the profession of architecture can presumably be better equipped to serve its members and, in turn, society.

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## **Acknowledgements**

Given my background in studio as an architecture student, I was particularly apprehensive about embarking on a research project that would leave me isolated and alone with my own thoughts for months on end. And there were certainly times where it felt as though I was playing out this preconceived image. But I deliberately designed the study around conversations with human beings partly for this very reason. So I would first and foremost like to thank my anonymous study participants—including students, faculty, and alumni—each of whom graciously took time out of their days to be interrogated and recorded. Your willingness to open yourselves up to me imbued this project with its richness and depth. Despite you each thanking me for the opportunity to be interviewed, I certainly got the better half of that deal! My hope is that now that the study is complete, any value you might get out of reading it helps makes up part of the difference, so to speak.

Next, I would like to thank my committee members. You each provided guidance and feedback that, in its own way, helped shape the outcome of this project. I appreciate the faith and autonomy that you entrusted to me that granted me the freedom to conceive of and carry out this project on my own terms and at my own pace. It made for a fulfilling experience that allowed me to establish a certain trajectory as a future scholar—and in this way, the project functioned not unlike the kind of projects that many of my participants described in their narratives.

Finally, there are all the other individuals who provided various forms of support throughout the life of this project. This includes my doctoral colleagues (especially Daniel Coslett for contributing his copy editing skills), dissertation writing group members, and anyone who prompted me to describe my research along the way. In particular, I am grateful to Tammy Tasker for her encouragement and direction early in the project. And after all, your dissertation laid the groundwork for mine. To all the administrators in the College of Built Environments who hired me to teach classes in your departments over the past several years, this project would truthfully not have been possible without your support. I was incredibly fortunate (maybe spoiled) to be able to balance my efforts between teaching and research. And of course, the support from my family was invaluable and very much appreciated. Jacqueline, it would be easy to overlook the many ways that you kept me sane and motivated throughout this process. Thank you!

## Preface

Looking back now, I can see how the impetus for this project began many years ago. After researching architecture schools as a prospective student for several years, I recognized the wide range of academic cultures that exist across the country. I also noticed how the field defied consistent classification within academia—sometimes being affiliated with art or design, other times with engineering, and sometimes in urban or environmental studies. Finally, I became aware of how this diversity of cultures and values made ranking architecture schools a problematic, if not fruitless, endeavor. All this is to say that, by the time I entered graduate school in 2007, I was already asking what you might call internal meta-reflective questions about architectural education. And this questioning continued throughout my experience as an architecture student: as I encountered the world of studio and the familial bonds it engendered, I became increasingly drawn to “architectural theory” as a way of bestowing architectural projects, including my own, with the political and ethical gravity I felt the world deserved. One of my rejected ideas for a thesis project was looking at twelve personas that I believed represented worldviews of the proverbial architect—from the artist, to the social activist, to the prostitute. With little awareness at the time of the ongoing debates about architecture’s role in society, this was my way of reconciling the diversity of identities I had begun noticing, as personified by members of the field. Looking back now, what I was also doing was asking questions about agency and professional responsibility, and doing so as a way of helping construct my own professional identity.

After I graduated and started working professionally full-time, I was struck by the contradictions and disconnects evident in architectural discourse and the day-to-day activities of

practitioners. It felt like a profession at once progressive and conservative, socially conscious on some important matters and utterly ignorant to others. Architects could spend hours “navel gazing” but not about what seemed to be the most critical questions of our day. Much like Dana Cuff’s (1991) description of her transition from architectural practitioner to researcher, these kinds of questions and disconnects about the role and training of architects are what drew me back to a doctoral program. Once there, I embedded myself in the contemporary discourse of architecture and soon encountered the multitude of opinions about how to save architecture from self-destruction. The general sense amongst critics from within the architectural community over the past fifteen years or so was that we needed to take stock of the discipline’s actual capabilities and achievements, and then begin aligning our values with our practices and processes of reproduction. In other words, we needed to change not only how architecture gets made but how architects get made (and what kinds of architects get made) in order to save the profession from becoming irrelevant or powerless.

In the course of exploring these ideas in relation to my own career development, I realized what I probably already knew deep-down: that what I most cared about was the education of the architect. From a researcher’s perspective, I was primarily drawn to how the experience and practice of teaching and learning architecture reflected the contradictory function of architecture schools:

As institutions, schools internalize the contradiction between reproduction and production; they have a fundamental stake in perpetuating their own values and at the same time an obligation to go beyond themselves in nurturing new practitioners and new knowledge (Ockman, 2012: p. 29)

I started noting the various discursive ways that architecture educators tried to resolve or address this contradiction and realized that I had already encountered these as an architecture student and practitioner. The strongest tropes at the time were that: 1) as future practitioners, architecture students are the saviors of the profession and the world, each of which are in a state of crisis; 2) one of the greatest values of investing in architecture school lies in the fact that it prepares you for any number of careers, not just conventional practice in architecture, because design thinking translates to so many professional contexts; and 3) architecture school is a life-changing experience where architects “find their voice”—but the skills and knowledge required for professional practice are acquired almost entirely through on-the-job training. Attentive to how these tropes might serve a very practical purpose within the marketplace of higher education, I wondered how they related to the experience of architectural education on an individual level. Having been one myself not too long ago, I wanted to understand how aspiring architects navigate the transition into, through, and out of architecture school into the profession. How do they make sense of this process, not abstractly but for their own lives and personal values?

As an early exploration into my project, I began mining rhetoric from administrators about architecture school today. From public lectures, interviews, and other available publications, I came to recognize a certain gap in their descriptions of professional education. They told you the kinds of students who come to their particular program, the kinds of students who succeed, and the ideal kinds of graduates and future practitioners that their school aims to foster—but there was rarely any accounting for the personal transformations that occur along the way. In other words, they told a certain *narrative* of architecture school that, while based on the *theme* of

personal transformation and with a clear *setting* and cast of *characters*, did not actually include any *plot* line. Furthermore, the fact that these narratives were generic, third-person stories meant that they lacked authenticity, details, or even credibility—the sort of qualities that first-person stories would offer. Similarly, findings from surveys of architecture students and graduates, though valuable, were detached from the trajectories and contextual factors of respondents.

My early review of scholarship on architectural education revealed a dearth of empirical studies on the experience of *becoming an architect*. In addition to the general lack of empirical studies on pedagogy, curriculum, learning, and teaching in architecture, there was almost no research on the experience of being an architecture student. Many critics have noted this lacuna and the possible reasons for its continued existence. For instance, unlike other disciplines, architectural education never adopted an approach by which it operates using a feedback loop guided by empirical research. Meanwhile, the notion that education is a process of socio-cognitive learning *and* human transformation is currently sweeping through other disciplines, reorienting educational research questions and methodologies in the hopes of informing teaching and learning practices. Thus, early in this project, I was keen to produce a manuscript that could be useful for educators without a background in qualitative research methods or contemporary theories of higher education. As a teacher of aspiring architects myself, I would want to know how this work might inform my own day-to-day activities and approach to education. Indeed, I could judge the value of my research project upon how much it informs my own educational perspective and practices.

My position within the architectural education community—including my past, present, and future identities—makes me a “stakeholder” in better understanding how one becomes an architect. Much like Dana Cuff described her “insider-outsider” position in relation to her research on architectural culture, my identity can roughly be characterized as having one foot in (as an instructor) and one foot out of architecture (as someone who once practiced professionally). Though I often feel like an interloper, I must remember that I am very much a product of the very processes I study. Indeed, my initial interest in the topic of architectural education and culture emerged from experiencing the process of becoming an architect firsthand and noticing certain oddities, challenges, and contradictions. And my decision to conduct research on this topic was primarily based on the fact that, as an aspiring educator, I wanted to better understand architectural education beyond my personal experience. Yet, part of the motivation for listening and telling narratives of becoming an architect also had to do with coming to terms with my own life story and those from my social circles. When so many individuals who enter the field are eventually faced with existential crises stemming from a misalignment between their aspirations and reality, how do those who continue in the field do so without succumbing to disillusionment or frustration?

As far as conducting a case study on a program inside the very institution with which I am affiliated, I did my best to remain objective. Yet, my own identity has unquestionably been shaped by this very context, just as my teaching and research contributions have shaped, to a slight degree, the professional program I studied. Moreover, I have developed attitudes about the program apart from any formal research activity. As several participants noted, events like exhibitions of student or faculty work can be viewed as public performances of program identity,

and I was a frequent “critical consumer” of such performances before and throughout the study. All of this is to acknowledge my position relative to the case study context. This certainly does not disqualify my interpretations, as all researchers bring their own biases to the table that inform their work. However, I tried to do my best to undertake this research and make interpretive claims that supported the ultimate aim of shedding light on the experience of architectural education as expressed by the participants.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

An architect is not trained. An architect is something you become.

-Wingård, Nilsson, Schuman, & Ljungberg, 2011: p. 2

More than in many other jobs, being a successful architect means not only knowing but being.

-Stevens, 1999: p. 55

Professionally, there are so many different trajectories our students encounter while at school and as soon as they graduate. It can be challenging to know where to go, what to do and who to become.

-Andraos, quoted in Taylor-Hochberg, 2015

### 1.1 Positioning the Project Aims within Architecture's Contemporary Context

As the above quotations imply, embarking on the path of a career in architecture means cultivating an architectural identity, of which there are many. Adopting such an identity requires more than acquiring the requisite knowledge and skills to practice professionally. Such abilities—the *doing* aspect of design practice—constitute only part of the equation. In actuality, *becoming* an architect is largely a meaning-making experience, whereby aspiring architects must periodically recalibrate their expectations, aspirations, and sense of self against the field's pluralistic cultural landscape. They inevitably encounter a certain tension that exists between the discipline's almost tribal insistence on upholding its academic rituals and the incessant calls for new architectural ways of *being*. Likewise, the entangled and dynamic relationship between architecture schools and the profession is palpable in just about all aspects of education. Gaining a sense of *belonging* to the local and global architectural communities is essential to navigating architectural education, yet the meaning-making process is highly personal given that it is

separable from one's life history and individual value system. Indeed, a certain level of psychological resilience is required to remain invested in a career path comprised of so many myths and contradictions. Arguably the most effective strategy for making sense of architectural education, and therefore remain invested in the career path, is narrative: through personal stories, aspiring architects find ways of connecting their past, present, and future selves, along with the interrelated dimensions of their emerging architectural identities.

While any form of education can be understood as a process of self-transformation, this becomes a particularly salient perspective for understanding architectural education today. Architecture departments are increasingly faced with a host of pressures from their academic institutions and the profession. On the one hand, there is anxiety about declining enrollment, leading to a nationwide communications campaign and new online recruitment tools that tout an architectural education as a way to ultimately "find fulfillment" and "make an impact," whether or not that means becoming a licensed architect.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, the profession has concerns about the general apathy towards obtaining licensure among recent graduates, in addition to longstanding concerns about professional competency. Finally, there is fear within the architectural community at large that the profession is becoming obsolete while the social

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<sup>1</sup> Here, I am referring to the recently launched site [www.studyarchitecture.com](http://www.studyarchitecture.com), as well as the 2014 study funded by the Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture (ACSA) that hired a marketing research firm to collect and analyze the perspectives of prospective, current, and former architecture students:

In light of concerns about drops in enrollment and negative press about career options for graduates, the ACSA board agreed in 2014 to make responding to these issues a priority and to develop a communications campaign for our member schools...The research project sought to understand how students, parents, and other influencers perceive the value of architecture education and architecture as a career. Our objective is to translate these research results for use in positioning architecture more effectively in the higher education marketplace (Edwards & Co., 2015).

capital of the architect has waned. In this context of structural and cultural change, few seem to be taking the time to solicit perspectives of students and recent graduates of architecture programs in any meaningful or holistic way. And yet, gaining a better understanding for how aspiring architects navigate their education is vital to any of the profession's larger objectives.

How, and how successfully, individual aspiring architects are able to adopt an architectural identity, and which identities they choose, inevitably shape the future of the profession. Educators in architecture programs acknowledge this, to some degree, when they elevate the role of student agency in resolving various crises facing the profession.<sup>2</sup> Schools are envisioned as “incubating new forms of professional” with students and faculty collaborating “to think the future of the discipline, the future of our expertise and of knowledge itself” (Wigley, quoted in Taylor-Hochberg, 2014). Whereas not all programs position themselves quite this way, there is a broad sense that the current generation of aspiring architects is responsible for defining and enacting the future of architectural practice, which is likely to be comprised of architectural

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<sup>2</sup> Architecture has a long history of referring to situations as “crises.” This typically is a form of self-criticism, when those in the field believe there is a dire need to update the field's professional mandate as a way of meeting changing cultural, economic, or political climates. Reflecting the general and recent usage of the term, the jacket description of Fisher's book *In the Scheme of Things* (2006) states,

At the dawn of the twenty-first century, architecture is in a state of crisis. Numbed by an ugly and shoddily constructed built environment and outraged by the cost of high-profile design projects, the public has become disinterested in and contemptuous of architecture as both a profession and an art. At the same time, some of our most creative designers have isolated themselves from the tastes and needs of mainstream society, reflecting a similar malaise found in design and architecture schools around the country. In this troubling climate, [Fisher]...contends that the purpose and prospects of architectural practice must be reconsidered and reenergized. *In the Scheme of Things* looks at architecture's need to respond creatively and meaningfully to the extraordinary changes affecting the profession now, changes that include the global economy, the advent of computer-aided design, and the growing disconnection between design schools, architectural practice, and the public.

At the same time, many educators see architecture schools as serving a role of vanguard or change-agent in terms of promoting change within the profession by envisioning novel approaches to design practice:

The role of architectural education is to speculate about possible futures, and provide a critical stance towards the built environment, in ways that practice, because of all its constraints, can't really do. In this way architectural education can anticipate or negate practice, and provide a counterpoint to what we consider practice to be (Ponce de Leon, quoted in Taylor-Hochberg, 2015a).

identities that are increasingly heterogeneous and distinct from their 20<sup>th</sup> century precursors. Thus, the notion that architectural education is transformative, both for future professionals and the profession, exists in some inchoate form.

Architectural administrators and instructors engage with issues of architectural identity often, whenever they consider the ideal character attributes of applicants, students, and graduate/practitioners. Such concerns explicitly guide curricular and pedagogical practices as well as revisions to them. Yet there is little to suggest that such engagement with architectural identity is informed by an empirical understanding of how aspiring architects themselves engage with these issues on a personal level. To put it in narrative terms, in the story of architectural education, we have identified 1) the protagonist and supporting cast of characters (the student and their peers, instructors, administrators, and other members of their social support network) and 2) the setting (primarily the studio, but also the rest of architecture school facilities as well as home and professional offices), and 3) we are aware of a certain degree of personal transformation (with graduates being distinct from applicants). What remains unknown, and therefore unexamined, is the plot sequence that connects these narrative components into a coherent story. Therefore, our understanding of architectural education remains incomplete.

This study addresses this lack of understanding and narrow perspective towards architectural education by importing theoretical and methodological approaches from other fields that resonate with past research on architectural education, my own experience being trained as an architect, and contemporary architectural culture. Namely, I draw from the rich body of contemporary literature on education, narrativity, and occupational engagement in higher education and professional contexts. In doing so, I aim to open new territory for future

studies on architectural education by foregrounding narrative as a research frame and method, whilst encouraging other ways of capturing the holistic character of becoming an architect. With a critical mass of studies of this kind we can build a better understanding of architectural education that revisits themes from outdated scholarship and yet-to-be-examined aspects.<sup>3</sup>

The present study constructs a composite narrative of architectural education by eliciting personal narratives from current students and recent graduates of a graduate-level, professional architecture program. Moving from interview transcripts through a series of analytical-interpretive steps, the ensuing content suggests how participants employ various narrative strategies in their attempts to construct architectural identities within their personal life histories. By capturing how these individuals constructed meaning from the various events, encounters, challenges, and turning points that constituted their architectural education, we begin to broaden and deepen our understanding of architectural education as a holistic experience that predates entrance to an architecture program and transcends the divide between academic and professional contexts. In particular, as I discuss in Chapter 6, we see how identity is constructed most effectively when narratives relate all four dimensions of occupational engagement—*doing, being, becoming, and belonging*.<sup>4</sup>

The present study's closest, well-known analog from within the field is Cuff's (1992) *Architecture: The Story of Practice*. In terms of research objective, like Cuff, I am interested in

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<sup>3</sup> Scholarship on the sociocultural aspects of architectural education from a generation ago can be considered a critical mass of its own (Anthony et al., 1991; Cuff, 1991; Dutton, 1989; G. Stevens, 1998; Willenbrock, 1991). Most germane to this study, it revealed how socialization processes in architecture schools produce certain kinds of design professionals, while foregrounding the student experience. Since then, literature on architectural education continues to cite these sources.

<sup>4</sup> See Chapter 4 for operational definitions of each of these terms.

linking the experience of becoming an architect to the field's pedagogical traditions and social contexts. Thus, my work can be considered a revisiting, 25 years later, of the chief questions that informed Cuff's project:

What does it mean to become an architect? What are the programs, behaviors, rituals, and knowledge that architects must learn? What is the metamorphic transformation of a layperson into an architect? By studying the process of becoming-an-architect, we discover what it *means* to be an architect, thereby gaining further insight into the culture of architecture. 'Architect' is a legal term, but it is not the legal sense that interests me here. Rather, I am concerned with the more tacit, more intricate evolution of an individual through a sequence of distinct periods: as an architecture student, an entry-level architect, a project architect or associate, and finally as a principal. Only in the last two stages can one be said to be a full-fledged architect. Normally, these developmental phases are not described explicitly, even to the novice, but reveal themselves only during the process of becoming. If we envision a black box, into which we place the raw materials of a layperson, and out of which comes the well-informed architect, then the contents of that box, and in particular the way the mysterious production line operates, need to be explored (p. 116).

In this significant piece of scholarship, Cuff revealed a set of dilemmas, mysteries, and contradictions that constitute the experience of becoming and being an architect. Many of these are likely indicative of the enduring aspects of the architect's social identity, as they remain apt to this day.<sup>5</sup> Cuff's book remains arguably the most holistic exploration into "the story of practice." Yet, 25 years later, professional practice and the "mysterious production line" of architectural education operate differently. At the very least, the cultural context that surrounds architectural education has undoubtedly changed—as has much of the discourse emanating from within architectural schools. Despite our kindred spirits and related underlying motivations, my

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<sup>5</sup> Lewis (2013), for instance, contends that, "The inside story of architectural education and practice is one of dualities: success and failure, acceptance and rejection, tedium and elation, fulfillment and disillusionment. The experiences of becoming and being an architect can be sweet and bittersweet" (p. xiv).

study is not just a revisiting of Cuff's work, however.<sup>6</sup> Borrowing from a wide range of scholarship, I adopt a perspective towards education that focuses on meaning-making as expressed through personal narratives. This approach borrows from recent perspectives toward higher education that foreground dimensions of self-transformation. It was also inspired by contemporary architectural discourse that positions students as saviors of the profession amidst the most recent wave of architectural hand-wringing over its future. Together, these suggested the need to empirically understand how individuals adopt architectural identities.

In addition to Cuff's work, much of the research conducted on architectural education over the past thirty years has attempted to "demystify" its cultural and pedagogical idiosyncrasies. The perceived need to expose the qualities of architectural education typically derives from several presumptions: that architectural education is paradigmatically different than "standard" models of education (and that it has something to offer non-design-based disciplines looking for alternative models of teaching and learning) and that the field of architecture can be improved or serve its constituents better by exposing and elucidating its hidden and tacit educational practices.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, architectural education shares certain inherent dualisms present within all forms of higher education. Thus, I believe that educators in architecture programs have much more to learn from other disciplines when it comes to understanding and improving education.

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<sup>6</sup> Still, I would argue that one can consider her work as a composite narrative, one that extends wider than this dissertation. Thus, comparing certain themes between the two projects will at least imply certain changes over the past generation to the "metamorphic transformation of a layperson into an architect"—and what of this process has been sustained.

<sup>7</sup> Numerous critics have noted certain persistent particularities, like the design jury, the charrette, and the studio (see for instance Anthony, 2012). On the other hand, Schön (1990) famously considered architecture pedagogy as a model for educating reflective practitioners across a range of disciplines, wherein learning is accomplished through doing by following tacit social contracts.

The Boyer Report (Boyer & Mitgang, 1996) presented what its authors considered to be strange disconnects: 1) between architecture and other disciplines on campus, 2) between architecture schools and the profession, and 3) between architectural practice and the public.<sup>8</sup> Each of these three “rifts” continues to frame dialogue and debates around reforming architectural education. Similarly, Piotrowski and Robinson’s (2001) edited volume proposed a set of contested issues regarding architectural knowledge and its production: authority; relation of architecture to other fields; relation between discipline and subfields; form and content of education; legitimacy of different voices within the field in relation to the social responsibility of the architect; relation between academia and the profession. In both cases, these themes are not necessarily issues to be “resolved” but faultlines inherent to the nature of the field itself that continue to attract attention, scholarly and otherwise, from members of the architecture community.

Whereas the present study is also intended to demystify architectural education, and certainly builds on this scholarship, my research questions are not directly oriented toward questions of pedagogy, curricula, or knowledge. Rather, I seek to open up new intellectual territory within the discipline, turning to themes of meaning-making and identity transformation by shifting attention to the voices of aspiring architects. Given recent and ongoing modifications to architectural education—much of it intended to address criticisms raised over the past three decades—I believe it is time we carefully consider the ways in which aspiring architects navigate

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<sup>8</sup> The breadth and depth of the Boyer Report’s study (including more than a dozen campuses and firms, by means of ethnography, interviews, and surveys) was unprecedented and is unmatched since; thus, it remains the touchstone publication on architectural education’s challenges and potential even to this day, succeeding in its aim to identify the agenda of architectural education, offer a new language, and shape a debate on its future. It is also worth noting that the report was written by two disciplinary “outsiders,” a journalist and an educational administrator.

the various environments, experiences, and challenges that constitute the process of becoming an architect today.

It is important to contextualize the narratives of aspiring architects presented in this study within current shifts in architectural culture. I will briefly discuss some of these shifts here by referencing recent disciplinary discourse, whereas the next chapter will review the past several decades of literature on aspects of architectural education relevant to this study. In reflecting on changes over the past twenty years within architecture education, Stan Allen (2012) notes that one of the overriding tendencies in this era has been a “shifting relationship between the profession and the school”:

In many cases, passionate academic debates have brought to light a deeper anxiety about the changing role of the architect in society. Architects, as Rem Koolhaas has pointed out, are at once immensely arrogant and massively powerless. That is to say, they are no longer effective in many areas traditionally seen as the domain of the architect, but potentially powerful in other, perhaps unanticipated arenas. One task of schools today is to identify these new arenas and capacities.

This is a task made more difficult by a climate of increasing pluralism. Clearly no single design direction dominates schools today, and while it is possible to map shifting intellectual agendas, the situation is not so much that one agenda supplants another as it is that one is layered over another, multiplying the possibilities and points of view. This can be confusing to a student, who is often thrown back on his or her own resources. Young architects need to cultivate intellectual independence, but students need stable landmarks as well (p. 228).

This project falls within this discursive context of architecture’s transforming social identity and a more cooperative relationship between schools and professional practice. The myth of individualism, or the notion that the architect is a solitary “hero” has been under siege for decades. Yet scholars maintain that this “hero” identity continues to inform studio pedagogy, whereas identities ostensibly needed for effective professional practice today, such as an empathetic collaborator, remain pedagogically marginalized: “The design studio in schools of

architecture still remains primarily geared towards developing individual star architects as unique and gifted designers, rather than preparing team players” (Nicol & Pilling, 2000a, p. 7).

Recent educational reforms in architecture that address the purported rift between school and practice operate under the assumption that the fundamental nature of the profession has transformed as of late—namely in terms of how architects relate to clients, to other members of the design and construction industry, and to the public. The argument is that this necessitates that schools overcome their conservative tendencies to alter the basic model and aims of instruction (Boyer & Mitgang, 1996; Fisher, 2006; Friedman, 2007; Gutman, 2007; Nicol & Pilling, 2000a; Salama, 2015; Till, 2009; Worthington, 2000).<sup>9</sup> Critics tend to call attention to fundamental shifts in both what and how architects *do* and in the very notion of what constitutes *being an architect*. For instance, in their response to recent revisions to architectural accreditation standards, the ACSA argued the following:

More than ever, architectural practice takes place within a network of interrelated disciplines. As this network expands, the knowledge needed to practice is becoming simultaneously broader, more specialized, and more diverse in scope. This emerging context translates into a complex, but no less compelling, portrait of an architecture graduate: a creative, responsive, and technically proficient designer, an acute synthesizer of knowledge, and a deft leader and collaborator within a multidisciplinary team (ACSA, 2013).

Schools have therefore claimed their objective is to cultivate graduates who are able to traverse and ultimately excel in such a complex and ever-changing world of practice.

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<sup>9</sup> Salama (2015) encapsulates the main thrust of this discourse when he writes: “While the practice of design professions has changed significantly and continues to change, architectural and urban design education has been slow to react to these changes at best or resists change or adaptation at worst” (p. 1). Reflecting a common conception of architecture school in relation to the “real world,” one alumnus of Columbia University referred to it as “an insane little bubble of nonreality” (quoted in Monaghan, 2001)

This study thus comes at an important moment in the history of architectural education, amidst a broad push toward an “integrated” curricular model that aims to expand and adapt to changes in the architect’s role.<sup>10</sup> Within this model, students are presumably given opportunities to encounter, “try on,” and perhaps even begin to adopt nascent professional identities before they graduate.<sup>11</sup> Formalized internship programs are the most obvious manifestation of this model, but other examples might include: practitioners being invited into the classroom to share stories with students from their professional lives, encouraging students to role-play design responses or logistical solutions; or a student might get hired by an academic-based research institution to help develop innovative materials or analyze “big data” of urban processes. In addition, efforts to shorten the average timeframe to attain licensure have recently been implemented, including several new degree programs designed to integrate academic and professional learning such that students can graduate with a professional license.<sup>12</sup> As these curricular and pedagogical advances become increasingly prevalent, so too does the need to provide students with self-reflection opportunities that allow them to connect their past, present, and future architectural selves into a coherent life story and thereby position themselves within the profession. One of the basic premises of this study is that today’s more

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<sup>10</sup> As I discuss in Chapter 5, this project’s case study, the accredited Master of Architecture program at the University of Washington, embodies many aspects and the ethos of this integrated model of architectural education.

<sup>11</sup> In engineering, a field that has undertaken considerably more effort to empirically understand how students construct occupational identities, educators are encouraged to “provide images of futures and ways to get to those futures” (Stevens, O’Connor, Garrison, Jocuns, & Amos, 2008, p. 366).

<sup>12</sup> For instance, a recently implemented program at the University of Minnesota integrates practice-based research within an academic setting, thus allowing licensure to be granted upon graduation of a post-professional MS in Research Practices degree (see Cheng, 2013). Likewise, the Savannah College of Art and Design is implementing an Integrated Path to Architectural Licensure, which “provides students the opportunity to complete requirements for licensure while earning their degree” (<http://www.scad.edu/academics/programs/architecture/accelerated-licensure>). This is in addition to the numerous co-op programs across North America, some of which have existed for over a century.

cooperative partnership between the academy and the profession impacts the individual experience of becoming an architect—and that the individual experience in turn shapes the future of the profession. Given significant structural changes to the process of becoming an architect, and with more on the horizon, it is essential that we examine the actual experience of becoming an architect.

The recent increase in publically available literature aimed at helping aspiring architects navigate their education is a welcomed development towards greater transparency and clarity.<sup>13</sup> However, such information is largely meant to elucidate the various structural steps and requirements of becoming an architect—including applying to schools, distinctions between degree programs, and the paths to licensure. Complementing these guidebook-like resources are more descriptive, personal accounts of becoming an architect, such as interviews, profiles, blogposts, and discussion boards on sites like [archinect.com](http://archinect.com), [sectioncut.com](http://sectioncut.com), [theproexams.com](http://theproexams.com), and the AIAS' "archibabble" and "in studio blog." This dissertation seeks to build on the momentum of this trend with the aim of further demystifying architectural education by employing empirical research.

The present study's focus on stories and storytelling is also meant to challenge the tendency in architecture to present student design products as "education," which conflates artifacts with what is a much broader set of processes and experiences (see Hejduk & Canon,

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<sup>13</sup> Most notable are Lewis' guide (2013), Waldrep's guide (2014) and blog ([archcareers.blogspot.com](http://archcareers.blogspot.com)) and the new ACSA-sponsored website, [www.studyarchitecture.com](http://www.studyarchitecture.com), which includes a "roadmap" for "an architecture student's journey." Informational pages and downloadable pamphlets are also available on the following websites: NAAB's "Thinking about becoming an architect?" (<http://www.naab.org/students/>), the AIA-sponsored Topic Architecture's "Become an Architect" (<http://www.topicarchitecture.com/becoming-an-architect>), and NCARB's "Becoming an Architect" (<http://www.ncarb.org/Becoming-an-Architect.aspx>).

1999; Hejduk, Diller, Lewis, & Shkapich, 1991). In a more general sense, this project draws from the longstanding tradition of storytelling in the field of architecture. Frascari (2012) argues that, “The education of architects has always followed a curriculum based on storytelling” (p. 228). Likewise, Deamer (2005) calls upon her fellow architecture faculty members when she writes: “We must be alert to the implications that we are teaching students to tell persuasive stories” (p. 7). The design review is, among other things, a stage for students to graphically and orally present narratives about their process and the imagined experience and use of their designed spaces. Personal portfolios, the chief media for representing academic and professional outputs of aspiring architects, are typically described as opportunities to construct not just one’s work but one’s self into a narrative. And in professional contexts, designers are tasked with telling compelling and credible stories to justify ideas and decisions to their design team, clients, and members of the public (see Frascari, 2012).<sup>14</sup> But the connection between narrative and architecture is not limited to complementary applications of the two practices. Frascari (2012) argues that architecture and narrative actually overlap in terms of their means and ends as meaning-, identity- and world-making activities:

Storytelling is a crucial condition for making sense of both individual experience of architecture and social interactions that take place in it... Stories not only help us make sense of the actions of others, they serve to shape our own identities. The fundamental implication is that architectural sense-making and the construction of identity are powerful narrative constructions (p. 228).

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<sup>14</sup> Other examples of narrative’s role in architecture include: scenario-building in the design process (Parkinson, Bohemia, Yee, & Smith, 2012), reconstructing the design process itself or particular design decisions using narrative structures (Parkinson & Bohemia, 2012), the ways that users phenomenologically/cognitively experience and represent built environments through narrative (Coates, 2012; Ro & Bermudez, 2015), as well as various applications within architecture culture.

By empirically extending this rich tradition of storytelling into the ways that aspiring architects make sense of their education, my hope is that others in the architectural community find this project compelling, informative, and therefore valuable to understanding and shaping life histories—either their own or those of aspiring architects.

## 1.2 Identity Transformation in the Field of Architecture

As in any profession, becoming an architect involves more than obtaining a legal title. It is a process of self-transformation, a shift from simply wanting to be an architect, to genuinely believing in one's potential (success), to eventually convincing those who matter to believe this, too, and ultimately feeling like a full member of the professional community. One's "education," which spans school and workplace environments, becomes "a time to learn what we do and don't want to be" as an architect (Enright, 2004). This consideration for the longer trajectories of architectural education was the impetus behind this project's focus on the notion of "becoming" as opposed to just "learning."<sup>15</sup> The meaning-making nature of this process, which takes years to unfold, implies the centrality of personal narrative. As demonstrated by decades of scholarship, individuals use narratives to construct coherence and meaning between their daily activities, their sense of who they are and whom they might become, all in relation to those in their social/learning community. Personal narratives often express how individuals navigate social and

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<sup>15</sup> I discuss this distinction in greater detail in Chapter 3. It is worth noting that those within the field of architecture have deployed the term "becoming" as a way of acknowledging themes of agency and self-transformation particularly germane to professional education. Referencing the first word of the book's title, Helene Combs Dreiling opens her Foreword to the latest edition of *Becoming an Architect: A guide to careers in design* with the following: Why focus on process rather than the object or goal? Because to strive to be an architect is always a matter of moving forward and beyond, a matter, in short, of *becoming*...We are not simply passengers headed for new ports. We ourselves are in a state of becoming as our awareness of how little we know drives our thirst to explore and create new knowledge and new ways of applying our maturing skills (Combs Dreiling, 2014, p. xi).

institutional structures, thus foregrounding agency in educational processes, experiences, and environments. But the role of narrative goes beyond an explanatory or meaning-making function when we consider that, “Telling a story about oneself can sometimes transform that self” (Wortham, 2001, p. xi). In Chapter 3, I discuss this notion of narrative identity in further detail.

Navigating architecture school has been described as feeling “like a second adolescence, constantly looking for solid ground. And when we finally land, we’re a different person—in most cases, a stronger and wiser person” (Wingård, Nilsson, Schuman, & Ljungberg, 2011: p. 81). In this sense, becoming an architect can be considered a process of self-transformation. Indeed, participants in the present study noted how they emerged from architecture school as different people than who they were then they started. But what role does the individual themselves play in this process of self-transformation? Ultimately, graduates are charged with attaining and exercising a certain level of professional and cognitive agency, such that they enter the architectural community having developed an “identity horizon”—or a means to consider how their skillset, their present self, and their future self are a “good fit” for the profession of architecture (Côté et al., 2015). Yet, given architecture’s cultural complexity, this project of meaning-making is particularly challenging and fraught with contradiction.

Scholars have noted the various ways that architectural education embodies “dual roles” at various scales: preparing students for practice while engaging the discipline’s ongoing practices, discourses, and knowledge production (Sheil, 2016, p. 20). Running parallel to these two primary roles is a dualism: the need to preserve disciplinary culture on the one hand, while encouraging innovation and challenges to the status quo on the other. Whereas faculty identities can embody one side of these dualities or the other, students are implicitly charged with

incorporating both these vectors into their identities.<sup>16</sup> This becomes one of the key challenges of becoming an architect in today's context: how to acquire a sense of belonging to the professional community while pushing the boundaries of what it means to be an architect. Adding to the disorienting nature of being an architecture student is the diverse range of skills and identities the profession ostensibly requires. As Ockman (2012) observes, architectural training has always been about negotiating multiple identities:

Arguably, what most distinguishes architecture education from other types of professional and graduate training is its syncretic nature. Geared to producing skilled practitioners and founded on concepts and discursive formations that have evolved since the time of Vitruvius, it combines technics and aesthetics, sciences and humanities. Schools are called on to impart highly disparate types of knowledge, negotiating the architect's multiple identities as craftsman, technician, and creative artist; professional and intellectual; public servant and businessman (p. 10).

Even within a single academic community, architectural identities can be quite varied (Moore, 2001). Successfully navigating an architectural education means making sense of where one fits within this varied social context by constructing one's identity out of the images of successful architects at one's disposal. At some point, students must recognize "what counts as architecture," or what is known as "accountable disciplinary knowledge" to compare and/or align their perspective and values with those of the profession (Atman et al., 2008). In this (re)calibration process, they may become aware that what attracted them to architecture in the first place was based on misinformation or cultural myths—for instance, that architecture is the work of a solitary, artistic genius or that the prestige apparently enjoyed by architects in Western

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<sup>16</sup> A recent faculty job posting at an architecture school put it thus: "Part of the mission of the [school] is to provide education for architectural practice by acquainting students with the nature of practice and simulating some of its aspects in design studios. This does not imply a slavish imitation of the mechanics of practice but rather the establishment of a critical view of how practice operates together with developing innovative attitudes to those aspects found wanting."

culture brings superior financial gain and economic stability. Today, many students enter architecture for somewhat idealistic reasons, presuming that, for instance, being a design professional will allow them to engage meaningfully with underserved communities. Yet they may discover that this identity is missing from their history courses, and find that they are unable to experiment with such a future role in their studio projects.

Traditionally, the transition from architecture school to the profession has presented a challenge to graduates—not just in terms of knowledge and skills but psychological distress and even existential crises (Burns, 2001, p. 266; Lewis, 2013, p. 171; Waldrep, 2014, p. 204).<sup>17</sup> Curricular and pedagogical innovations like co-ops and internship placement programs form a dovetailed pattern on the academic and professional dualism intended to decrease the likelihood of such crises when graduates enter the workforce.<sup>18</sup> Yet, as educators continue to implement curricula in ways that allow students to “approach their education as a laboratory to test, develop and define their professional persona” (Schwartz, quoted in Ingalls, 2015), it is important they consider the implications of such interventions on socialization processes and the development of architectural identities. If architecture students are expected to navigate school, transition into the profession, and ultimately become self-directed practitioners, they need sufficient

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<sup>17</sup> “This transition from the world of education to your first career position is dramatic and perhaps challenging. Most college graduates are not fully prepared for the magnitude of the transitions and adjustments that must be made on virtually all fronts and are unaware of the consequences of not making these adjustments in a mature and speedy manner. What a shock it can be when you, a new graduate, drop to the bottom rung of the career ladder. Just as a new college student has to learn the ropes of the new environment, the recent graduate starting a career position faces a whole new world. The challenges include maintaining a budget, dealing with your personal life, and adjusting to your first career position. The difficulty is that the real world is less tolerant of mistakes, offers less time and flexibility for adjustment, and demands performance for the pay it offers” (Waldrep, 2014, p. 204).

<sup>18</sup> “Because there is a gap between education and practice, what happens in the studios of schools is much different than the studios of the firms. For this reason, architecture students are strongly encouraged to seek experience in architecture firms during their academic years” (Waldrep, 2014, p. 267).

guidance and support to have any sense of control over this transformation. Too often, their journey follows a hero legend with students expected to relinquish their past selves before embarking on a path toward self-discovery, endure initiation and a series of existential trials only to return to the “real world” with an enlightened perspective of reality and their place in it. While the promise of cultivating critical, empathetic, and innovative practitioners requires schools to adopt transformative pedagogies and curricula, it also demands that graduates from architecture programs seeking to enter the profession derive meaning from this process in ways that can help sustain their investment in architecture. Only then can we reasonably expect graduates to channel their idealism towards making professional practice more socially effective and not allow themselves to succumb to cynicism or apathy.

One of the ubiquitous discourses currently pervading the field of architecture suggests that proceeding through architecture school does not impose limits on a graduate’s career options.<sup>19</sup> In fact, a common claim is that architecture school provides an excellent foundation for a variety of alternative career paths.<sup>20</sup> In this sense, the career pathway toward becoming an architect can be thought of as having built-in off-ramps. As a recently published architecture career guide argues, “An architectural education is excellent preparation for many career paths beyond architecture. In fact, the career possibilities with an architectural education are truly

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<sup>19</sup> It is revealing that, in his text on professional practice in architecture, Pressman (2008) includes an entire chapter on “nontraditional practice” with a review of Robert Douglass’ research on “maverick architects” who attended architecture school but went on to succeed in other careers. Similarly, the popular website Archinect.com has published a series of profiles since 2008 called “Working Out of the Box” that features successful practitioners who have applied their architecture backgrounds to alternative career paths, such as product design, business, art, filmmaking, and fashion: <http://archinect.com/features/tag/1149/working-out-of-the-box>

<sup>20</sup> Ostensibly, this kind of claim is most appropriate at the undergraduate level, where most programs are pre-professional. However, many participants in my study of a graduate-level program remarked on how they not only felt free to transition into related careers after graduation, but that architecture school prepared them to feel confident and transdisciplinary enough to do so.

limitless” (Waldrep, 2014, p. 269). There are obvious reasons for the popularity of this discourse, both for school administrators and students, as it can help retain and sustain those with an interest in design thinking or architecture as an intellectual pursuit but who have certain misgivings about the profession. But the supply of practicing architects still presumably must meet the demand of the profession, the commitment that accredited schools of architecture have to the profession and society: “Recognition as a professional school implies an important responsibility to society—preparing people to enter the practice of architecture” (S. Anderson, 2001, p. 293).

### 1.3 Identifying the Need for this Study

Architectural culture is such that most activity that could be considered as directed toward understanding or improving education occurs in isolation—either through self-reflection or casual conversation. Scholarship conducted by design faculty, in particular, tends to be of the non-empirical variety (and what most academics outside of architecture would almost certainly not consider “research”), and the vast majority of published work focuses on curricular and pedagogical aspects of education in a superficial way (at least in relation to contemporary scholarship on teaching and learning produced in other disciplines). And yet, a closer read across this range of scholarship brings to light an inchoate demand for attending to the transformative and human dimensions of architectural education. The following quotation from Salama (2015) is indicative of this call:

There is a glaring need to harness and holistically form a student’s sense of self, identity, and place through responsible teaching practices and activities. While principals in architectural offices have the sometimes onerous task of teaching young graduates, they often find their task exasperating due to the poor learning skills, attitudes and habits and inadequate knowledge-base; this is made worse by the celebrity culture adulation and

copying of trendy star architects who often design for the self-important affluent rather than the financially constrained general public. This lack clearly suggests that there is a serious need to examine how and what the design studio actually teaches, what it imbues in the student and how he or she is nurtured and mentored. A close scrutiny of what is actually going on in the design studio and the classroom in architectural institutions is desperately needed in order to remedy the glaring defects and deficiencies in the current system; and transform the system into one that prepares well-rounded, articulate, innovative, skilled and aware young architects. This transformation, one would hope, will avert our graduates from becoming irrelevant and incompetent practitioners of the profession they work in and uncaring and uncommitted 'experts' in the communities they are supposed to serve (p. 9-10).

Later, he identifies the “urgent need for contemporary pedagogues to open their eyes and see what is happening in the world around” (Salama, 2015: p. 16). Salama’s exasperated tone and alarmist language reflects his impatience with the discipline’s failure to examine and reflect on its teaching and learning practices—an attitude easily justified, if not necessarily productive. Such aspiration for improving the general understanding of the processes and outcomes of architectural education would be better served by directing research towards a more holistic understanding of how aspiring architects make meaning of the experience of architectural education within their individual life histories. The point I am trying to make here is that vocal members within the field of architecture have already identified the need to focus on identity transformation as part of the project to reform architectural education’s responsibilities to the profession and society. However, the epistemological and methodological traditions within the field (or lack thereof) have yet to be mobilized to properly address the implications of this shift in focus. Today, the architectural community still refers to studies conducted decades ago when explaining the core tenets of its educational practices (see Anthony et al., 1991; Boyer & Mitgang, 1996; Cuff, 1992; Schön, 1990; Stevens, 1998). In addition to methodological critiques of several of these studies (see, for example Mewburn, 2011, for her assessment of Schön's work), all of

them can now be considered outdated in the sense that a) the experience of becoming an architect has changed over the past two decades and b) wider perspectives toward higher education and how to conduct research on higher education have changed.

Beyond architecture, the turn towards the sociocultural dimensions of education is increasingly common across disciplines.<sup>21</sup> Numerous studies have resuscitated theoretical treatises from decades ago to help illuminate how learning is a more holistic process than commonly conceived. Educators are thus charged with taking the role of context into account, including that different disciplines have their own sets of value systems, languages, and ways of being. Amidst this paradigm shift, and following calls to focus on the graduate and professional student experience (Conrad, Duren, & Grant Haworth, 1998, p. 65), there has been a significant rise in research examining fields like engineering, social work, and medicine (see for instance Atman et al., 2008; Barretti, 2003; Godsey, 2011; Mason, 2012). These case studies were designed to capture experiences and identity change over extended periods of time in the educational timeframe (using longitudinal or cross-sectional studies), something very few scholars in architecture have attempted (with Cuff, 1991, remaining the exemplary touchstone). This wealth of research presents architecture with various methodological templates for how to examine its own processes of education and thereby update its understanding of how students eventually become architects.

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<sup>21</sup> As I discuss in Chapter 3, the “ontological turn” is merely the most recent manifestation of a perspective towards education that can be traced back more than a century—namely, that learning is inherently transformative, and that educators ought to support learners in self-authorship. This time around, such a perspective has been proposed as a direct challenge to approaches in education and educational research that foreground cognitive and technical aspects of learning. The context of architecture scholarship, as discussed in Chapter 2, differs somewhat in that, rather than contending with an outright positivist framework of education, we are dealing with a pedagogical tradition that *tacitly* adopts a positivist epistemology but *actively* purports to be student-centered (Yanar, 2007).

In fairness to architectural scholarship, I should mention ongoing efforts to capture the collective voice of aspiring architects. Every few years, findings are published from national surveys that chart the attitudes and perceptions of architectural education and the profession from architecture students and graduates, often including expressive quotations.<sup>22</sup> From these, we have a sense of the broader attitudes shared by tomorrow's architects and snippets of their voices. In his 2009 study, McClean also used questionnaires to gather voices of aspiring architects as they started and finished an undergraduate program, with a particular interest in their attitudes towards studio pedagogy. But what we still lack are *stories* that evoke the fuller and richer experience of architectural education as a process of meaning-making and identity transformation. In developing this dissertation, therefore, my approach has been to use in-depth interviews and narrative inquiry as methods for attending to two primary discourses—one from within the discipline, which identifies the need to better understand the experience of becoming an architect; and the other from higher education, which calls for understanding education as a process of personal and social transformation.

#### 1.4 Overview of Dissertation

As this chapter has put forth, the present project is premised on the argument that there is currently both the need for and the desire to better understand what becoming-an-architect entails from the perspective of those who undergo this transformative process. Chapters 2 and 3 review literature relevant to this topic, the former from within architecture and the latter from an assembled, interdisciplinary set of sources. In Chapter 2, I continue my discussion of the

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<sup>22</sup> See for instance the AIAS' Task Force on Studio Culture Report (2008), the AIA/NCARB Internship and Career Surveys (reports from 2003-14 are available at: <http://www.aia.org/careerstages/groups/nac/AIAS075139>), and the ACSA's Communications Campaign Study (Edwards Co., 2015)

disciplinary context by reviewing literature on architecture's predominant pedagogical and curricular practices, as well as autobiographical accounts. Chief among these topics is the dynamic structural relationship between education and practice, particularly recent attempts to integrate the two and ease paths to licensure. These developments must be understood in relation to the diverse and disconnected cultural and social landscape of architecture. I argue that recent structural changes to architectural education, together with a cultural shift that encourages architecture students to imagine new professional identities for the sake of the profession, signal the need to understand meaning-making strategies at the level of the individual.

As a first step towards applying and inspiring this perspective toward architectural education, I turned to bodies of scholarship that likewise sought to illuminate “shadows” cast upon higher education by predominant teaching practices and research perspectives.<sup>23</sup> Chapter 3 is organized around three lines of inquiry that I wove together as the project's primary theoretical and methodological frames. The first is the “ontological turn,” which calls for reconceptualizing higher education as fundamentally an experience of personal transformation that ought to cultivate graduates capable of flourishing in a context of uncertain futures. I argue that this broad perspective towards education resonates with discourse in architecture but has yet to prompt empirical research on its implications in our field. Second, the “narrative turn” foregrounds the role of storytelling in our everyday lives as a way for us to construct meaning from our circumstances and craft a life story with coherent protagonist. This suggests that the

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<sup>23</sup> Here, I am borrowing Haggis' (2004) terminology he uses for research on pedagogy in higher education. This use of metaphor is fairly typical of much of this work.

meaning-making challenges of architectural education might be understood through narrative inquiry—and possibly mitigated by employing narrative strategies. Lastly, I draw from scholarship in occupational therapy that considers *doing, being, becoming, and belonging* as interdependent dimensions of “occupational engagement.” I propose that this analytical framework helps us better recognize the ways that “architectural education” actually functions in the lives of aspiring architects: as a holistic set of engagements, challenges, and commitments. The chapter then concludes with a review of several studies pertinent to this project. From these “precedents,” I gleaned how various methodological approaches used by researchers in other fields were employed to examine how students and professionals make sense of their education. I review these approaches and the findings from these studies germane to my work.

In Chapter 4, I describe the project’s research procedures, including: the decision to use a single case study and the selection of the particular study context; the selection of participants and design of interview cohorts; the design of interview protocols; and content analysis procedures. I end the chapter with a sample transcript passage diagrammed to illustrate my application of occupational therapy’s analytical framework.

From its conception, this project has been shaped by the perspective that I am exploring becoming an architect *within a particular time and place*. In Chapter 5, therefore, I present the institutional context of this case study, the University of Washington’s Master of Architecture program. This discussion is based on interviews with faculty members, as well as reviews of program literature, accreditation assessments, and published histories. Like other qualitative case studies in institutional contexts, this is meant to convey a sense of how the narratives collected through this study derive from and reproduce their cultural field. Because participants

acknowledged that their context shaped their emerging professional identity, I believe it is important to provide readers with some sense of this context. Including this chapter on the program's culture is also an attempt to counteract any tendency to read the narratives elicited in this study as generalizable to *any* cultural context. This is not to say that the conclusions drawn from this study are irrelevant to those beyond the context of this particular university. Indeed, stemming from what Rem Koolhaas (1996) refers to as the global "collective subconscious" of architectural culture, there are certain recognizable consistencies between architecture schools worldwide. Still, any potential transferability of findings from this study must take into account differences in context.

In Chapter 6, I present a set of narrative constructions produced through the various analytical steps outlined in Chapter 4. These narratives and my ensuing interpretation are organized first by interview cohort and individual participant, then assembled into a composite narrative comprised of various content themes. The final chapter of the dissertation then reviews the significant conclusions and contributions from the project, framed within the contemporary context of architectural education. Finally, I discuss the potential for future research on architectural education stemming from this project.

## Chapter 2: Disciplinary Context (Literature Review Part I)

At least for now, architecture school remains the crucial site where the discourse of architecture is formulated and disseminated. More than the sum of its curricular components, it is the place where students become conscious of themselves as members of a preexisting community of professionals and intellectuals, where they begin to sort out the manifold identities available to them, and where the future field of architecture, in all its disciplinary and professional cognates, is collectively constituted.

-Ockman, 2012: p. 32

### 2.1 Chapter Introduction

As the quotation above expresses, architecture schools serve a central role in supporting the profession, shaping its future, and forever changing the lives of its members. In this way, schools and professional practice share a mutual investment in cultivating and supporting architects and architects-to-be. The aim of this chapter is to review literature on the culture of architecture—specifically on pedagogical, curricular, and extracurricular structures, practices, and reforms related to architectural education’s role in socializing future architects. These include both longstanding norms and rituals, as well as recent changes that portend future trajectories. I draw from a range of empirical, (auto)biographical, and polemical publications on themes related to the experience of architecture students and young professionals, including the primary social contexts and challenges that future architects must navigate.<sup>24</sup> The chapter is organized around certain cultural features that characterize architecture and that are essential to framing the ensuing chapters on this study. Specifically, this chapter is meant to provide

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<sup>24</sup> I deliberately allowed emerging themes from this study to inform my selection of topics to include in this review. However, I cannot claim that it is a complete review of all relevant literature on the topic. One of the reasons I felt it necessary to draw on such a range of publications is that, as critics have suggested, architectural education generally suffers from under-theorization, which has led to a disconnect between educational research, discourse, and practice (Dutton, 1989; Ochsner, 2000; Salama, 2015; Webster, 2008). This is coupled with the many idiosyncrasies of architectural education.

further evidence for the argument made in the previous chapter—that this study is particularly valuable today given current discourse, recent changes to professional development, and lack of scholarship from this perspective or on these topics in architecture thus far.

As discussed in the previous chapter, critics from within the field have acknowledged the continuing need for illuminating and attending to the psycho-social challenges that aspiring architects encounter and the strategies they use to navigate school and enter the professional community. The pairing of challenges *and* strategies is my attempt to strike a balance between structure and agency, considering both as equally significant in terms of understanding the educational process. Whereas research conducted by architecture educators most often favors the former by portraying students as confused and passive, public discourse in non-scholarly texts tends to elevate the latter, overemphasizing the role of student agency and underestimating the role of institutional, disciplinary, and pedagogical structures. In this project, I attempt to account for both agency and structure as irreducible factors in shaping transformation at the individual and social level. This chapter contextualizes the participant narratives presented in Chapter 6 by providing some cultural context on the disciplinary scale. In addition to the immediate context of their program presented in Chapter 5, it is important to consider that participants of this study reside within a broader context of architectural education, which includes architecture's particular social and pedagogical traditions, structures, and developments. For instance, how socialization processes function within architecture specifically,

though this may not arise in any particular narrative, ostensibly informs the contours of each participant's identity.<sup>25</sup>

## 2.2 Navigating Architecture's Social/Pedagogical Contexts

Several themes emerge from published memoirs and interviews that effectively represent students' experience of architecture school across historical and geographic contexts.<sup>26</sup>

Emotional and psychological experiences of students appear to follow certain patterns:

- First-year students enter with minimal knowledge of what architecture school or design learning entail;
- They immediately begin to feel stripped of their past selves and lose their self-confidence amidst unfamiliar and unspoken teaching and learning practices;
- Those who persist begin to form tight bonds with other students, undergoing cultural homogenization while cutting social ties with the outside world;
- They justify and defend their unhealthy lifestyles, like late night spent in studio;
- When they emerge from school, they have adopted a certain architectural identity that allows them to proceed through the design process with sufficient self-confidence;
- They also feel empowered by their identity that, as architects, they will make the world better somehow;
- But this then must be calibrated to function within whatever professional setting and position they ultimately land, typically one where they feel little to no decision-making power or design influence.

These patterns, while consistent across publications, persist in a somewhat mythical fashion—through discourse and anecdotes disconnected from personal experience. Thus, one of the aims of the present study is to compare this meta-narrative of architectural education against

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<sup>25</sup> Because participants in this study were aware that I, as their interviewer, had a shared experience of once being an architecture student (though at a different program) and was a member of their college community, it is also plausible that they omitted certain contextual framings and topics from their responses and reflections. For example, they may not have felt the need to define disciplinary jargon or describe in detail certain cultural traditions at our institution.

<sup>26</sup> Here, I am referring to the following memoirs of students and alumni (Esherick, 1977; Hightower, 2002; Howland, 1985; Willenbrock, 1991), as well as studies that analyzed voices of students and alumni (Anthony et al., 1991; Kellogg, 2004; Krupinska & Danielson, 2014; McClean, 2009).

individual narratives, adding richness and variation to this largely decontextualized plotline of becoming an architect.<sup>27</sup>

Following broader cultural shifts within higher education that I will not discuss here, in most North American professional architecture programs today, “making it through school” is no longer formulated as a “weeding out” process where students compete with one another for limited spots as they move through the program. Instead, this filtering now occurs almost entirely through the program admissions process.<sup>28</sup> Thus, one might surmise that, once students enter a given program, faculty and administrators take on a more supportive role, leaving behind their historic function as professional gatekeepers.<sup>29</sup> However, educators continue to serve an enculturating role in shaping students’ transformation into professionals. Therefore, a key to “success” for aspiring architects—as defined by students graduating and ultimately becoming architects—is aligning their emerging and future professional identities with the culture of architecture (or how they view and represent themselves as members of the architectural community) in such a way as to sustain sufficient passion through the rigors of school.<sup>30</sup> As one faculty member I interviewed put it when discussing what it takes to succeed in architecture:

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<sup>27</sup> This project also builds upon the momentum of recent attempts to capture the authentic student experience in architecture programs. A recent study of undergraduate studio culture, for instance, determined that students, in fact, do not enter architecture school as “newcomers”; rather, each student enters with a nascent architectural identity and “learns to belong” to their community through “peripheral collaborative and social activities that surround formal teaching” (Williams, 2016, pp. 58–59). Both this study and mine reveal how certain students retain a somewhat marginalized identity throughout architecture school.

<sup>28</sup> Or, what “weeding out” processes that still do exist tend to do so at the undergraduate level. The point is that most programs, particularly graduate programs, use their admissions process as way of selecting those students they consider to be the most driven and therefore have the greatest chance of success.

<sup>29</sup> Certainly, being “supportive” could be construed along a broad spectrum of approaches, just as good parenting might include a stance of “tough love.” While any historically evident adversarial relationship between students and faculty may be less common or less extreme, several of my participants did express clashes with their studio instructors.

<sup>30</sup> Likewise, “success” could be defined more broadly. Farrelly and Samuel, for instance, (2016) write: “We have an ethical duty to furnish students with the best possible chances of success in their own terms” (p. 332) and, “We want

For me, the most important things are curiosity, work ethic, and an absolute burning desire to do this. I believe almost anyone, if they really want to do this badly enough, they will figure out a way to be successful enough at it. So I think that's probably the most important criteria. The only reason to do [architecture] is because there's really nothing else for you to do. Because there are just too few benefits to it.

Testing one's conviction about architecture and experimenting with aligning one's future identity with the profession is psychological work undertaken during architectural education. In fact, I would argue that this is the primary aim of architectural education, at least from the perspective of the student.

Typically, the first opportunity to begin such psychological work is during the initial social transition into an academic program. In my study, some participants recalled deciding to attend architecture school initially out of intellectual curiosity, while others were drawn to the career path. Regardless, "For graduates and undergraduates alike, first impressions of the architectural scene can be overwhelming, just as are first impressions of a new foreign culture" (Cuff, 1991, p. 118). The environment and pedagogical mode associated with the studio in particular is not only presumably a different way of learning and *doing*, it calls for a new way of *being* a student and *belonging* to a learning community, while remaining open to *becoming* something different from what you were when you entered.<sup>31</sup> Thus, students often consider the early experiences of architecture school as both "edifying and exhausting" (Hardin, 1992, as cited in McClean, 2009).

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to help students develop the skills, knowledge and ethical compass to make what they will of [architectural practice's] constantly shifting potential" (p. 326).

<sup>31</sup> Depending on a student's background, this adjustment can be quite profound and troubling:

Design education is fundamentally about learning 'trust' in a process—a process of discovery, the endpoint of which cannot initially be known or even predicted. Students entering architecture programs, particularly those entering three-year graduate programs, have often been high achievers who have excelled in the technical rationality typical of most non-architectural education. The need is often to set aside the kinds of thinking that they have mastered so well and turn instead to a process that involves much psychological risk: it tolerates, even revels in, ambiguity; it offers no guarantees that success will be achieved; it is a gradual process of discovery that is often best approached through wide two and three-dimensional

For architectural education, studio has long been considered its “head and heart” (Dutton, 1989), as well as its “signature pedagogy” (Crowther, 2013; Shulman, 2005).<sup>32</sup> Reviewing literature on this mode of education, McClean (2009) writes: “Architects learn through ritualistic behavior involving the exploration, testing, and development of ideas emanating from discussion with an experienced designer or, more commonly in the practice setting, shadowing the experienced practitioner” (p. 65). Part of what makes this environment and pedagogical model so central to the experience of becoming an architect is that it is through studio that future architects begin the enculturation process, entering architecture’s cultural community: “For the moment, the design studio still serves as the hub of architectural learning and production, the centerpiece around which all else revolves and the experience that is etched in students’ memories years after they graduate from school” (Anthony, 2012: p. 401). Studio thus serves two related roles: “The design studio is the primary space where students explore their creative skills that are so prized by the profession” and “it is the kiln where future architects and designers are molded” (Salama & Wilkinson, 2007: p. 5). Related to the first role, as students, aspiring architects seek to “find their voice” by cultivating their own approach to the design process and aesthetic style amidst feelings of insecurity and doubt that are considered inseparable from design practice (Colletti, 2016; Ochsner, 2000). Each cohort and program may be said to have a collective voice, as well. These “voices” are ultimately represented through each student/alumni’s design

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nonlinear exploration; and it cannot even be explained to beginners, but still requires a beginning before the instructor can offer assistance (Ochsner, 2000, p. 195).

<sup>32</sup> As researchers have found, the term “studio” can refer to the physical workspace itself, the teaching space (not always physical, as in virtual studios), the curricular unit, as well as any aspects of teaching and learning considered fundamental to these spaces (Wallis, Williams, & Ostwald, 2010). Roberts (2003) even considers studio as “an ethos that extends beyond the physical bounds of space, and that develops primarily from a collective will of people to work together” (in McClean, 2009, p. 42)

portfolios—a collection of design work presented in graphic narrative format used to apply for scholarships and obtain employment, and revised throughout the course of one’s education and career.<sup>33</sup> But before they can concern themselves with finding or expressing their voice as a designer, students must reach a certain threshold of design ability and understanding:

[Studio] is a place where they are introduced to a plethora of new concepts and viewpoints, but it is also a place that demands simultaneous and rapid engagement with two tasks: that of design, and the process of learning to design (McClean, 2009, p. 69).

Thus, the early portion of studio curricula is dedicated primarily to acclimating students through the acquisition of fundamental skills and knowledge. This requires that “they must ‘do’ before knowing what to do” (*ibid.*, p. 70). Later in the curriculum, with more experience under their belts, they will be able to put these skills and knowledge to use reflectively, or as second nature.<sup>34</sup>

In terms of the studio being “the kiln where future architects and designers are molded,” academic studios can never be direct facsimiles of professional practice due to irreducible differences in context and purpose.<sup>35</sup> Rather, studio pedagogy employs a range of activities and participant structures—most fundamentally design research, design criticism, and various modes of collaboration—to socialize students into the culture of reflective design practice.<sup>36</sup> At times,

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<sup>33</sup> A key element of becoming an architect, the significance of portfolios transcends the content itself: “How your portfolio is done says much about you as a future architect” (Waldrep, 2014, p. 117).

<sup>34</sup> However, this model of putting off ethical questions during introductory studios (in the tradition of the Bauhaus and Beaux-Arts pedagogies) is being questioned. The theme for the 2017 National Conference on the Beginning Design Student, for instance, reads:

In order to develop critical habits of mind that scaffold resilience and adaptability in students, we propose that beginning design education needs to be grounded in discussions of ethics and values, beginning not with questions of “how...?” but with questions of “why...?”

<sup>35</sup> Indeed, although debate has recently intensified on this topic, the role of architecture schools is typically and traditionally not conceived as producing licensed architects at graduation. As one critic put it, “Academia tends to make students into would-be architects, not real ones” (Miller, 1997: p. 86).

<sup>36</sup> Seminal texts on the general tenets of design studio education include Schön (1987) and Rowe (1986). Dozens of scholars have critically amended Schön’s model, in particular, to include other aspects of design teaching and learning or to challenge the validity of his model (Anthony et al., 1991; Groat & Ahrentzen, 1997; McClean, 2009; Mewburn, 2011; Salama, 2015; Vowles, 2000; Webster, 2008; Yanar, 2007). From this collective body of work, we

these pedagogical structures might be devised to more directly simulate professional practice, for instance, by bringing practitioners into studio to serve as guest critics or having in cross-disciplinary teams collaborate on a project. But it is never the objective for students to leave school thinking that their studio experiences exactly mirror what they will encounter professionally. Rather, “students use the studio as a vehicle for developing a sense of belonging to the architectural community” (McClellan, 2009, p. 44, citing Koch et al, 2002). And, “ultimately it is not so much the project work that acquires lasting significance, but the culture that the learning environments propagates” (*ibid.*, p. 45). For this reason, experiences outside formal studio teaching and beyond the studio’s physical environment have been recognized as important sense-making opportunities for architecture students and their enculturation into the profession (Webster, 2008; Williams, 2016). Workplace opportunities, like internships and job-shadowing, allow students to compare the two social/pedagogical environments—although structured, reflective exercises are an effective way for students to delve deeper into analyzing professional norms and dynamics (Black, 2000). As several participants in my study mentioned, they were able to consider the similarities and differences between the two settings, and the value of having each retain a relative level of autonomy, once they had experience in both.

Each cohort starts to gel through shared experience, including a “spirit of survival in the face of duress”—like spending late nights together to meet deadlines and the general culture of mutual support within a pedagogical ethos of creative exploration. Students attribute to the studio “a support function beyond its strict academic purpose, providing a place of dialogue,

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have a fairly clear understanding of the pedagogical aspects of the predominant mode of architectural design education. Less is known about the impact of alternative pedagogical modes on learning, not to mention their impact of personal transformation.

assistance, and advice” (McClellan, 2009, p. 208). Unlike other educational social structures that may encourage atomism, studio cohorts often function through systems of consensus and mutual responsibility. For instance, whereas in some cases final projects from a studio cohort are judged against one another for awards or competitions, in other cases they are curated into a published or exhibited collection that warrants collaborative decision-making and presenting a collective voice. Through their shared experience and supportive ties, each cohort of students forms a bond that is often described as being “like a family” or a “second home” (McClellan, 2009).<sup>37</sup> This sense of belonging is also reflected in the notion that each student’s desk space is a representation of their identity (Scupelli & Hanington, 2016).<sup>38</sup> Williams (2016) describes how studio functions as a community in several ways:

The social development of community emerged from working together on similar tasks and on stressing cherished differences between themselves and other (non-architecture) students. This community’s boundaries were tightly drawn around studio culture, sustained through a symbolic dimension in the form of values, codes and common experiences. Students talked about a currency of ideas and thinking, blurring boundaries between themselves and the community (p. 59).

In general, studio culture supports a sense of belonging among students—a feeling that they are not alone in their struggles—and between students and faculty (even if students may not always feel totally comfortable opening up to each other or their instructors for psychological or emotional support).<sup>39</sup> In general, feelings of belonging—in all their manifestations and

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<sup>37</sup> One of my study participants referred to the rigors of introductory studios as leaving students with diverse backgrounds feel like they were “all in the same boat.” Indeed, studio instructors that I interviewed admitted that producing these feelings among students are, at times, their primary aim as instructors—to reduce dependence on faculty and foster student autonomy and interdependence within each cohort.

<sup>38</sup> Typically, in upper-level studios at the undergraduate and graduate level, desks are assigned for the entire term, and studios include a refrigerator, microwave, sink, and sometimes a couch.

<sup>39</sup> Whereas “phenomena known to take place in the interaction between analyst and patient in psychoanalysis may...occur in the design studio environment between instructor and student” (Ochsner, 2000, p. 195), it does not necessarily follow that instructors are always aware of this fact or its potentially problematic implications.

dimensions—have a significant impact on the shaping of architectural identities throughout one’s education.

Discussing the socialization of architecture students, McClean (2009) writes, “Fundamentally, the process of assimilation is determined by the individual, and their ability and willingness to adapt to the new culture in which they are active” (p. 74). He adds, “As a concept, assimilation extends far beyond the bounds of knowledge or skills acquisition to aspects of personal behavior, values, beliefs, and judgments” (p. 77). Just as in nuclear families, certain students within each cohort tend to get labeled “rebels,” “mavericks,” or some similar identifier reserved for those who “defy the norms” of professional convention in some way.<sup>40</sup> Just as Williams (2016) notes the presence of “peripheral” and “marginal” members of studio communities, several of my participants noted how certain students got labeled as the “bad kids” or “problem children” within their cohort, in many cases referring to themselves. In my study, this sort of identity was most often attached to those who rejected a particular studio or instructor’s pedagogical model because they felt it promoted blind obedience or needless competition between students. The silver lining for such “rebel” students was that they were able to identify one another and form social bonds, providing mutual support and helping validate their perspectives toward architecture, however marginalized they may have felt within the program’s dominant culture.

Even for these participants who considered themselves marginalized in some way, architecture students often become quite close with certain studio instructors, who come to

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<sup>40</sup> These terms were used by Cuff (1991: p. 135) to describe those who skip over “the entry-level or project architect phases of development to begin their own practices or alternative careers as early as possible.”

serve as their mentors, professional role models, and even potential future colleagues. The relatively informal and non-hierarchical environment of the studio, structured around design conversations that often take place at students' personalized desk spaces, means that studio faculty represent more than just instructors: "The studio instructor will be their semester-long guide into the mysteries of design. The typical studio instructor is a practicing architect who provides a living example of what it means to be a designer" (Cuff, 1991, p. 121).<sup>41</sup> In fact, a common characteristic of architecture programs is the regular presence of local practitioners, as schools often operate as de facto hubs for social events like public lectures and design exhibitions. Many practitioners look for opportunities to periodically engage with academia as visiting or guest instructors, jurors, and lecturers—perhaps in an ongoing attempt to relate their own academic and professional identities.

Indeed, this points towards the other key threshold that shapes the experience of becoming an architect: between the two major social contexts of architecture school and the workplace. Again, although professional education (as I am defining it for the purposes of this study) transcends this divide, the world of school and the world of professional practice are different social and pedagogical settings. Due to their distinctive qualities, moving between these arenas greatly impacts the experience of becoming an architect.<sup>42</sup> As Burns (2001) notes, "The disconnection between school and practice leads to doubts about the schools' stance toward the

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<sup>41</sup> As participants in my study noted, this is even truer during travel abroad opportunities, where students and faculty socialize and interact with each other outside of the studio confines and the aspiring architect can observe in a more "cultured" and public setting what it means to "live like an architect."

<sup>42</sup> It is important to note upfront that these various contexts are often not experienced in a linear or sequential fashion, as many aspiring architects take "non-traditional" paths, work professionally in the time between attending undergraduate and graduate programs, and/or experience these contexts simultaneously within a single period of their development.

profession as well as to distress among recent graduates, many of whom confront practice with wrenching dismay” (p. 266, see also Waldrep, 2014: p. 204). Expressing this disconnect, in the opening passage of his autobiographical narrative of architectural education, Howland (1985) recalls:

I started architecture school with only a vague idea of what I would become, and now, as a practicing architect, I find I still have no clear idea of what I am. Many of the ideas about architects and architecture that I acquired in school are in conflict with the way I practice today...My experience indicates that contradictions between aesthetic aspirations and business responsibilities create strong tensions in the development of a professional identity among architects (p. 4-5).

He then closes his account with:

In thinking back over the influences that have shaped my understanding of how architects think and work and behave, what strikes me is how different my school impressions were from those I have formed in practice, even though my professors were practicing architects and my professional colleagues had similar academic careers (p. 8).

Like the period of transition from non-architectural education to architectural education, the transition from architecture school to architectural practice is a significant moment of psychosocial adjustment, which can potentially lead to existential crises, as described by Hightower (2002):

In school we are taught that architecture is not simply a job. It is a lifestyle. It is a way of looking at the world. It is a verb. It is a constant exploration where one looks for and finds inspiration in the world around them, and then applies that inspiration to create something completely new. And that thing we create is beautiful and makes a difference in the world. And though in school we may slave away on hypothetical projects that will never be built, we can rationalize that it is all done in preparation for that first ‘real’ job. But in those first few months of that first real job, interns often find themselves as far away from architecture as ever. Instead of creating beauty, we find ourselves staring at colored circles on a 13-inch computer monitor, trying to remember at what point things had gone so horribly wrong (p. 28).

It is not an accident that this transition is marked by discontinuity, tension, and contradiction. In moving between academic and professional realms, the aspiring architect experiences directly

the defining duality of architecture, as both a discipline and a profession (see Anderson, 2001)—a topic the following two sections of this chapter expand on. And yet, it is also true that “the studio, through its practice and processes, engenders a sense of professional persona in a remarkably brief period” (McClean, 2009, p. 47). Navigating the full duration of this process, and particularly these critical transition periods, becomes an exercise of self-reflection and identity construction on the part of the emerging practitioner, who must make sense of what it means to be an architecture student, an architectural intern, and a licensed architect, while reconciling the distinctions among the three.<sup>43</sup>

From this review, as well as my own study, it is clear that entering the culture of architecture in school, and transitioning to professional culture, present two significant and distinct challenges within the broader narrative of becoming-an-architect. Given their influence on the development of an architectural identity, these inflection points require substantial effort in terms of meaning-making. As I found, those who find the challenge of aligning their identities with architecture most difficult (students and graduates alike) are most susceptible to making an early exit from the profession—or at least laboring beneath the psychological and social ramifications of such dissonance.

### 2.3 Architecture as a “Dynamic and Contested Field”

From critical observers of architecture’s social contexts, one of the major observations is that architecture schools are sites of social incoherence, struggle, and pluralism—meaning that the coexisting identities and ideologies that constitute any of architecture’s academic contexts

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<sup>43</sup> This study focuses mainly on the transition from architecture student to young professional, as opposed to the transition from intern to licensed architect.

are irreducibly diverse and in tension with one another (see Cuff, 1999; Moore, 2001).<sup>44</sup> Webster (2008, p. 68) refers to architecture as “a dynamic and contested field,” and Burns (2001, p. 270) argues that, “The discipline of architecture is messy because it is inclusive.”<sup>45</sup> Moore (2001) breaks down the ontological worldviews represented by architecture faculty into “the scientist,” “the social activist,” “the cleric,” and “the practitioner.” For Moore, such a diverse social landscape of worldviews and identities usually results in a certain degree of conflict between faculty members, some of whom are also practitioners. Students must navigate this social landscape while making sense of and calibrating their own convictions about architectural practice and the profession. Certain faculty members play a particular inculcating role by passively embodying a professional identity and/or actively shaping the catalog of architectural identities available to students from which to select. But significantly, “students are left with a confusing message regarding the nature of architecture: one with a split personality,” which leads to “uncertainty and a lack of identity for students” (p. 71-2). Participants in the present study across all three interview cohorts described the experience and challenge of confronting and negotiating a range of faculty approaches and identities across the curricular sequence.

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<sup>44</sup> On the other hand, it has also be argued that architecture displays a level of cultural coherence at the broader scale. Bermudez (1992, cited in McClean, 2009: pp. 73-74) argues that the following characteristics are indicative of the architecture community as a professional subculture: a clear hierarchy and power structure; initiation rituals (university admission); an effective assimilation system (architectural education); a defined territory of activity; its own language; its own ethical, aesthetic, and epistemological beliefs; a particular domain of knowledge and technologies; a system of governance and self-regulation; its own media; its own history; myths.

<sup>45</sup> As Farren-Bradley (2000) puts it,

There are at least two recognizable and distinct professions within architectural education: the educators and the practitioners. They are not mutually exclusive, but like the distinction between pedestrians and motorists, who may be both at different times, when acting as either they tend to adopt the behavior and prejudices of that particular group (p. 186).

This challenge does not necessarily cease when students enter the workplace, though it takes on a different form. Even established practitioners embody a spectrum of identities, worldviews, and values that emerging practitioners encounter and position themselves within.<sup>46</sup> Likewise, within a given professional firm, employees adopt a range of roles to collectively and collaboratively practice the many facets of architecture—including design, production, project management, marketing, and business administration. What makes architecture different than many other professional fields is that each of these occupational identities are typically adopted by individuals with nearly identical educational backgrounds. In other words, students do not graduate specializing in particular aspects of professional practice. Many gradually become more specialized, while others retain a generalized approach, depending on the professional context within which they ultimately find themselves operating.

That architecture is composed of a range of roles and worldviews is not inherently problematic. It is a result of the field's varied vectors of responsibilities and its syncretic mode of practice. In fact, such diversity adds to the richness of the discipline by stimulating ongoing reflective debates on architectural education's objectives and the proper role of architecture in society. What *can* become problematic is if students are left to navigate this complexity without support or transparency, even simple opportunities for self-reflection. Second, reflecting the general perspective of educators, the notion of student agency is noticeably lacking in the

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<sup>46</sup> Saint (1983) argued that the professional 'image of the architect' is multifarious and historically-situated, at various times shifting from 'the architect as businessman,' to 'the architect as gentleman,' to 'the architect as hero and genius,' to 'the architect as entrepreneur.' And Cuff (1999) writes: "There are numerous stereotyped distinctions: art or business orientation, star or hack architects, with design or profit motive. The basic drama pits a starving artist against a profit-driven barbarian" (p. 79-80). Also worth considering is her claim that, "The general population has never been as concerned about the architect's identity as we architects" (p. 78).

research and discourse that acknowledges architecture's dynamic and contested nature. If navigating architecture's social landscape is indeed bewildering and challenging, many do so successfully, presumably with little in the way of explicit institutional support. The present project adds to previous studies of architecture's social contexts by foregrounding the ways that aspiring architects traverse these contexts using narrative strategies. The participant narratives presented in Chapter 6 express how these strategies, such as psychological resilience, operate within the context of my particular case study.

#### 2.4 The Image of the Architect: From hero-genius to empathetic-collaborator

Lewis (2013) argues that architecture is characterized from a particularly strong disconnect between popular imagination and the realities of professional practice:

People choose careers for many reasons yet typically know relatively little about their choice at the outset. Many career appear inscrutable or mysterious to the uninitiated, the nature of which is discovered only after initiation. Architecture is no exception but its real attributes differ greatly from those so often ascribed to it. Countless students, clients, and consumers or architecture possess incredibly meager and often erroneous knowledge or comprehension of how architects think and function. Indeed, most people's notions about accountants, bankers, pilots, doctors, truck drivers, attorneys, computer programmers, or plumbers better approximate reality than their notions about architects (p. xviii).

In addition to this longstanding disjunction, architecture is actively attempting to revise both its image and its common modes of practice. Farrelly and Samuel (2016) propose that the notion of professionalism is comprised of skills, knowledge, and ethics. They go on to argue that the content and delivery methods within each of these three areas are undergoing much-needed revision to engender a new social role of the architect. Most striking about this development is that it aims to upend the top-down understanding of "expertise" that has dominated our notions of professionalism for centuries. Moreover, it seeks to dismantle the two dominant architectural

identities of the twentieth century—the lone genius and the anti-capitalist visionary—in favor of an architectural identity demonstrating qualities like empathy, collaboration, and concern for the public’s interest.<sup>47</sup>

At the height of the Modernist movement, a certain identity of the architect reached its apex that came to be the avatar for 20<sup>th</sup> century professional practice. Epitomized by Howard Roark, the main character in Ayn Rand’s *The Fountainhead*, this cultural figure contributed to what Cuff (1991) refers to as “the primacy of the individual” in architectural education. Howland (1985) describes how he and his fellow undergraduates at Rice University in the 1960s “applauded Howard Roark’s uncompromising passion and longed to stand on top of our own building with the wind blowing through our hair and love at our feet” (p. 5).<sup>48</sup> Real-life Modernist icons who embodied these traits—architects like Frank Lloyd Wright, Le Corbusier, and Louis Kahn—were idolized by generations of students and acolytes, their personas attaining a mystical status. With the rise of the Postmodernist movement in the 1980s, architecture’s heroes took on a more intellectual persona. Embodied by academics like Peter Eisenman and Lebbeus Woods, these “paper architects” found the profession so ensconced in political and economic forces that they believed architectural practice should operate “autonomously” as a critique of such structures. This development was indicative of the splintering of architecture’s culture into two

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<sup>47</sup> My aim here is not to define what the image of the architect necessarily *should* be but rather to point out that such discourse informs and frames architecture’s contemporary educational project. Along these lines, it is worth noting that Thomas Fisher has pointed out across multiple publications (see for instance Fisher, 2006) the potential for the design professions to follow in the footsteps of the health professions by allowing “public-interest design” (or some label denoting an architectural subfield) to branch off from conventional architecture in the way that “public health” split from mainstream medicine’s umbrella of education and practice.

<sup>48</sup> I would venture to say that the reaction by students in schools today would instead include scoffing, jeering, or eye-rolling.

major camps—the intellectuals and the practitioners—with figures like Frank Gehry later cultivating hybrid identities.<sup>49</sup> In the aftermath of Modernism and Postmodernism’s collective impact on architectural culture, the studio learning model described by Schön (1990) has been criticized for promoting egocentric qualities represented by the heroic figures of each movement. As Burns (2001) argues, “Schools proffer a model of practice that is not reflected in [professional] practice—the single individual acting autonomously” (p. 266; see also Cuff, 1991; Monson, 2005; Nicol & Pilling, 2000). There are cues that the celebration of the heroic architect has begun to erode in the minds of the public and the profession—though these critics argue that architecture’s traditional mode of studio pedagogy, which remains dominant, continues to engender egocentric or “hero-like” architectural identities.

Reflecting this push to update design education’s pedagogical framework, the 2017 National Conference on the Beginning Design Student’s call for papers reads:

In order to develop critical habits of mind that scaffold resilience and adaptability in students, we propose that beginning design education needs to be grounded in discussions of ethics and values, beginning not with questions of ‘how...?’ but with questions of ‘why...?’ We are educating a generation of designers who will enter a rapidly changing and increasingly complex world in which the means and methods of making are in flux. Many of the prevailing pedagogical paradigms were shaped during the last century; in the Atelier or Bauhaus models of design education, where the why and the what of the discipline is known, it made great sense to begin with the how of skill building, as those particular skills were known to inform such expected outcomes. In response to

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<sup>49</sup> Having studied the culture of architecture in the 1980s, the sociologist Robert Gutman (2010) conceptualized the oscillating character of architecture schools as a pendulum (p. 268-9), swinging between two opposing camps—those who sought to maintain the autonomy of the academy (the ‘purifiers’) and those who sought to integrate the academy with professional modes of design (the ‘simulators’). More recently, Whiting (2010) has argued that these camps have blurred and hybridized:

Today...this simple split seems almost quaint. While the divide between practice and the academy remains perhaps the greatest gulf in architecture, over the past quarter century the black-and-white simulator/purifier binary has multiplied into innumerable shades of gray...Consequently, today’s architectural landscape is populated by plenty of *purifying simulators* and *simulating purifiers* (p. 314-5, emphasis in original).

situations in which the outcomes are ambiguous or the parameters unknown, today's curricula needs [sic] to focus on developing adaptive and agile systemic and integrative thinkers rather than focusing on disciplinary adherence and skill building (NCBDS 2017 "Conference Theme," 2016).

Alternative pedagogies are increasingly being implemented to promote more collaborative and empathetic qualities in future architects (Brown & Moreau Yates, 2000; Carpenter, 1997; Fisher, 2000; Sara, 2000; Sutton, 2014). Design/build, interdisciplinary, community-based, and research-based studios—increasingly common in architecture programs—are intended to cultivate occupational identities distinct from those cultivated in a more traditional studio model where each student typically designs their own project for an imaginary client.<sup>50</sup> Likewise, critics have called for centering architectural practice on notions of “agency” and “contingency” (see Schneider & Till, 2009; Till, 2009). Several recent architecture publications and projects propose a role for the architect more similar to that of a community organizer, social worker, or event planner—where coordination, empathy, translation, and curation are the essential skills.<sup>51</sup> Terms like “entrepreneurial,” “difference-makers,” and “agents of social change” have now come to define the current generation of individuals who choose architecture as a career and who are considered most likely to excel in the profession (Hyde, 2012).<sup>52</sup> As a dean of an architecture

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<sup>50</sup> The push towards new architectural identities meant to undermine the dominance of previous ones demands further empirical research in terms of its impact on education at various scales, contexts, levels, and modes. The hope beyond the present study is that, by shifting our attention to notions of becoming in architectural education, scholars might begin critically considering how professional identities develop and transform through the growing number of alternative or “minor” pedagogies, such as design-build, shop-based, service-learning, and research-based studios. Several participants in my study commented on how they felt their personal development was hamstrung by the traditional studio model and how much they gained from studios conceived as collective and/or collaborative research enterprises.

<sup>51</sup> Cuff (1991) once proposed the architect as “translator,” whereas Worthington (2000) has proposed the architect as “integrator.”

<sup>52</sup> Just as the adoption of terms like “craft” and “making” within architecture in part reflects broader cultural trends, the mainstreaming of more socially aware and community-embedded identities can be seen occurring beyond just architecture and its allied fields.

program phrased it in a recent interview: “All student considering the study of architecture today are keenly interested in actively engaging real world problems” (Michael Speaks, quoted in Taylor-Hochberg, 2015a). Reflecting this shift, when I asked a focus group of current students who participated in my study to identify major challenges facing the profession of architecture today, they immediately raised a set of political/ethical questions and issues regarding architecture’s responsibility, mentioning how, to them, “ego” remains a significant hindrance to architecture’s power/ability to address social and environmental challenges.<sup>53</sup> Their concerns echo Sutton’s (2001) claim that professional expertise, as construed since the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, has been based primarily on notions of privilege, patriarchy, and the use and abuse of landscape.<sup>54</sup>

The ACSA and other institutional bodies have begun marketing architecture schools accordingly, to attract today’s generation of aspiring architects who enter schools with certain expectations that architectural practice will allow them to “make an impact” in/on the world by operationalizing a set of social and environmental ethics (see Edwards Co, 2015). But even if schools are meeting expectations of their perspective students, what happens when these aspiring architects graduate? Are they are able to secure professional positions that reflect their emerging identities and support their transformation? Are significant numbers of graduates finding the need to establish their own firms? Or are many ultimately turning to alternative careers that better match their aspirations and ideals? Within the small sample size of this study,

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<sup>53</sup> As one of the students put it: “Since the Modernist movement, or maybe even before that...there’s a drive to change the world through architecture. And it’s not the thing that changes the world. A building doesn’t change—I mean, it’s part of the things that change the world, but you can’t forget about the rest of the world, y’know!?! The rest of the components of society.”

<sup>54</sup> The fact that UW students echo this philosophy can partly be attributed to the fact that Sutton herself taught in the M.Arch program there from 1998 to 2016.

those participants who were working professionally were generally successful in aligning their identities with the companies for which they worked—some conventional, some less so. However, this required substantial navigational acumen on the part of each individual to strike a balance between becoming the kind of activist architect they admired while retaining gainful employment along the way.

### 2.5 “The Clumsy Embrace of Two Octopuses”: Toward an integrated model

In any field, there are bound to be philosophical questions concerning the proper relationship between, and respective educational roles of, academic and professional realms. In what ways should schools attempt to simulate professional practice, and how should they go about choosing which models to simulate? What kinds of learning outcomes are best promoted in academic settings versus being left for the “real world” context of architectural practice? When in the course of their development is it most appropriate and effective for students to obtain “field experience”? Given that the academic realm enjoys relative freedom in terms of design activity being less controlled by client demands and market forces, should schools in fact operate in such a way as to challenge dominant modes of practice? As the architecture community has been debating these questions for decades, we can assume they will continue to do so. As Sheil (2016) writes, “The form, purpose, and direction of architectural education generates continual debate” (p. 20). The answers to such questions do, however, impact curricular and pedagogical practices, directly and indirectly. And these, in turn, structure the individual experience of architectural education. Specifically, the widespread adoption of “integrated” curricular models of professional programs can be understood as the most recent manifestation of the relationship between schools and practice—in this case, an alignment of certain fundamental goals and

values.<sup>55</sup> As Fisher (2001) observes, architectural education has long been structured around a particular relationship between school and practice when it comes to professional development:

In architecture, educators and practitioners worked out a system early on in which the schools would focus on areas such as design, history, and theory, and the profession would educate interns about such matters as running a firm, managing a project, and detailing and constructing a building (p. 4).

This arrangement contributes to the jarring nature of the shift from architecture school to professional practice for students and graduates, particularly if their instructors did little to address this disjunction and the philosophical, historic, and practical justifications for it. Beyond issues of skills and knowledge areas, many participants in my study remarked on the change in daily lifestyle as they transitioned into a professional community typically structured in a more hierarchical manner than an academic studio.

The following quotations from critics and administrators express the nuanced intertwining of architecture's two primary realms of professional reproduction, as well as how this relationship has fluctuated historically:

The relationship between the profession and education is complex. It is not completely causal—the actions of the academy do not directly influence the profession and the profession does not directly control education. It is messier than this, like the clumsy embrace of two octopuses. The academy at the same time shapes, and is shaped by, the profession and vice versa (Till, 2009: p. 17).

[A]rchitectural education cannot (and should not) duplicate practice and...the architectural profession cannot assume the primary responsibility for education. Each has its domain. Each has its intentions, expectations, and priorities of purpose. Architectural education pursues knowledge, skills, and understanding. The architectural profession pursues experience, service, and profit. Education can afford to learn from failure; the profession cannot afford to fail. If education and the profession are to effectively

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<sup>55</sup> Penn (2016) argues that architectural education is currently exploring ways to challenge traditional assumptions on three fronts: where their primary responsibility lies (client vs. society), divisions between disciplines (solid vs. permeable), and authorship (sole vs. shared). These concerns reflect the broader belief that academia can serve as a critical but supportive role to professional practice.

complement each other, these differences have to be acknowledged and accepted so that each can contribute constructively from their respective strengths rather than dilute their effectiveness through an inappropriate duplication of roles (Rudd, 1989: p. 27-8).

Schools of architecture *should* stand apart, I believe, from the everyday demands of the professions and marketplace. Education and practice each has its [sic] own particular limitations and allowances; all that is distinctive about one in relation to the other should be maintained and valued. Education provides the student with ways to approach architecture, as both discipline and profession (Burns, 2001: p. 261).

Letting education be defined by existing models of practice makes a school into a service provider, but not addressing practice at all leaves graduates powerless to implement change (Whiting, quoted in Taylor-Hochberg, 2014).

The role of architectural education is to speculate about possible futures, and provide a critical stance towards the built environment, in ways that practice, because of all its constraints, can't really do. In this way architectural education can anticipate or negate practice, and provide a counterpoint to what we consider practice to be (Ponce de Leon, quoted in Taylor-Hochberg, 2015).

[T]raffic between the academic world and the profession constitutes an ongoing, intricate dynamic...[T]he profession has at times been a force for educational change, as in the founding of the AIA. At other times, the schools have insisted on autonomy from the profession or else aspired to play a vanguard role with respect to it. At present a certain truce between the two seems to be in effect, but will no doubt be subject to new inflections in future years (Ockman, 2012: p. 31).

The view of the academy and the profession serving harmonizing roles remains dominant among today's leading educators (see also Fisher, 2006). The two sides operate in a less adversarial relationship these days than in the past, although there is certainly a variety of vocal opinions about exactly how each domain ought to complement the other in spirit or in terms of curricular approaches.<sup>56</sup> Recent curricular proposals can largely be understood as intended to address the widespread conviction that formal architectural education ultimately teaches architects very

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<sup>56</sup> The "truce" that Ockman refers to is the field's attempt to recover from a generation-long period when the academy (at least the North American programs considered to have the most influence over architecture's academic culture) took a vanguard approach and claimed "autonomy" by declaring that architectural knowledge ought to function as separate from the "nasty inconveniences" of political, economic, and functional considerations (see Ghirardo 2002).

little in terms of practical skills and knowledge they apply in their everyday practice. There is also a change in language, tone, and perspective towards the relationship between schools and the profession, perhaps best represented in the following claim:

The profession is best served by a continuum of learning, where the lines defining education, experience, and examination converge. In this model, knowledge and skills are acquired throughout the continuum, thus enhancing the development and stature of emerging architects.<sup>57</sup>

In other words, school and professional practice ought to be considered part of a longer process of education in ways that support the personal growth and agency of young practitioners. This holistic perspective towards education, both in terms of time and content, informs the present study. As the participant narratives in Chapter 6 reveal, aspiring architects very much consider the experience of becoming an architect as a “continuum of learning.”



*Figure 1: Paradigms of architectural education—vocational, binary/sequential, aligned, and integrated—roughly following an historical chronology.*

To operationalize this conception of architectural education, and in response to fundamental changes to professional practice, administrators and accrediting bodies have begun implementing ways of bridging the divide between schools and practice. Although most of these ideas have precedent, we are only recently seeing a concerted and widespread effort to integrate professional experiences and professional development within curricula. This increasingly popular integrated approach will likely become the standard curricular model in North America

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<sup>57</sup> This comes from the Collateral Internship Task Force’s (CITF, formerly the Architectural Internship Steering Committee) 2001 report to the presidents of architecture’s five collateral bodies, the ACSA, AIA, AIAS, NAAB, and NCARB: <http://www.archvoices.org/citf-final-report/> See Table 1 for a list of the CITF’s proposals.

in the near future. As Waldrep (2014) argues, this shift can be traced back to the publication of the Boyer Report in 1996. Since then, the push has been for

schools, practitioners, and local and national architecture organizations [to] collaborate to increase the availability, information about, and incentives for students to gain work experience during school. Because the five collateral organizations commissioned this report, there is substantial consensus within the profession that gaining experience while an architecture students is valuable (p. 167).

Parallel to these shifts, but on the other end of the developmental timeline, are demands and proposals for greater opportunities for “continuing education,” whereby practitioners are encouraged to return to the academy after graduation for periodic doses of formal instruction. Thus, the current paradigm of architectural education can be represented as a dovetailing of architecture’s two social and pedagogical realms (see Figure 1).<sup>58</sup> This shift raises corollary questions in terms of how such a paradigm impacts the ways that aspiring architects encounter and navigate their “education,” in the broadest sense of the term. The present study thus comes at a critical moment in the history of architectural education, when the experience of “becoming an architect” is ostensibly transforming amidst structural and cultural change.

Advocating for an integrated mode of education, Burns (2001) writes:

The education of a professional should not be formulated in terms of the boundaries between academia and the profession. A broader model should be envisioned—a series of alignments that go across and link these interrelated distinct realms (p. 267).

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<sup>58</sup> This latest shift towards an integration of academic and professional experience represents the latest dominant model in terms of how architects are educated. Tschumi (1995) proposed that the field of architecture underwent three major paradigm shifts throughout its history in terms of its primary mode of social reproduction. The first, when it first institutionalized apprenticeship training in antiquity (see Vitruvius’ proposal, for instance); the second, when it broke from engineering and craft-based programs during the Industrial Revolution, and the Beaux-Arts and Bauhaus models becoming the two dominant models in this period; and the third, in response to the social movements of 1968, when architecture dramatically expanded its scope and theoretical purview, adopting a more interdisciplinary role. It is important to note that these paradigm shifts should not be considered immediate or complete breaks; instead, there remain latent characteristics of even the master-apprentice tradition in today’s pedagogical model, for instance, as practitioners are commonly employed as studio instructors and model “designerly” behavior to students.

She goes on to propose the following conceptual framework:

The diagram of the relationship begins with schooling and practice as two disjunct realms that are overlaid and cross-connected with many layers of different types of lines. The crossing should be easy, often, rich, fueling, and integrative (p. 270).

Among Burns' proposed alignments are: 'alignment of disjunction' (with educators conveying the differences between school and the profession more explicitly), 'multiline alignment' (allowing extended curricula on particular topics), 'point-to-point alignment' (including internship programs and mentorship services), 'line segment' (providing greater opportunities for the craft of making, through design/build and shop facilities), and 'vector' (including continuing, professional, and lifelong education after graduation). Each of these alignments have enjoyed widespread (though not ubiquitous) adoption since the publication of Burns' essay fifteen years ago. For instance, at least a dozen architecture schools in North America now offer "co-op" programs, while others like the University of Washington have less-structured internship placement programs with local offices. By structuring work-based learning to a certain degree within the curriculum of a degree program, the belief guiding such programs include that they offer students opportunities to "strengthen their developing identities as professionals" and "integrate what is studied in class with what is experienced when working."<sup>59</sup> But the ethos behind these kinds of arrangements remains arguably outside the norm. At a recent meeting of American architecture educators, for instance, a long-time administrator described the work of three award-winning educators as "subversive" simply because they implemented pedagogical opportunities for students to "locate themselves within the field" by engaging in real-world

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<sup>59</sup> The phrases borrowed here are posted on Northeastern University's website describing its co-op program: <http://www.northeastern.edu/camd/architecture/experiential-learning-co-op/co-op/>

practice or through role-playing exercises. While an overstatement, the use of such a label suggests the marginalized nature of these practices in today's context.

Still, over the past fifteen years, structural changes to how aspiring architects enter the professional community are very much evident. Table 1 is a list of recommendations and proposals from CITF published the same year as Burns' essay. Efforts since have addressed most of these concerns, either at the national or individual program level. The most radical change is seen in programs that are implementing an idea formally proposed by the AIA in 1999 but rejected by NCARB in 2001 that would allow students to achieve professional licensure upon graduation.<sup>60</sup> Worth noting, however, is the lack of headway on the final point in the list. NCARB rejected the recommendation of the CITF to immediately confer graduates with the title "architect" and add "registered architect" to the lexicon, and concerns about professional titles remain to this day.

1. Accessibility into the profession should be broadened.
2. Practice should be integrated into education.
3. Education should be integrated into practice.
4. Every candidate for registration should have a professional degree from a NAAB/CACB-accredited program or its equivalent.
5. Alternative paths for obtaining professional experience leading to registration should be accepted. (The variety of professional experience settings should be expanded. Collaborative educational and professional innovations, such as practicum studios and practice academies, should be encouraged.)

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<sup>60</sup> For a discussion of the MS in Research Practices degree program at the University of Minnesota, see Cheng (2013). This program provides a structured path to licensure in seven years. Likewise, schools including the Savannah College of Art and Design are implementing curricula as part of the NCARB-accepted Integrated Path to Architectural Licensure (SCAD, 2016).

6. Examination should be permitted upon graduation.
7. Continuous learning and mentorship are fundamental to the profession.
8. National and international reciprocity should be strengthened.
9. Architecture graduates should be recognized for their knowledge and abilities.

Titling should reflect an individual's stage of professional development:

'Architecture student' is used to describe those individuals who are dedicating a significant portion of their lives to the formal study of architecture.

'Architect' is used to describe professional degree graduates of an accredited program as they pursue one of the diverse career paths for which their architectural education has prepared them.

'Registered architect' is used to describe those individuals legally responsible for the protection of the health, safety, and welfare of the public.

*Table 1: List of ideals/goals/objectives/strategies from the Collateral Internship Task Force's (CITF) Final Report (2001): <http://www.archvoices.org/citf-final-report/>*

The present study lies within this broader context whereby various "alignments" between schools and professional practice are enjoying widespread adoption.<sup>61</sup> In examining narratives of aspiring architects, I explore how individuals make sense of their architectural education within this contemporary context. While not designed to evaluate the effectiveness of such alignments, this project shifts our attention towards the agency of aspiring architects as a critical factor in this discussion of improving professional education.

## 2.6 On Self-Education and Lifelong Learning

Education is there to encourage good habits of lifelong learning and self-development both in yourself and in others, not to impart a quickly dated body of knowledge. These

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<sup>61</sup> As I discuss in Chapter 5, the program under inquiry has recently begun implementing initiatives like a summer internship program for graduate students in its three-year program track. Thus, I designed the study in part to examine the impact of this initiative on professional development from the perspective of personal identity.

attitudes and values around learning and professionalism start in the school of architecture (Farrelly & Samuel, 2016, p. 330).

Two related concepts associated with architectural identities are self-education and lifelong learning. Evident in architectural scholarship and discourse including everything from program reports and course syllabi to professional licensure requirements and job postings, these concepts permeate contemporary understandings from within the field's own ranks of what it means to be and become an architect. The "original," proverbial figure of the architect is often conveyed as being self-taught in the sense that pre-industrial education occurred outside any institutional structure (see Krupinska, 2014, pp. 89–110 for a discussion of autodidacticism in architecture). In more recent history, however, the term "self-education" is used to describe certain qualities of learning style within formal education.<sup>62</sup> I include the concept of self-education in this chapter's discussion of disciplinary discourse specifically because it is often identified within architecture as both the means *and* ends of design education—students learn to be self-educating designers in order to become self-educating professionals. It is both a skill and a character attribute that provide structure to architecture programs in terms of pedagogy and curriculum, as well as internship development programs—thus shaping the educational experience on a holistic level.

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<sup>62</sup> Whereas the meaning of the term "self-education" is highly dependent on its linguistic context, its usage by architectural scholars and educators evokes several connotations. Historical architects like Eileen Gray and Luis Barragan are considered "self-educated" in the most literal sense: they never attended a formal architecture school. In places where a professional degree is now required for licensure, this is no longer permitted. So today, the term typically is not meant to imply that the role of the teacher is superfluous. However, the notion that, within academic and professional contexts, reflective practice demands a certain degree of self-direction pervades discourse throughout the professional fields. And indeed, the notion of "lifelong learning" is codified in legal requirements for one to remain licensed as an architect.

The quotation above evokes the ubiquitous, contemporary discourse that the ever-changing world of practice demands that architects follow a model of self-education for them and the profession to remain relevant and successful—and that this stance toward what it means to be a design professional can be cultivated while in architecture school. Beyond the architectural context, from the field of adult education, Gerald Grow (1991) presents the figure of the “self-directed learner” in a way that resonates with studio pedagogy:

Self-directed learners set their own goals and standards, with or without help from experts. They use experts, institutions, and other resources to pursue these goals.... [They] are both able and willing to take responsibility for their learning, direction, and productivity. They exercise skills in time management, project management, goal-setting, self-evaluation, peer critique, information-gathering, and use of educational resources (p. 133-34).

However, as critics have noted, beliefs and practices of architectural educators do not always align. In this case, “studio-based teaching, as typically practiced, propagates dependencies that run in opposition to notions of the independent learner” (McClean, 2009, p. 297). Educators seeking to address this contradiction have implemented pedagogical strategies meant to encourage autonomy among students in studio (see Bose, Pennypacker, & Yahner, 2006).

Indeed, the traditional model of studio education is designed around the notion that relationship between instructor and student transforms throughout the course of the curriculum.

Echoing the work of Schön, one faculty member I interviewed put it thusly:

The most important skill that graduates could learn is how to become self-educating individuals. And I think that’s much harder to teach today because that’s not something you can teach overtly. You can’t say, ‘Oh, I’m teaching you to become a self-educating individual.’ In fact, if you *do* that, that’s like trying to choreograph a psyche: you create resistance...When you do beginning studios, the faculty member is a teacher. By the end of the program, the faculty member should be a coach. In beginning studios, the faculty member teaches. If the program is successful, in the final studios, the faculty member critiques and challenges, and at times does what a coach does.

By serving as a “coach,” a studio instructor supports the self-directed student. Less frequently, they might roleplay the part of professional supervisor or project client. In upper-level architecture studios, faculty rarely prescribe particular methods or resources for the design process. Likewise, they commonly do not dictate precisely what is required for each class session or what students should be working on during particular studio sessions. Students are expected to set their own goals and work together as needed to meet certain deadlines, usually in the form of reviewed presentations. Furthermore, students typically have access to studio around the clock and must manage their time efficiently and effectively.<sup>63</sup> Faculty teaching introductory studios then assume the responsibility of gradually socializing students into this culture of self-education. The idea is that, by the time students reach the apex of the curriculum, they are supposed to feel independent from individual faculty members when making design decisions and structuring their design process.

For many students, the studio experience becomes about more than applying design skills or learning new ones. It is often seen as an opportunity to shape their architectural sense of self by developing an individual approach design. For example, beginning in early design studio

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<sup>63</sup> Following negative press and in support of student wellbeing, NAAB accreditation since 2004 requires that each program produce a written “studio culture policy” describing the expectations and responsibilities of students and faculty for maintaining a healthy, supportive, and productive studio environment (see AIAS, 2013). The University of Washington’s Studio Culture Policy states:

Although studio faculty are responsible for the organization and progress of the studio during the quarter, much of the work students do in a design studio is self-motivated and self-directed. Because architectural design is a complex and time-consuming process, in order to excel students must often dedicate significant time and energy to architectural design studio courses. This will often be somewhat out of proportion with the effort necessary to excel in other courses. The demands of design studio should not, however, adversely affect students’ performance in other classes, nor should it upset the appropriate balance of academic and non-academic pursuits. Faculty therefore must set fair and reasonable expectations for adequate performance in the studios, and also provide regular, productive feedback to each student on the progress of his or her work in the studio (UW Department of Architecture “Studio Culture Policy,” 2014).

projects, students might be tasked with researching a project site. They would then have to determine which resources to draw upon, critically evaluate what information they deemed relevant, and how to best represent their findings—ultimately requiring that each student defines the particular “design problem” for themselves. Presumably, this largely hands-off approach is meant to simulate a professional context, with students being trained to be goal-oriented in their design work as opposed to following or imposing upon themselves standardized time constraints. Several participants in this study described this shift in perspective as particularly challenging, though they eventually acknowledged that time-on-task did not always lead to a better design outcome.<sup>64</sup>

The concept of lifelong learning holds that professionals continue learning throughout their careers, under their own volition, even after graduating from formal academic programs. After all, it has been said that, “We live in a world of continuing education” (Gutman, 2007, p. 17):

In order to cope with the knowledge explosion and the rapid rate of change in society, architects (like all other professionals) need to develop the habit of monitoring, evaluating and managing their own learning and of learning from practical experience (Nicol & Pilling, 2000b, p. 177).

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<sup>64</sup> Several participants also discussed the shift from pre-architectural education to architectural education was challenging, particularly because with the latter came an expectation of self-education. If students enter architecture programs used to having skills like software taught to them, they quickly realize that, in architecture, much of this skill-based learning must be accomplished without the direction or supervision of an instructor (although much of the time it becomes a collaborative affair within each cohort). Emilia, for instance, reflected on how she underwent a certain change in perspective toward learning from when she was an undergraduate to when she graduated from the M.Arch program. She claimed that the primary objective of her education ultimately was “removing the fear from learning new things” and “being excited rather than scared about learning new things.” This resonates with Butterworth’s (2016) call for architecture educators to encourage and empower risk-averse students to “cope with and embrace uncertainty, both in their design process and in their future practice” (p. 382).

The idea that *being* an architect requires lifelong learning suggests that, in fact, one never stops *becoming*. Throughout this project, I use the term “being” to refer to the relatively fixed aspects of identity (such as one’s professional title) and “becoming” to refer to the ways that architectural identity is in a constant state of flux.<sup>65</sup> The notion of lifelong learning is an example of the relationship between being and becoming, as one must ostensibly *be* a lifelong learner in order to remain a practitioner with an insatiable appetite for new knowledge and skills:

[T]o strive to be an architect is always a matter of moving forward and beyond, a matter, in short, of *becoming*...We are not simply passengers headed for new ports. We ourselves are in a state of becoming as our awareness of how little we know drives our thirst to explore and create new knowledge and new ways of applying our maturing skills (Combs Dreiling, 2014, p. xi).

Given the centrality of lifelong learning within contemporary architectural education, the latter must be understood in its entirety, as a holistic set of experiences that transcends formal and institutional training.

## 2.7 The Invisible Nature of Architecture’s Social Reproduction

Citing Duffy’s (1998) work on architecture as a profession, McClean (2009) emphasizes that, “The defining nature of professions is that of a social grouping bound together by its specific knowledge and expertise, accepting that this is itself an evolving entity” (p. 47). As a profession, architecture sustains itself on a certain ideology (in terms of how society functions, being pro-development, etc.), as well as how it defines itself in relation to associated fields and services. Thus, becoming an architect means gaining (and therefore accepting, to some degree)

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<sup>65</sup> I acknowledge the long history of philosophical debates surrounding these terms. In this study, however, I have chosen to allow my understanding and operational usage of the terms to develop through an examination of architectural discourse and the narratives of my own study participants. In doing so, I run the risk of my work being read as uninformed. Still, this study is premised on remaining attentive to the ways that those within the architectural community understand themselves and their education.

membership into a certain culture with a long but evolving history of mores and value systems. Depending on an aspiring architect's personal value system, they may face what could be called "ideological dissonance" at some point in the process of becoming an architect. Indeed, this theme was central to many of the narratives contributed by participants of this study.

The socialization of individuals (and cohorts) into any professional culture is a process fraught with power differentials, tension, and contradictions. In architecture, decades of scholarship has explored the role that schools play in reproducing the profession's values and norms by transferring its ideology onto incoming members through a "hidden curriculum" of enculturating myths and rituals (Banham, 1990; Cuff, 1991; Dutton, 1989; Esherick, 1977; G. Stevens, 1998; Yanar, 2007).<sup>66</sup> This process, which occurs primarily through the social/pedagogical setting of the studio, is how architecture maintains its sense of constituent cultural qualities:

This slow and elaborate process of gaining membership serves to protect the status quo of the profession: its sense of identity, distinctiveness, and survival of the professional community. The norms, codes, and habitus cannot be explicitly taught to the students. Rather, in architectural schools the students are directed toward an invisible gate, though which they can step in once they have internalized the right kind of attitudes, preferences, habitus, and behavior. Those students, who are willing to accept, maintain, and reinforce the prevailing cultural and social norms, are welcomed to enter the gate. (Yanar, 2007: p. 68).

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<sup>66</sup> Critics have also noted that, historically, the enculturating role of architecture schools was much more transparent. The field distinguished itself from more technical and craft-based fields by producing "noble gentlemen" able to operate within the cultured echelon of society (Cret, 1941; Esherick, 1977). Gradually, however, the reproduction of architects began to become more and more like a "black box of mystery" (Banham, 1990), in part to elevate architecture in relation to allied disciplines (i.e., "architecture versus mere building") and the public (Stevens, 1998):

To say one is an architect is not only to say that one has a certain sort of degree, or that one can design buildings, it is to say that one has a certain set of attitudes, tastes and dispositions, all the forms of cultural capital that distinguish an architect from a mere builder (Stevens, 1998: p. 80).

It is precisely in the effort to be distinct from the businessperson, on the one hand, and from the worker, on the other, that the professional finds it necessary to cultivate a professional ethos and culture (Burns, 2001: p. 263).

Yanar goes on to argue that, “The ethical problems that this process causes are rarely noticed” (p. 68). The mechanisms that operate within schools to socialize future architects and pass on disciplinary ideologies are intrinsic (in that they serve to reproduce architecture’s cultural capital) and invisible (in that they are largely tacit and not necessarily deliberate on the part of professional gatekeepers).<sup>67</sup>

McClellan (2009) and others have also argued that architecture’s largely tacit pedagogy has become “naturalized,” its status quo preserved due to a culture that elevates design products and concerns of competency, leading to a “decline of pedagogic discourse amongst educators” (pp. 291-2). Critiques of Schön’s teacher-centered model of studio pedagogy and studio culture reveal a general lack of pedagogical transparency and problematic operation of power (Anthony et al., 1991; Dutton, 1989; Kellogg, 2004; Mewburn, 2011; Moreau & Brown, 2002; Webster, 2005; Willenbrock, 1991; Yanar, 2007). As Mewburn (2011) discusses, the “desk crit,” the basic unit of social interaction between instructor and student in a design studio, is haunted by the power relations fundamental to this form of role play “in which the student plays the ‘novice architect’, while the teacher takes on various other roles such as ‘experienced architect’, ‘client’ or ‘consultant’” (p. 364). Other facets of studio pedagogy serve to reproduce professional value systems:

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<sup>67</sup> Stevens (1998) distinguishes between two types of inculcation in the studio: the scholastic or pedagogical approach to teaching explicit knowledge and skills versus the charismatic mode of “transferring embodied cultural capital.” Although this distinction is fairly well-established in scholarship, it remains a taboo topic in the everyday discourse of educators presumably for at least two reasons: 1) that open discussion of the hidden curriculum, or “pulling back the curtain” is a notoriously awkward task for educators, and 2) that many educators believe design education to be based fundamentally upon a process of self-discovery and that this presumably extends to discussion of pedagogy, as well. In other words, Schön’s notion that design learning is achieved through a “pedagogy of discovery,” or that teaching design must be a tacit enterprise, might lead educators to assume that the inculcating role of studio is necessarily tacit, as well.

In the studio the discussion around professional knowledge, argumentation, and design solutions might appear to be neutral. However, the knowledge and the embedded value claims act as means of imparting the prevailing professional culture to the students. This includes tacit norms and value systems, economic and social relationships in the field, hierarchies such as the division of labor, and other unspoken attitudes and rules of membership of this professional society (Yanar, 2007: p. 66).<sup>68</sup>

Architecture faculty, visiting practitioners, and senior students constantly make claims about proper ways of architectural being in subtle and not-so-subtle ways. This includes presenting what is acceptable to architects in terms of everything from the brands of sketchbooks, pens, and modeling knives, to which architects' processes and aesthetic styles are worthy of emulation. In one of the few published essays that openly exposes the enculturating role of studio pedagogy, a first-year studio instructor writes:

We are teaching the student to perform, architecturally, in a civilized fashion.... We are producing...the architectural citizen; we are educating people who will put their design out in the world publicly, with vigilance and intelligence.... We, as teachers, need to see ourselves not just as those with knowledge teaching those without knowledge, but as models for how these individuals should engage with the outside world, be it other people, the built landscape or society at large (Deamer, 2005).

While problematic, architectural education's role in socializing students for professional culture cannot be avoided:

[A]rchitectural education, although obviously intended as vocational training, is also intended as a form of socialization aimed at producing a very specific *type of person*.... All forms of education transmit knowledge and skills. All forms of education also socialize students into some sort of ethos or culture [and] these two functions are inseparable (Stevens, 1998: p. 105, emphasis in original).

The present study adopts the perspective that, in fulfilling their role of professional education, architecture schools must retain some socializing function—but that this process should not

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<sup>68</sup> Yanar (2007), among other critics, emphasizes that whatever pedagogy a given architecture educator espouses and what teaching approaches they actually practice are often at odds with one another.

remain invisible or unexamined. Ultimately, illuminating the ways in which students navigate the palpable and hidden aspects of the curriculum is intended to move the discipline towards a more transparent and inclusive mode of education. Recent structural changes to architectural education discussed in the previous sections of this chapter ostensibly mean parallel changes to the cultural and professional socialization of aspiring architects. Yet, there is little to suggest that these processes are being reexamined in the face of this change.

## 2.8 Cultural Homogenization

One of the mechanisms and outcomes of architecture's enculturation process is the social homogenization of aspiring architects at various social scales. While this many go unnoticed to students in the midst of their transformation, incoming students, alumni, and outside observers often acknowledge it:

I remember how I noticed that my classmates looked completely normal. They seemed to be a collection of average people between 18 and 40 years old. I also noticed that the students in the upper classes did not look normal in the same way. The majority of them had a style I would soon call 'architecture'. I noted that the style did not just include clothing, but instead, a whole concept that could even encompass—believe it or not—body language, facial expressions, opinions, and food habits. It really felt like they had understood something that I had yet to understand. They were on their way toward becoming real architects while I often felt like a forlorn guest. They had all the qualities needed to become something (Wingård, quoted in Wingård et al., 2011: p. 15).

The long hours of work in a common studio space forged us into a close knit group of men and women who were marked by our dedication, endurance and talent. We shared the excitement of learning to see the world in a new way, of learning to distinguish between well and poorly designed glasses while our friends were drinking coffee unaware from styrofoam cups. We were the imaginative professionals with certified taste (Howland, 1985: p. 5).

Participants in my study identified various ways that cohorts were diverse in certain aspects and homogenous and others when they started the program.<sup>69</sup> Throughout the course of graduate school, however, they became increasingly homogenous—presumably in appearance, taste, and mannerisms, but also in terms of their design process, skills, aesthetic, and their general approach to producing and evaluating “good” design. Participants in every study cohort expressed a sense that, over the course of their first year in the program, the diversity of their program cohort in terms of architectural ideas, aesthetic approaches, and presentation manners tended to disappear. Over time, participants began to distinguish themselves from their peers by referencing their individual design workflow and personal studio habits—things like what software they preferred to use, what topics other students typically came to them seeking assistance, and where and when they tended to work on studio projects.

Against the backdrop of this general tendency towards cultural homogenization, this study is premised on an understanding of narrative as a performance of one’s identity. As I discuss in the following chapter, identity has both an inward- and outward-facing nature as expressed through narrative practices. These combine with one’s physical appearance, speech patterns, mannerisms, and evidence of aesthetic taste and lifestyle choices, to constitute one’s “identity” (as theorized most notably by Judith Butler; see for instance Butler, 1990). However, as I make clear in Chapter 3, narrative is more than just a reflection or “performance” of our identities; it also offers an opportunity for “identity work” through reflection and active meaning-making

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<sup>69</sup> At the graduate level, aspects described in the two quotations above could presumably occur before one enters the program. Even for cohorts of students without previous architecture degrees, what it means to be (and look, act, and live like) an architecture student can be ascertained during the course of deciding to attend architecture school in the first place (through career discovery programs, job shadowing, informal conversations with alumni, campus visits, etc.).

strategy. Thus, narrative practices can serve as vital processes for 1) positioning our identities within our sociocultural context and life history and 2) making our identities coherent to ourselves and potentially others by weaving this content into a narrative structure.

## 2.9 Architecture's Myths and Illusions

Myths and illusions about what architects do permeate the profession. These illusions may be necessary in order to encourage young men and women to enter the field (Gutman, 2010, p. 44).

Architects depicted in film and television can be heroes, lovers, fools, or miscreants. But there are no popular accounts about an architect being an architect in the way that doctors are shown engaged in medicine, attorneys in law practice, or police in law enforcement (Lewis, 2013, p. xx).

Critics have also noted architecture's use of various myths about education and professional practice as a key element in its socialization efforts (see Banham, 1990; Koch, Schwensen, Dutton, & Smith, 2002; McClean, 2009; G. Stevens, 1998). Typically early in the program (if not prior to it), aspiring architects encounter the many myths that pervade architecture school itself. The AIAS published a set of these myths, culturally reproduced by students, alumni, and educators (see Table 2).<sup>70</sup> As suggested in Gutman's quotation above, many of the myths center upon the relationship between school and practice.<sup>71</sup> But the degree to which aspiring architects believe that practitioners spend a majority of their time designing or doing something akin to what students spend their time doing in studio cannot be attributed

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<sup>70</sup> During interviews, participants in my study discussed encountering many of these myths. In some instances, coming to terms with their mythical nature became a central experience of their education. Some even took it upon themselves to challenge the power or truth of certain myths by fostering a studio culture of collaboration and emotional support, or by personally leading a balanced lifestyle.

<sup>71</sup> Other powerful myths include the hero-architect, as I discussed earlier in this chapter, which gets reproduced through the idolization of "starchitects" by popular culture and the typical model of independent studio projects. Stories of architecture's past heroes also tend to take on the qualities of myths or fables, as well, with modern architectural history full of cases of designers employing myths to illustrate their design decision-making process. Perhaps the most famous example is Louis Kahn's conversation with a brick (see Ochsner, 2000).

solely to naiveté. In exposing students to the professional realm, integrated curricula may lessen this discrepancy between myth and reality, allowing students to witness that, in actuality, design is often only a small part of day-to-day practice (depending on an individual’s role in their firm, project management, coordination, marketing, and drafting will likely take up more of their time).

1. Architectural education should require personal and physical sacrifice.
2. The creation of architecture should be a solo, artistic struggle.
3. The best students are those who spend the most hours in studio.
4. Design studio courses are more important than other architecture or liberal arts courses.
5. Success in architecture school is only attained by investing all of your energy in studio.
6. It is impossible to be a successful architect unless you excel in the design studio.
7. Students should not have a life outside of architecture school.
8. The best design ideas only come in the middle of the night.
9. Creative energy only comes from the pressure of deadlines.
10. Students must devote themselves to studio in order to belong to the architecture community.
11. Collaboration with other students means giving up the best ideas.
12. It is more important to finish a few extra drawings than sleep or mentally prepare for the design review.
13. It is possible to learn about complex social and cultural issues while spending the majority of time sitting at a studio desk.
14. Students do not have the power to make changes within architecture programs or the design studio.

*Table 2: Myths of studio culture, from AIAS Studio Culture Task Force Report (Koch et al., 2002)*

Although studies over the past 25 years have helped reveal the positive and negative aspects of design culture, every reflective educator knows that making improvements is more complicated than simply encouraging healthy choices, discouraging unhealthy choices, and disputing problematic myths. Many of the negative aspects of design culture are intertwined with socialization processes and learning objectives that we hold most dear. Moreover, many aspects of studio culture are beyond the control of individual educators, sustained as they are through

global discourse and passed down from cohort to cohort. But while some myths may serve a justifiable purpose or are consequences of deeply held cultural ideologies, the truth is that most of these are counter-productive to architectural education's core objectives of preparing its graduates to excel in and fundamentally transform professional practice.

### 2.10 Strategies of Psychological Resilience

Almost every participant in the present study admitted to considering dropping out of graduate school. Yet in no cases was it because they felt like school was too difficult academically or feared not meeting academic standards. Rather, this sentiment tended to follow one or both of two patterns: 1) participants started to question the “return on investment” of their education, wondering whether the effort they were putting in would pay off in the end through fulfillment of some kind;<sup>72</sup> or 2) there were moments in their narratives when, as aspiring architects, they were made to feel less than welcome as members of the architectural community. How each student was ultimately able to negotiate these doubts and struggles became central to their individual narrative identity. While ranging depending on how they identified the challenge in front of the, the strategies they employed to cope and flourish suggest a kind of psychological resilience. From the results of this study, narrative is a chief means by which aspiring architects evoke this psychological resilience. Based on literature reviewed in the following chapter, narrative may also be a strategy for developing such resilience.

Across historic and cultural contexts, student descriptions of architecture school often include overwhelming feelings of uncertainty and inadequacy, performance anxiety, mental

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<sup>72</sup> This was almost always expressed in terms of emotional investment, as opposed to financial investment. None of the participants seemed to have had any illusions about their eventual income in the field of architecture.

stress, psychological pressure, and insomnia (see Wingård, Nilsson, Schuman, & Ljungberg, 2011: p. 29). Certainly, some of these issues signal something more serious going on, and some of it may be avoidable. The field has acknowledged its long history of exploitation and promotion of unhealthy lifestyles, both in schools and the profession (see Koch et al., 2002), and school culture has inarguably changed to more supportive—though there remains significant progress to be made on this front. But architectural education can presumably still be characterized as operating largely through tacit practices. Architecture educators rarely follow standard practices of clarity and transparency when it comes to learning expectations and objectives, learning processes, feedback, and opportunities for student reflection—all of which breeds uncertainty and anxiety (see McClean, 2009). Two points are worth making here: first, that coping with (and even embracing) anxiety and feelings of uncertainty can be considered a necessary aspect of becoming a design practitioner (Butterworth, 2016). Indeed, alumni participants in my study revealed that, by the time they graduated, they were able to make sense of certain negative feelings they experienced as students and came to consider them as essential for their personal growth. Whereas certain aspects were expressed as obstacles to be overcome, more commonly participants incorporated challenging moments into their identities in a productive way as an expression of emotional resilience. This does not mean that educators can simply overlook psychological pain and suffering—only that it would benefit the profession and students to be as explicit and transparent as possible regarding the identity changes that must occur throughout the course of an aspiring architect's education. Then, the structures of architectural education can be designed around this foregrounding of transformation, with support offered along the way to help manage the most challenging manifestations of these changes.

The second point relates to the previous sections of this chapter: certain aspects of studio culture get perpetuated because they help preserve architecture's social reputation. Disciplinary myths and the fraternity-like culture of self-sacrifice and rationalization are used to sustain the belief, for instance, to the rest of campus that "those who study architecture are the crazy students who spend all of their time sequestered in that one building that is always well lit" (Koch et al., 2002, p. 6). Moreover, a certain level of cognitive dissonance—including unhealthy life choices and counterintuitive values—can be considered a rational response to the open-ended nature and implicit expectations of design culture. Considering architecture undergraduates in the United States, Bachman and Bachman (2009) argue that several psychological constructs and cognitive mechanisms can help explain how students cope with and justify their unhealthy lifestyles. Developing strategies of rationalization and persistence help reconcile their "idealized and romanticized self-image with the incoherent sacrifices of design studio" (p. 315).<sup>73</sup> But just because some of this dissonance can be understood as inherent to the field (as a manifestation of the contradictions illuminated by Cuff 25 years ago), it does not follow that students need to embody these without an open discussion and reflection.

As part of the long-term project of making architectural education more transparent and student-centered, I propose that narrative practices play a central role. As I argue in the next chapter in my review of scholarship on the topic, storytelling becomes a way of making meaning out of the central contradictions and challenges of architectural education and possibly doing this collaboratively with others. Resilience is certainly a useful mechanism for survival, but

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<sup>73</sup> It is worth emphasizing that Bachman and Bachman's article was purely theoretical. As far as I can gather, no study has empirically examined the cognitive mechanisms of architecture students.

educators need to meet students halfway with pedagogical strategies that encourage open dialogue and meaning-making. Navigating the complex sociocultural landscape of architectural education is a challenge for aspiring architects, especially while they are simultaneously attempting to construct their own architectural identity—and when this is entangled with their particular social context. Working on and working out who we are and who we want to become is achieved (in both practical and psychological terms) in relation to, and by making sense of, the way things operate around us. The complexity of navigating architecture’s sociocultural landscape and its significance to each individual’s life story suggests that meaning-making is a particularly central activity in becoming an architect. Meaning-making is how individuals locate themselves (i.e., their personal and social identities) within their social context (i.e., the identities of those inside and outside their community). As I discuss in the following chapter, an increasing number of scholars in the field of education are conceptualizing education more broadly as a transformative experience intimately tied to narrative processes of meaning-making. Such a perspective is meant to shift the priorities of educators and researchers alike, to focus on understanding and supporting how students undergo and navigate such a transformation.

## Chapter 3: Theoretical Context (Literature Review Part 2)

Education is not a discipline but a phenomenon. We conceptualize education as a fuzzy set of processes that occur in events and institutions that involve both informal socialization and formal learning. Various objects are constructed in educational processes, such as the identities of teachers and learners, the subject matter learned, and the social structures produced and reproduced. These objects are constructed through mechanisms that involve various levels of organization, including psychological, interactional, cultural, and social elements.

-Wortham & Jackson, 2008, p. 107

Higher education...takes on the character of the beginnings of a personal voyage of human becoming.... A start of a journey, a continual lifelong journey of personal becoming and *re-becoming*.... The voyage will go on anyway, with or without higher education. But higher education has the potential to take on board this agenda of human becoming and *re-becoming*.... The problem is [that] processes of human becoming are taking place subliminally, as unforeseen consequences.... It remains to be seen whether this tacit project of human becoming can be an explicit project and so go much further in realizing its potential.

-Barnett, 2006, pp. 61, 62, 64

### 3.1 Chapter Introduction

In this chapter, I review scholarship from beyond the field of architecture that supported and informed the primary aims of my project. I drew heavily upon three lines of scholarship—the “ontological turn,” the “narrative turn,” and the “occupational perspective” from occupational therapy.<sup>74</sup> Each of these served as valuable theoretical frames, with the last providing an analytical framework discussed in the following chapter. Synthesizing concepts and perspectives from this breadth of literature allowed me to formulate a coherent approach for proposing and examining how aspiring architects make meaning of their education. In the following three sections of this chapter, I briefly review the emergence and theoretical foundations of each of these developments, focusing mainly on applications in contexts of professional, higher

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<sup>74</sup> Readers will notice that the terms and general perspective reviewed in this chapter appear throughout the previous two chapters. Reflecting my iterative research process, this chapter can be understood as a glossary of sorts for the rest of the dissertation.

education. Each of these “turns” emerged as critiques of dominant approaches to research, then coalesced into realms of inquiry in their own right. However, their conceptual boundaries and definitions remain fairly nebulous, allowing researchers like myself to import and adapt them in novel and contextually appropriate ways. Finally, throughout this chapter, the overlaps between these various lines of scholarship will become evident. In general, I argue that adapting each of these perspectives in discipline-specific ways offers the field of architecture a means of grounding, and considering the implications of, their inchoate calls of understanding education more broadly as a process of identity transformation. In other words, this chapter forms a bridge between Chapter 2’s discussion of architecture’s sociocultural context and the ensuing chapters that elucidate my study’s methodological procedures and its ultimate outcomes and significance.

To further elucidate my research premise, in Section 3.6, I review a handful of “precedent studies” from a range of fields that were particularly influential for designing and carrying out the empirical portion of the present study. In addition to tying architecture’s contemporary discourse on education as a process of human transformation to more empirically derived and empirically oriented literature, this chapter is thus intended to lay the theoretical and analytical groundwork for the following chapter on the project’s methodological decisions. In this way, I extend the tradition in architectural research of importing perspectives and concepts from scholarship outside the field to inform my investigation. As a project designed to illuminate the contemporary experience, in this case, I determined it most appropriate to draw upon theories currently considered most effective and appropriate for examining the experience of education as defined in the quotations above and below.

### 3.2 The Ontological Turn: Background and key concepts

[E]ducation is not only epistemological but also ontological.... When students learn subject matter, they do more than change their cognitive states. They also become different kinds of people—the kinds of people who would think about the subject in that way, who would engage in the cognitive practices required to learn as the school teaches. Schools favor one set of cognitive practices and thus tend to produce a kind of person who, for example, favors decontextualized knowledge over knowledge embedded in craft and apprenticeship activities. Schooling is not just about cognitive development, then, but also about the construction of persons. The ontological character of education means that, when students learn things in school, both academic learning and the construction of individual identities occur (Wortham & Jackson, 2008, p. 122).

Whereas a focus on ‘learning’ typically draws attention to changes in an individual’s cognitive capacities, a focus on ‘becoming’ draws attention to additional dimensions of change over time, and in particular, to a broader set of social organizational practice in which the [aspiring practitioner] is embedded and through which she or he charts a course (Stevens et al, 2004: p. 355).

Personhood...has an aesthetic component. We cannot reduce identities to numerical data, nor can we understand the human self through the use of metrics. Becoming an educated person involves the creation of a new set of stories to tell yourself, a new understanding of who you are.... To understand the change that students undergo, we need to solicit stories from them, and for that, we will likely need ethnographers and a commitment to understanding the processes and rites of education and not simply their quantifiable outcomes (Hanson, 2013).

The above quotations reflect the recent ontological turn in the field of education, which arose with calls from a number of educational theorists to reconceptualize the purpose of higher education around the development of human character traits, as opposed to just cognitive development, and thereby focusing exclusively on technical skills and knowledge or quantifiable outcomes. The leading advocate for the ontological turn, Ronald Barnett (2006), argues that graduate attributes “should not primarily be construed as sets of skills or even knowledges. What is required are certain kinds of human dispositions and qualities” (p. 61).<sup>75</sup> The general thrust of

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<sup>75</sup> Similarly, Herrenkohl and Mertl (2010) claim that the “human side of learning can easily be lost in our attempts to segregate what might be considered ‘soft’ outcomes of learning from the real business of schooling—academic

the ontological argument is twofold. The first claim is descriptive—that the exclusive focus on learning (and teaching) effectively produces “shadows” in how educators and researchers approach education, blinding us to more holistic and humanistic aims and outcomes. The second claim, a normative one, is that these concerns in fact *should be* the ultimate aim of education. In other words, teaching and learning practices should be designed around the development of human attributes to best prepare graduates for a world where one’s character matters more for future success than just acquiring skills and knowledge, which are bound to change. This kind of perspective certainly has roots in centuries of scholarship on theories of learning. The recent wave of literature, however, is intended to counter the mechanization and marketization of higher education. As I argue, although architectural discourse operates on a different wavelength, so to speak, the general perspective guiding the ontological turn complements architecture’s impulses—specifically, in promoting self-education and lifelong learning and its focus (though tacit) on the development of human dimensions in students and graduates.

In urging a “broad view of education,” scholars like Herrenkohl and Mertl (2010) extend the tradition of describing learning as a social, cultural, and historical process that is thus inseparable from social practice more generally. Their interest in how individuals’ personal worlds dovetail with disciplinary worlds in educational contexts seeks to illuminate “the complex interaction of personal and collective interests, intentions, emotional commitments, and beliefs

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achievement” (p. 25). And Sandberg and Pinnington (2009) argue that professional competence “is not primarily defined by scientific knowledge, tacit knowledge, knowing-in-action, understanding of work or practice as such. Instead, professional competence is constituted by specific ways of being” (p. 1162). The term “ontological” in this case refers to self-transformation, as presumably distinct from knowledge and skill acquisition. I have elected to limit my use of this term given its ambiguous meaning within the architectural context. Instead, I refer to the ways in which individuals change through education as “transformative” in an attempt to circumvent the ongoing debates about the relationship or distinction between one’s cognitive state and one’s identity.

about how to be a person in [a given discipline] as it is about personal and collective ways of knowing and doing [in that discipline]" (p. 2).<sup>76</sup> In other words, education is a way that individuals socially engage (*belonging*) in learning activities (*doing*) in ways that inform their emerging identities (*being*) and the trajectories of their life histories (*becoming*).<sup>77</sup> Understood in this way, "education" extends beyond student-teacher interactions, even beyond institutions and formalized learning. This perspective, wherein "thinking is more than a cognitive act" (*ibid.*: p. 3), "learning is a process not just an outcome" (*ibid.*: p. 18), and "learning is a way of being in the social world, not a way of coming to know about it" (Hanks, 1991: p. 24), explicitly draws upon Lave and Wenger's notion of "situated learning," as well as pragmatist and constructivist thinkers from a century ago—like Vygotsky, Bakhtin, Heidegger, Dewey, and James. Claims for learning as embedded within social practice, and doing as inherently connected to being and becoming, are intended to challenge the predominant, Western, technical approach to learning, in which practical skills and knowledge are considered to be of primary importance for professional training.

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<sup>76</sup> In general, these scholars advocate for "a shift in focus from epistemology in itself to epistemology in the service of ontology," whereby "the question for students would be not only what they know, but also who they are becoming" (Dall'Alba & Barnacle, 2007: p. 683). Herrenkohl and Mertl (2010) expand on this more clearly when they state:

Our contention is that as students become knowledgeable in new areas of study, they are also becoming certain kinds of people in relation to that subject matter, one another, teachers, parents, the larger community, and their futures selves. These ways of being are often left out of our accounts of students' learning in school. Students develop and refine ways of being including interests, motivations, affective orientations toward learning, and personal and social values about what is worth learning and if, how, and why one ought to put certain knowledge and skills into practice. If we are to fully and completely understand human thought and learning, we must engage these processes of being alongside and in conjunction with knowing and doing (p. 7).

<sup>77</sup> Here, I am drawing connections between an ontological perspective toward learning and an occupational perspective toward health, as discussed later in this chapter.

The second portion of the ontological turn's premise centers on its normative claim. In several publications, Barnett has asserted that the contemporary condition is one that demands foregrounding the "ontological" aspects of education. He refers to our historical time as "the age of uncertainty" (2006), "the age of supercomplexity" (2000), and "a situation in which there are no stable descriptions of the world, no concepts that can be seized upon with any assuredness, and no value systems that can claim one's allegiance with any unrivaled authority" (2012, p. 69). Such a context, which he argues is unprecedented, challenges educators to foster graduates capable of acting, living, and prospering in "an unknown future" (Barnett, 2012). Elsewhere, he relates this demand for self-reflection and self-transformation to the transition from school to work:

Professional life...is itself chock-full of ambiguities, value conflict and continuing demands to take on new forms of professional identity. Lifelong learning, under such conditions, becomes a social and personal space in which new resources, new understandings, new senses of the self can be laid down. Such learning can be accomplished by the individual but it is likely to be aided by an environment for collective reflection (Barnett, 2006: p. 64).

Thus, whereas learning is a lifelong endeavor, conceived as extending beyond the walls of academia, higher education serves a critical purpose for orienting graduates towards occupational identities deemed necessary for today's world of complexity and change. Thus, the ontological turn is premised on the notions that educators are neglecting certain aspects of learning and that these very aspects are the most critical for humans to flourish in the immediate future.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the notion that design practitioners must accept uncertainty and unknown futures as a given and be able to work and flourish within this context

is a commonplace trope within architecture. Indeed, it is the basis of calls for lifelong learning, as well as for fostering critical thinking skills and dispositions. Nicol and Pilling (2000a), for instance, preface their edited volume by stating the following:

Over the last 10 years numerous reports and studies have described how changes in society and in the construction industry are impacting on architecture and the other construction professions.... And as a result of changes in society, technological advances and the rapid growth of information, those entering the profession are likely to have to update their knowledge and skills many times over a lifetime. All this is calling on architects to become more skilled in the human dimensions of professional practice and more adaptable, flexible and versatile over the span of their professional careers. Architectural education must respond to these changes: it must enable students to develop the skills, strategies and attitudes needed for professional practices and it must lay the foundation for continuous learning throughout life (p. 1).

Here, we notice mainstream architecture's attempts to reorient its educational practices towards the development of "human dimensions" in future professionals as a way of meeting the challenging demands of professional practice. Thus, the field's efforts to cultivate self-education and lifelong learning overlap with the key normative tenet of the ontological turn. As I argue in the previous chapter, those within architecture have also acknowledged the descriptive basis of the ontological turn—that education is a process of socially engaging with learning activities to engender a lasting, personal transformation. And yet, research on architectural education has yet to empirically direct its attention toward such concerns or perspectives. The present study seeks to remedy this by opening up theoretical and methodological territory. In doing so, I also add to the burgeoning field of inquiry on professional identity development beyond the field of architecture.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Recent case studies of professional identity among teachers, students, and practitioners (almost all of which are dissertations) have emerged from the fields of: social work (Barretti, 2003), pre-K education (Sisson, 2011), K-12 education (Hsieh, 2010), occupational therapy (Ennals et al., 2016), library science (Sandford, 2013), nursing education (Becker, 2013), theology (Mason, 2012), and speech-language pathology (Godsey, 2011).

In architecture, the basis for the ontological turn might not necessarily carry as much gravity as in other fields with more positivistic pedagogical traditions. One might even argue that the critique posed by the ontological turn—that educational practice tends to ignore ontological development in favor of other aspects—cannot be waged as easily or fairly on architectural education. Whereas certain ontological aspects of education have been identified and acknowledged in architectural scholarship, broadly speaking, however, topics of identity development and socialization remain tacit in everyday practice. Moreover, even if it less commonly follows the wider trend of concentrating on cognitive learning outcomes, most architectural scholarship on education continues to be based on a narrow, shallow, or uncritical perspective. Thus, the implications of directing our attention towards education as an ontologically transformative process of becoming remains underexplored and under-examined. Borrowing from the ontological turn is meant less of a critique of architectural scholarship on education and more as a potential opening. What makes such a perspective particularly valuable for architecture now is the recent, lively discourse (discussed in Chapters 1 and 2) around reforming education and the path to licensure, specifically in terms of how such changes might support the changing role of the architect in society and practice. Whether architectural educators desire to produce graduates like or unlike those of previous generations, it is in their best interest to critically assess the training of tomorrow's architects across a range of cultural and pedagogical contexts.

### 3.3 Identity in Educational Contexts

Many today consider the ideal role of higher education to be in facilitating self-discovery, an environment and period where and when students can “try on,” and begin to adopt, certain

social and occupational identities. Institutions of higher education “hold the promise of helping students to develop wiser, more thoughtful, and idealistic versions of themselves” (Hanson, 2014b: p. 12). Throughout college, students tend to be “actively experimenting with and consolidating a sense of identity: who they are, what they can do well, what is important to them, how they want others to see them, and so forth” (King & Kitchener, 1994, p. 203). Insofar as college students consider themselves to be traversing particular career pathways, they also cognitively develop what are known as “identity horizons” to reconcile their emerging sense of self with their professional goals (Côté, Skinkle, & Motte, 2008).

Foregrounding the notion of identity thus becomes a means for educators and researchers to consider the ways in which education effects personal transformations with regard to the human dimensions of individuals.<sup>79</sup> Borrowing from Holland, Lachicotte Jr., Skinner, and Cain (1998) and other scholars, the present study considers identity to be double-sided in nature, consisting of both how we perceive ourselves and how our projected selves get perceived by others. For every individual, one of the great challenges in life can be cultivating and managing our sense of self:

People tell others who they are, but even more important, they tell themselves and then try to act as though they are who they say they are. These self-understandings, especially those with strong emotional resonance for a teller, are what we refer to as identities (Holland et al., 1998: p. 3).

This “identity work” becomes an ongoing negotiation between an individual’s agency and structure as determined by their particular sociocultural context. For this reason, numerous

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<sup>79</sup> Scholars that I have identified as contributing to the ontological turn use a variety of terms to acknowledge the role of identity in educational contexts. Depending on the connotations in their respective field, a term like “self” may replace the term “identity.” I use both interchangeably, but I elected to use identity in most cases given that it resonates best with architecture’s historical and theoretical understandings of its own educational practices.

scholars have focused on identity to examine the dynamic but irreducible relationship between agency and structure, as well as psychological transformation and social transformation. Because I am interested in how individuals construct and embody particular disciplinary and professional roles, identity becomes an appropriate concept for the present case study. As I discuss later in this chapter, one's identity manifests itself via an interconnected web of the four dimensions of occupational engagement—*doing, being, becoming, and belonging*. This framework allowed me to operationalize “identity” within this study around the notion of “occupational engagement,” thus attending to the holistic and multidimensional nature of how participants engage with architecture.<sup>80</sup> As the following section explains, I then borrowed from scholarship to understand narrative as a performance of identity and as a meaning-making strategy for constructing and then managing and possibly reinventing our identities.

#### 3.4 The Narrative Turn: Background and key concepts

[T]he stories we construct to make sense of our lives are fundamentally about our struggle to reconcile who we imagine we were, are, and might be in our heads and bodies with who we were, are, and might be in the social contexts of family, community, the workplace, ethnicity, religion, gender, social class, and culture writ large. The self comes to terms with society through narrative identity. The formulation of a narrative identity is the central psychosocial challenge of emerging adults in modern societies (McAdams, 2008, p. 242-3, 252).

Perhaps the push toward narrative comes from contemporary preoccupations with identity. No longer viewed as given and ‘natural,’ individuals must now construct who they are and how they want to be known, just as groups, organizations, and governments do (Riessman, 2008, p. 7).

It is through narrativity that we come to know, understand, and make sense of the social world, and it is through narratives and narrativity that we constitute our social identities.... [A]ll of us come to be who we are (however ephemeral, multiple and

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<sup>80</sup> It is important to acknowledge that this project does not intend to engage with *all* aspects of identity as a theoretical construct. Rather, I am focused solely on identity as it appears through first-person narratives, with the broader perspective that individual identities of aspiring architects shape the trajectory of the profession.

changing) by being located or locating ourselves (usually unconsciously) in social narratives rarely of our own making (Somers, 1994: p. 606).

The idea of narrative is appealing to educators. First, learning, in the sense of meaning-making, can be understood as a narrative process. Second, personal change also can be conceptualized as a narrative process. And finally, the construction of a life narrative can be seen as the central concern of adult development (Tennant, 2012: p. 89).

Running parallel to the ontological turn, and occasionally merging with it, has been a widespread turn toward narrative. Researchers and practitioners across a range of disciplines have promoted narrative inquiry and narrative strategies as a way of better understanding various themes of personal experience through an individual's point of view.<sup>81</sup> In general, narrative inquiry "revolves around an interest in life experiences as narrated by those who live them" (Chase, 2011: 421). Recent work on narrative builds upon decades of scholarship that focused on how individuals construct meaning from life events (see Goodson, 2001). Initially, narrative was considered largely a representational and methodological approach, as a way of collecting and retelling stories of research participants that could capture the richness of everyday experience. Narrative inquiry gradually emerged into a form of praxis within the "soft sciences," or a way of illuminating aspects of the human condition that research methods considered more legitimate, generalizable, or rational could not. Since the emergence of narrative studies as its own transdisciplinary field in the 1990s, many researchers have argued that a critical/subversive element underpinned their work. To them, narrative inquiry represents a "moment of resistance to the dominant research paradigm" (Mishler, 1999: p. 162) and an opportunity to engage the perspectives of marginalized groups and individuals. Atkinson and

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<sup>81</sup> Researchers across social science, the humanities, psychology, and social work have used narrative to examine themes including social change, social trauma, and social adaptation (Catherine Kohler Riessman, 2008).

Delamont (2006) sound an important note of caution, however, advising qualitative researchers not to celebrate biographical accounts or narratives so uncritically, warning that we have become complicit in the so-called “interview society.”

Given the diverse approaches and agenda comprising narrative studies, there is no consensus regarding the meaning of “narrative.” Based on her review of recent trends in the field, Chase (2011) offers the most inclusive definition of narrative’s common characteristics:

Narrative theorists define narrative as a distinct form of discourse: as meaning making through the shaping or ordering of experience, a way of understanding one’s own or others’ actions, of organizing events and objects into a meaningful whole, of connecting and seeing the consequences of actions and events over time (p. 421).

For the present study, I adopt this broad definition of narrative, as a way that individuals make sense of their daily activities and sense of self (as both relatively fixed and relatively mutable) within the context of their social community—in an attempt to assemble these into a coherent whole. In this sense, narrative operates as a means for individuals to relate the various dimensions of the “occupation”—*doing, being, becoming, and belonging*. In this study, the broader notion of “architectural education” has been conceptualized as a form of “occupational engagement” in the sense that it incorporates these four dimensions into a holistic construction of experience. As I discuss later in this chapter, this understanding complements contemporary theories of education and narrative, ultimately providing me with an analytical frame for interpreting participant narratives of their education.

Narrative theorists tend to agree that, whereas the construction of narratives is itself an act of agency on the part of the individual or group, narratives are always limited by the structural constraints of language and context at the institutional and social levels. In other words, although

they offer us a way to assemble our social identities and in so doing grant us some freedom to be or become otherwise, narratives are not completely of our own choosing in terms of their format, motifs, or language. Nor can we hope to control the reception of our narratives by others:

Narrators artfully pick and choose from what is experientially available to articulate their lives and experiences. Yet, as they actively craft and inventively construct their narratives, they also draw from what is culturally available, storying their lives in recognizable ways. (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000, p. 103).

Thus, methodologically, narrative inquiry requires that researchers consider the discursive and cultural context within which given narratives were constructed. It also requires acknowledging the role of the researcher themselves, who often acts as an active participant in narrative construction, whether by interviewing participants or interpreting their stories. In my case, I acknowledge both by presenting the wider architectural context, the specific program context, and by describing my role as a participant in the narrative process.

As Riessman (2008, p. 5) notes, “the concept of narrative is operationalized differently” depending on one’s disciplinary tradition and the aims and scope of the particular research study. She proposes three primary conceptual definitions: 1) “a discrete unit of discourse, an extended answer by a research participant to a single question” (used primarily by social linguists), 2) “extended accounts of lives in context that develop over the course of single or multiple research interviews” (used primarily by psychologists and sociologists), and 3) “an entire life story woven from thread of interviews, observations, and documents” (used primarily by social historians and anthropologists). The present study most closely adopts the second approach for conceptualizing narrative, whereby, as a researcher, my primary activity was to elicit, record, organize, and process the data in the presentation of participant narratives that evoked various aspects of

architectural education. It is important to keep in mind, however, that narrative operates across multiple, overlapping levels:

[S]tories told by research participants (which are themselves interpretive), interpretive accounts developed by an investigator based on interviews and fieldwork observation (a story about stories), and even the narrative a reader constructs after engaging with the participant's and investigator's narratives (Riessman, 2008, p. 6).

In any research project of this kind, all three of these levels of narrative are at play at various points in the study. So, in addition to the three scales of inquiry by disciplinary focus, Riessman (2008, p. 6) proposes three “nested uses” of the term narrative: “The practice of storytelling (the narrative impulse—a universal way of knowing and communicating); narrative data (the empirical materials, or objects for scrutiny); and narrative analysis (the systematic study of narrative data).” Narrative as a mode of research engages with each of these uses of narrative. In this case, I allowed each of these uses to inform my research design decisions throughout the length of the study.

Over the past few decades, narrative inquiry has been theoretically bolstered by notions of narrative identity and narrative time, as well as findings from the field of cognitive psychology.<sup>82</sup> The basic concept of narrative identity is an ontological claim—that the quotidian construction of narratives, through various modes of storytelling, is fundamental to constructing our identities and reflecting upon its transformation. As Wortham (2001, p. xi) notes, “Telling a story about oneself can sometimes transform that self.” Or as Mishler (1999, p. 19) contends, “We express, display, make claims for who we are—and who we would like to be—in the stories we tell and how we tell them. In sum, we perform our identities.” This notion of narrative has

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<sup>82</sup> For a treatise on the concept of narrative time, see Ricoeur (1980). For a discussion of cognitive psychology's use of the concept of narrative, see Eakin (2008).

informed multiple aspects of this dissertation. First and foremost, it supports my claim that by examining the content of narratives told by aspiring architects, we can better understand how architectural education plays out as a process of personal transformation and in supporting the development of occupational identities. This is why, for this study, I was more interested in meaning-making as expressed through the content of narratives than in the ways that the narrative structure reflects particular cognitive or linguistic strategies.<sup>83</sup> In other words, I was less interested in the degree to which participants actually were able to make meaning, in terms of particular narrative strategies. Rather, I was most concerned with how the content and general form of participant narratives, individually and collectively, represents *both* architectural education as a series of navigational strategies and the development of occupational identities.

Having already used the term on several occasions, I am compelled to define what I mean by “meaning-making,” as well. For the purposes of this study, the term implies the process by which individuals “approach and interpret their experiences” using particular cognitive and/or linguistic structures “to make sense of, or interpret, their experiences” (Baxter Magolda & King, 2007: p. 495). Citing Kegan (1994), Baxter Magolda and King go on to write: “Individuals make meaning in the space between their experiences and their reactions to the experiences” (p. 495). This kind of activity occurs on an everyday basis, whenever individuals inwardly or outwardly reflect on their place in the world. Meaning-making is also the fundamental operation involved in the more active construction of one’s life history—in relating events, activities, and experiences to one’s past, present, and future sense of self through a narrative structure that is

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<sup>83</sup> Some critics question this dichotomy. However, given the aim of this project is to address a certain misalignment between architectural education’s objectives and its research practices, it seemed most prudent to initiate this discourse by focusing on narrative content.

presumably coherent to ourselves and those to whom we narrate. Often, individuals require a certain level of prompting to reach the depth and reflection sufficient enough for meaning-making to occur. Thus, meaning-making often is more likely to take place when we apply to schools or jobs, in therapy or recovery sessions, or when we are interviewed as part of a research study. As the quotation from Tennant at the beginning of this section proposes, educators can also play a particularly significant role in encouraging meaning-making among students.<sup>84</sup>

My use of narrative also emerges from my disciplinary identity and intended primary audience of architectural educators and researchers. As discussed in Chapter 1, storytelling is a longstanding tradition within the field of architecture, with some scholars even arguing that architecture and narrative are analogous or overlapping activities (see Frascari, 2012). Moreover, there do not seem to be any significant forces *against* narrative inquiry in the discipline (in the way one might find in those fields dominated by positivistic or “harder” approaches to research). Thus, I draw upon various approaches from the narrative turn as a way of extending architecture’s tradition of narrative to operationalize it for the particular purposes of this empirical study. Throughout the design of this study, narrative become a way of orienting and linking various aspects of inquiry that related to the questions driving the project—in terms of theoretical, methodological, representational, and normative standpoints. From a theoretical perspective, research suggests that narrative activity is the fundamental way that aspiring architects construct their identities by positioning their ongoing experiences within their life

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<sup>84</sup> But narrative constructions of ourselves are never complete—like a building, they must be maintained and occasionally remodeled. Thus, narrative practices are used in education and “the helping professions” as a strategy for helping people “work on themselves” (Tennant, 2012)—as well as in psychotherapy, organizational change, and conflict resolution.

histories; from a methodological standpoint, narrative inquiry is the chief way of studying meaning-making across time periods and social contexts, particularly on the topic of identity; from a representational standpoint, the use of narratives is a way for readers to “hear” the data, in this case voices of aspiring architects; and finally, from a normative standpoint, this study is meant to suggest ways in which narratives can be used as a pedagogical strategy by teachers and mentors for supporting lifelong learning and the wellbeing of aspiring architects.

### 3.5 Dimensions of Occupational Engagement: Doing, being, becoming, and belonging

As mentioned previously, I have borrowed a conceptual framework for this project from the field of occupational therapy (OT) that holds promise for structuring how we understand architectural education as a comprehensive set of activities, commitments, and identity changes. The interdependent dimensions of *doing*, *being*, *becoming*, and *belonging* provide of way of positioning architectural education within a more complete set of relationships, reflections, and experiences. As a way of interpreting the data I collected from aspiring architects, these concepts (individually and together) offer a framework that I believe reflects the multidimensional, interrelated, and holistic experience of navigating architectural education in its broadest sense.

In the field of occupational therapy, the term “occupation” does not refer to one’s job title or career, necessarily. Rather, it refers to one’s daily activities and commitments, as well as how these relate to one’s holistic sense of self. In an attempt to escape the philosophical limitations associated with the medical professions, occupational therapists are increasingly coming to understand their field of “occupational science” as embracing “a unique understanding of occupation that includes all the things that people do, the relationship of what they do with who they are as humans and that through occupation they are in a constant state of becoming

different” (Wilcock, 1999: p. 2).<sup>85</sup> When OT scholars refer to “occupational engagement,” therefore, they are implying a holistic consideration of four dimensions: “Engaging in occupation requires that we perform activities and occupations (*doing*) that meet the needs of both ourselves (*being*) and others (*belonging*), that we can learn from and build upon through time (*becoming*)” (Hitch, Pépin, & Stagnitti, 2014: p. 258). Wilcock (2007) argues that these four dimensions are essential to human survival and health, the ultimate concern of her discipline. The fact that so many describe making it through architecture school as an act of “survival” is not always hyperbolic. Indeed, participants in this study identified various existential challenges throughout their education. Thus, in the case of the present study, “architecture” can be considered an occupation in both senses of the term. However, I am particularly interested in how architecture functions as an occupation in this OT sense—as encapsulating one’s activities, sense of self, their perceived potential for growth, and their sense of belonging to various communities. How aspiring architects survive as such therefore depends inherently on sustaining meaning in terms of *doing, being, becoming, and belonging*.

Referring to Wilcock’s “Occupational Perspective on Health” (2006), scholars have recently begun developing provisional definitions for each of the four core concepts of “occupation” with the understanding that, “The interdependent dimensions of occupation are omnipresent in human experience, not just theoretical, mysterious concepts” (Hitch et al., 2014, p. 254; see also Ennals, Fortune, Williams, & D’Cruz, 2016). Wilcock herself developed her

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<sup>85</sup> According to Wilcock (1999, p. 1), “Occupational therapists are in the business of helping people to transform their lives through enabling them to do and to be and through the process of becoming.” My understanding of architectural education aligns with this definition, making the case for its broader applicability to education in general.

perspective of “occupation” by drawing upon a wide range of sources, including the work of archaeologists, anthropologists, evolutionary scientists, epidemiologists, and philosophers. Based on their analysis of how these dimensions have been applied in OT literature, Hitch et al. (2014a; 2014b) determined that, in order to be empirically useful, the dimensions must be defined in several ways: individually; in related dyads; and ultimately as a holistic foursome. For instance, one develops a sense of who they are (*being*) in relation to whatever activities they are partaking in (*doing*), in relation to their peers and the broader disciplinary community (*belonging*), and in relation to their potential future vis-à-vis their occupational pathway (*becoming*). Hitch et al. (2014a) propose the following provisional definitions for each dimension:

*Doing* is the medium through which people engage in occupations, and the skills and abilities needed for *doing* accumulate over time. *Doing* involves engaging in occupations that are personally meaningful, but not necessarily purposeful, healthy or organized. *Doing* involves being actively engaged, either overtly (i.e., observable, physical) or tacitly (i.e., mental, spiritual). *Doing* follows broadly similar patterns across the population, and humans are able to adapt their *doing* to greater and lesser degrees according to circumstance.

*Being* is the sense of who someone is as an occupational and human being. It encompasses the meanings they invest in life, and their unique physical, mental, and social capacities and abilities. Occupation may provide a focus for being, but it also exists independently of it during reflection and self-discovery. *Being* is expressed through consciousness, creativity and the roles people assume in life. Ideally, individuals are able to exercise agency and choice in their expression of *being*, but this is not always possible or even desirable.

*Becoming* is the perpetual process of growth, development, and change that reside within a person throughout their life. It is directed by goals and aspirations, which can arise through choice or necessity, from the individual or from groups. Regular modifications and revisions of goals and aspirations help to maintain momentum in *becoming*, as does the opportunity to experience new or novel situations and challenges.

*Belonging* is a sense of connectedness to other people, places, cultures, communities, and times. It is the context within which occupations occur, and a person may experience multiple *belongings* at the same time. Relationships are essential to *belonging*, whether they be with a person, place, group, or other factor. A sense of reciprocity, mutuality, and

sharing characterize *belonging* relationships, whether they are positive or negative (p. 241-2).

According to Hitch et al. (2014b), “The four dimensions of occupation...are all at play simultaneously, at the levels of individual, group and population.” Moreover, “Each dimension is interdependent on all others, and their actions cannot be understood in isolation” (p. 258). Finally, empirical findings from a range of studies revealed “a continually shifting pattern of prominence...where one or more dimensions were foregrounded at different times and spaces within occupational engagement” (p. 259).

As these definitions emerged from a review of OT literature (and there is no consensus on definitions even within that field), I adapted them for the purposes of this study while borrowing their relational framework.<sup>86</sup> I present my own provisional definitions for these four dimensions at the end of the following chapter and include a transcript passage diagrammed with these terms as an example of how I used them analytically.

### 3.6 Precedent Studies: Epistemological and empirical inspiration

Throughout the course of this research project, a number of published studies served as valuable precedents in the process of directing my initial questions towards a viable empirical study.<sup>87</sup> Most were useful in terms of operationalizing our shared epistemological orientation, often offering particular concepts or conceptual frameworks that proved relevant to interpreting my context. In certain instances, I borrowed methodological particularities from these studies, typically other dissertations or those that included sufficient detail in their discussion of methods.

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<sup>86</sup> Hitch et al. (2014a) even mention the need to incorporate and alter OT’s understandings of these dimensions based on “the work of other disciplines” (p. 241).

<sup>87</sup> Readers familiar with the architectural design process will note that I am borrowing the application of the term “precedent” from the way that designers typically borrow conceptual orientations or design solutions from successful projects already completed.

Following the previous two sections, which were organized around broader perspectives and concepts, I end this chapter by briefly reviewing a few of these studies in order to better contextualize my work within certain interdisciplinary trends of contemporary research.

In *Storylines*, Elliot Mishler (1999) interprets transcripts of his interviews with five craftartists to explore the notion of narrative identity. Encountering Mishler's work convinced me of the value of in-depth interviews and life history for exploring issues of identity and agency through narrative inquiry. The ethical tone taken by the author and evoked in the participants' stories resonated with the general orientation of my study. But most significant was Mishler's conception of interviews as a dialogical form of praxis and "identity performances." For Mishler, the researcher plays an important role in narrative construction, in prompting participants as an attentive listener, and later in interpreting and writing up the study. Despite stretches of the text focusing on theoretical and methodological topics, Mishler relates every section back to his personal research interests, always drawing heavily from the first-person voices of his participants. The way he weaves together his research findings with methodological and representational concerns served as an inspiring model for how to incorporate these aspects into a coherent and compelling manuscript.

In her dissertation titled *Designing Landscapes and Creating Selves*, Tammy Tasker (2011) applies Herrenkohl and Mertl's (2010) Vygotskian critique of education and their "broader understanding of learning" to investigate two University of Washington Landscape Architecture studios. Tasker uses primarily ethnographic methods to observe students and faculty in their social environments, interpreting their educational activities. Using a range of lenses and data collection modes, but particularly interested in the ways that studio learning is physically and

socially constructed around various participant structures, her study ultimately “reveals how people engaged in learning a discipline change at the level of ‘self.’” Thus, there are clear overlaps between our studies, including the institutional setting and our shared interest in education as a process of self-transformation.<sup>88</sup> Exposure to Tasker’s project early in my research design phase allowed me to formulate my project as somewhat of a tangential extension or follow-up study. Namely, I broadened the developmental timescale under consideration as a way of complementing her focus on the social, pedagogical, and material processes of studio learning at a single point in a program’s curriculum. This prompted me to design my study around storytelling and cross-sectional cohorts of participants to access a wider timeline of experience, from current students to recent graduates and emerging professionals.

Another study that overlaps significantly with my study is David McClean’s (2009) dissertation, *Embedding Learner Independence in Architecture Education: Reconsidering design studio pedagogy*. From his experience as an architecture educator, McClean noticed that design studio pedagogy—for all its valuable attributes—was not particularly adept at accommodating a diverse range of learners. He also questioned whether the dominant pedagogy of studio education was cultivating independent learners as it intended. To spark change in teaching approaches and bring them up to date with contemporary theories, he produced a case study of an undergraduate architecture program in Scotland. Using a longitudinal study, McClean studied several cohorts of students at the beginning and end of the program curriculum. Yet, rather than examine learning by testing students’ competencies and skills, he used a mixed methods

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<sup>88</sup> Despite both disciplines sharing studio as their signature pedagogy, the distinction between architecture and landscape architecture is potentially significant given their dissimilar pedagogical lineages (see Fisher, 2006).

approach to capture student attitudes and compare them against the perspectives of several leading British pedagogues. In this way, McClean and I approached “education” in a similarly holistic fashion. In fact, although the title suggests a focus on studio pedagogy, his determination to listen to students necessarily expanded the scope of his study to non-academic topics—in a way, setting the groundwork for studies like mine that employ life history and narrative to broaden the scope of inquiry. Having discovered this dissertation after my study was close to completion, I was still able to consider how our studies might be understood as comparative or complementary. Despite our different contexts and research questions (but probably because of some overlap between our approaches and agendas), significant commonalities emerged in terms of the architecture student experience. Notably, we both found that approaching education more holistically suggests a strong need for: 1) clarifying and articulating learning objectives and processes, 2) accommodating and embracing diversity in terms of learner types, perspectives, and motivations, 3) better mentorship and support services for students, and 4) more opportunities generally for students to reflect on their learning throughout the curriculum.

The next precedent project was a large-scale study that used a cross-sectional approach to examine how students navigate higher education in the field of engineering. Eventually generating over 80 publications, the Academic Pathways Study (APS) was a multifaceted and comparative project that sought

to understand how students identify themselves as engineers, how they overcome the significant challenges during the educational process, and how they transition into a professional engineering career (Sheppard et al., 2004: p. 1).

The focus on how identities transform over the course of each student’s education led the project’s team of researchers to examine confidence, commitment, community, challenges, and

skill development in the hope of developing a “navigation chart” to “identify, analyze, and illustrate the various observed pathways to becoming an engineer” (*ibid.*: p. 12). One of their many interests was “how a person makes oneself into an engineer and how one is made into an engineer” (Stevens et al., 2008: p. 355). Ethnographically following students at four institutions across the United States and into the professional sphere, the research team developed an analytical framework called “becoming an engineer” that involved three related dimensions tracked over time: “disciplinary knowledge, identification, and navigation” (*ibid.*: p. 357). They found that “different students navigate differently through engineering,” and that “dramatic changes take place across critical transitions through obligatory passage points” (*ibid.*: p. 357). There were also significant differences between institutions, in terms of “navigational flexibility,” how they officially identified students as engineers (which affected how students identified themselves and their commitment to the field), and generally different cultures at each school when it came to the relationship “between being at the particular university and being in engineering” (*ibid.*: p. 361). Although the scope of my project is significantly smaller, affecting the design of the study, I was able to borrow certain concepts and approaches given the overlapping orientation and research interests.

Studies of “occupational identity,” like the APS and the present study, owe their theoretical foundations to decades of research on the topic. Becker and Carper’s seminal work (1956a, 1956b) investigated students in three different disciplines (engineering, physiology, and philosophy) to ascertain when and how they developed attachment to particular occupational identities. In studying “adult socialization” they looked into how and when students decided upon and entered their field; how and when they adopted the ideology particular to the field;

how and when they became invested in the profession; and the role of skill development, peer and mentor networks, and academic structures in this process. While their specific research approaches and findings are obviously quite dated, Becker and Carper's work continues to provide researchers like myself with touchstone concepts for studying issues related to professional development and occupational identity. In defining the term "occupational identity," Becker and Carper (1956b) are careful not to ignore the significance of one's actual professional title:

Kinds of work tend to be named, to become well-defined occupations, and an important part of a person's work-based identity grows out of his relationship to his occupational title. These names carry a great deal of symbolic meaning, which tends to be incorporated into the identity.... The title, with its implications, may thus be an object of attachment or avoidance... (p. 342).

Embedded within an occupational title, they argue, are a set of norms and values that relate to the discipline's culture, as well as societal expectations:

Occupational identities contain an implicit reference to the person's position in the larger society, tending to specify the positions appropriate for a person doing such work or which have become possible for him by virtue of his work (*ibid.*, p. 346).

Occupational identity also includes how aspiring professionals psychologically related one's past, present, and future self, as well as the practical ways in which they navigated institutional and social networks:

An occupational identity tends to specify the kinds of organizations, and positions within them, in which one's future lies, the places in which it is appropriate, desirable, or likely that one will work (*ibid.*, p. 344).

Changes in social participation in the course of graduate work lead to the acquisition or maintenance of specific kinds of occupational identities. Such participation affects identity through the operation of the social-psychological mechanisms of development of interest in problems and pride in skills, acquisition of ideologies, investment, the internalization of motives, and sponsorship (Becker & Carper, 1956a: p. 289).

The results of this study suggested certain patterns across disciplines in terms of processes but substantial differences tied to the distinct character of each discipline—i.e., its titles, methods, ideologies, etc. Thus, the lasting significance of this research addresses the individual narrative identities of aspiring professionals and their relation, and ultimate conformity, to the social identities of the disciplines at large. This discipline-specific approach to the topic, and specifically how ideology and social networks play key roles in the process of constructing occupational identity, provided an epistemological foundation for studies of more contemporary contexts, including my own.

Another set of studies that proved to be particularly influential examined transformative aspects of learning among students and graduates of undergraduate engineering programs in South Africa by Jenni Case and her colleagues (Blackie, Case, & Jawitz, 2010; J. M. Case & Jawitz, 2004; J. M. Case & Marshall, 2004; J. M. Case, n.d., 2007, 2013; Jawitz & Case, 1998; D. Marshall & Case, 2010). The particular concerns of engineering education in South Africa led these researchers to draw primarily upon Margaret Archer's social theory and her concept of morphogenesis as embodied by participant narratives. My distinct context meant that, although I used a different set of theoretical tools, I also attended to contextual factors of culture and discipline, while focusing on the individual learner as the subject of inquiry. Using various modes of narrative inquiry to examine how students enter and navigate their education, this body of work offers a useful model for how an interest in student development can inform a wider set of research projects, including longitudinal studies, theoretical explorations, even autoethnographic explorations.

The last project I found particularly influential was a dissertation project by Marietta Anne Barretti (2003) that studied how undergraduates in the field of social work adopt professional roles and identities, interested specifically in the influence that field work experience and role models have on that process. Through interviews and classroom observation, followed by a series of qualitative and quantitative analyses, Barretti concluded that:

Students continually journey through three sets of nonlinear phases or cycles throughout their education. Phase I, Expectation-Revelation includes program entry expectations, previous encounters with social workers and social problems and perceived proclivities to the profession—all of which influence initial experiences and the construction and selection of role models. Phase II, Refutation-Negotiation includes the discovery of contradictions and ambiguities in the educational process including tensions between class and field, 'negative' role models and the low status of the profession, all which prompt the development of coping strategies. Phase III, Adaptation-Affirmation, includes the gratifying internal adjustments and self-awareness that result from compromises between ideal and real (iv-v).

This three-part model of nonlinear phases resonates with the results of my study, since, in many ways, the experience of architecture and social work students can be understood as a continuous journey through three, non-linear phases or cycles in their education: Expectation-Revelation, Refutation-Negotiation, Adaptation-Affirmation. This set of dualisms that one encounters and engages with over time reflects the ongoing, problematic, and oscillating character of the experience of becoming an architect. Since I discovered this work while already well into my writing stage, this suggests that socialization follows similar patterns across different professional fields, particularly when the two fields in this case each are characterized by widespread cultural myths and misconceptions. Finally, the fact that social work pedagogy has centered predominantly around authentic field work longer than architecture means that Barretti's study may be increasingly relevant to educators in my field.

## Chapter 4: Methods

Any thorough study of how people change in college would seem to require an analysis of the narratives that students use to develop identities—a sense of what they were like before they started and who they became during the course of their education.

-Hanson, 2014, p. 8

### 4.1 Chapter Introduction

Borrowing perspectives, concepts, and approaches from the literature reviewed in the previous chapter, I designed the present study as an exploration into ways of eliciting, representing, and interpreting the varied experiences and broad timescale that constitute an architectural education today. This work adds to the growing collection of case studies on occupational identity and narrative, as informed by “broader” conceptualizations of education as a meaning-making process. In this chapter, I outline the methodological basis for my research design and ensuing methodological decisions, beginning with my research questions as an orienting frame. Following a rationale for the study’s particular brand of qualitative inquiry—a case study that involved in-depth interviews across cross-sectional participant cohorts—I discuss the various procedures I followed, from case study context selection, participant selection, and interview design, to data collection and transformation.

Interested as I am in the ways that individuals navigate the process of becoming an architect, the research questions in Table 2 provided me with a way of orienting the project’s methodological approach and research design decisions. As research methodology and the framing of research are “intimately intertwined,” I was compelled to work back and forth between my interests and emerging understandings of the topic, the traditions and epistemological orientations associated with interpretive research, and the phrasing and content

of my research questions (Candy, 1991: p. 452).<sup>89</sup> For instance, using a life history-format in terms of interview design allowed me to collect “data” that could be simultaneously deep (by yielding a significant level of richness in terms of content from each participant) and broad (by prompting a wide diversity of content in terms of experiential timeframe and social/pedagogical contexts). This matched the understanding of architectural education, as discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, as a holistic experience of occupational engagement, extending over time and social/pedagogical contexts. To take into consideration a variety of perspectives along various points of this developmental timeline, I designed the study around cross-sectional cohorts of participants.

- What meaning do aspiring architects attribute to their professional education and the experience of navigating its constituent components and contexts? In other words, how is education represented as a meaning-making process? In particular, what meaning do participants make of the transition and distinction between school and the workplace?
- How do participants assemble this content into a coherent narrative that gets incorporated into their life history? In other words, how is narrative employed as a meaning-making strategy? To what degree do participants’ narratives evoke an interrelated understanding of what they do, who they are, who they are becoming, and their place within the architectural community?

*Table 2: Research questions*

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<sup>89</sup> Candy (1991, p. 432) outlines the following “assumptions commonly shared by interpretive theorists”:

(1) the belief that any event or action is explicable in terms of multiple interacting factors, events, and processes, and that ‘causes’ and ‘effects’ are mutually interdependent; (2) an acceptance of the extreme difficulty in attaining complete objectivity, especially in observing human subjects who construe, or make sense of, events based on their individual systems of meaning; (3) the view that the aim of inquiry is to develop an understanding of individual cases, rather than universal laws or generalizations; (4) the assumption that the world is made up of tangible and intangible multifaceted realities, and that these are best studied as a unified whole, rather than being fragmented into dependent and independent variables (in other words, context makes a difference); and (5) a recognition that inquiry is always value laden and that such values inevitably influence the framing, bounding, and focusing of research problems.

As the phrasing of these research questions suggests, I was interested in how participant narratives evoked a sense of the meaning-making properties of *both* education and narrative. This study was not, therefore, designed, to assess the quality or impact of a particular educational program or model. Nor was it designed to interpret activities or experiences directly through observation. Wolcott (1994) distinguishes between “three major modes through which qualitative researchers gather their data: participant observation (experiencing), interviewing (enquiring), and studying materials prepared by others (examining)” (p. 10). This project lies mainly within “enquiring,” making interviews the most obvious starting point for its data collection mode.<sup>90</sup> Narrative inquiry then provided me with an approach for collecting, interpreting, and retelling participants’ stories.

I entered this project with my own perceptions of architectural education having been shaped mainly by my personal experience. Therefore, I was familiar with the psychological and practical challenges presented to aspiring architects. I also had a good sense of why so many passionate individuals enter the field, hoping that it will provide them with the expertise to “make an impact” and subsequent personal fulfillment. What was less clear—because there is generally so little open dialogue on this topic, not to mention empirical studies—and what therefore drove my curiosity was how different aspiring architects engaged with these challenges in such a way that they remained committed to their career path without succumbing to cynicism or apathy. What I ultimately found was that participants (each of whom worked hard to construct and maintain their architectural identities) developed various strategies to position themselves

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<sup>90</sup> To varying degrees, the project did include all three modes. My own *experience* as a student and instructor informed my understanding, whereas I *examined* program documents to get a sense of the cultural and pedagogical context of my case study.

within “architecture” as comprising all four, interrelated dimensions of occupational engagement—*doing, being, becoming, and belonging*. The narratives presented in the following chapter reflect these efforts by participants to make meaning of their architectural education.

#### 4.2 Case Studies and Selection of Case Study Context

In general, case studies focus on a limited contextual scope to attain a certain level of depth or specificity in terms of research findings:

Case studies are used to explore, describe or explain the case of interest and facilitate the development of context-rich knowledge and understandings about everyday life events. Equally they are valuable for understanding events, social activities and occurrences that happen very rarely (Brown & Baker, 2007: p. 82).

The term does not imply a particular methodological approach, however.<sup>91</sup> Case studies are commonly used by researchers seeking to describe and interpret how human experience relates to social, cultural, and/or institutional contexts. Findings from case studies are intended to be of broader applicability, yet it remains up to the reader to determine the transferability of findings to their own context (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Yin, 2004). Focusing on individuals housed within a single graduate program allowed me, and indeed compelled me, to consider the “data” of interview transcripts not as isolated or generalizable voices but as produced through some interaction between individual participants and their particular context. The point is that there is value to the data collected by studying only one context, although that data should not be taken

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<sup>91</sup> Sisson (2011), Sandford (2013), Becker (2013), Hsieh (2010), Mason (2012), Godsey (2011)—all recent dissertations designed as case studies to examine student and/or professional identity transformation—employ a variety of methodologies, methods, and theoretical sources. This suggests that, despite all having small participant pools (n=4-15), a range of approaches currently exists for how to study this topic. Depending on their particular interests and orientation, some of these researchers provided contextual detail, while others remove contextual labels altogether. I chose the former approach because I consider identity development and transformation to be inherently tied to one’s sociocultural/institutional context.

as being generalizable to *any* context.<sup>92</sup> A descriptive study such as this can thereby complement larger data sets (i.e., of national scope) as well as evaluative studies (i.e., from single courses or course sequences).

The next chapter outlines the academic context of this case study, in order to position the case as potentially typical, paradigmatic, or unusual along various contextual vectors (see Flyvbjerg, 2001; Kvale, 1996). It is presumed that findings could be interpreted in relation to a range of dimensions, scales, and other contexts, including: disciplinary and academic classification (architecture vs. non-architecture, professional and pre-professional vs. general/liberal arts), global and regional culture (North American vs. non-North American contexts, the Pacific Northwest vs. other regions), program culture and curriculum (University of Washington vs. other Masters of Architecture programs), level of education (graduate vs. undergraduate), time period (contemporary vs. historical), as well as methods and methodology (interviews/narrative/case study vs. other possible approaches to examine these topics).

Although Chapter 5 presents the program context in detail, it is worth including here a brief discussion of the selection of the case study as a methodological issue. More than a just matter of convenience, my own placement within this institutional context meant that I had previous connections and commitments to the community, as well as a deeper curiosity and interest in understanding how “education” transpires here as compared to elsewhere. As a site of inquiry, I consider the University of Washington’s Masters of Architecture (M.Arch) program to be paradigmatic in certain ways. It stands as one variety of the integrated model of

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<sup>92</sup> Also, like McClean (2009), I would argue that because I possessed “intimate knowledge of the school...a cross-school comparison would have yielded no discernible advantage, and would have proved considerably more complex to implement” (p. 139).

professional education that, as I discussed in Chapter 2, is moving towards becoming the standard for architecture programs in North America. Most students complete the program having had some opportunity to develop and experiment with their professional identity. It is clear from program reports and my interviews with students, alumni, and faculty that students graduate with an expectation that they will secure a job in the field and eventually become licensed professionals. According to accreditation reports and exam results, the vast majority of students complete the program on time and a relatively high percentage of graduates do, in fact, pass their registration exams and obtain licensure. Thus, the program can be seen to represent the conventional model of architectural education in the sense that it not only seeks to produce, but succeeds in producing, future architects.

I decided to focus solely on an M.Arch program for several reasons. First, it is the primary professional architecture program at the University of Washington, and I was specifically interested in studying how individuals developed *professional* identities within school and shortly after graduating.<sup>93</sup> Second, being an accredited program means that the UW M.Arch program shares certain qualities and curricular objectives with other M.Arch programs in North America in order to satisfy accreditation requirements. At least on this continent, M.Arch programs have become architecture's chief professional degree-granting unit, superseding the Bachelors of Architecture over the past several decades. Finally, an additional benefit relates to the fact that,

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<sup>93</sup> Whereas a student in a pre-professional (undergraduate, liberal arts) architecture program might be considered to be "becoming an educated person," a student in a professional architecture program is "becoming an architect" more explicitly and consciously. I am not implying that this distinction is mutually exclusive, only that a professional program's objective is more oriented towards producing future architects than non- or pre-professional programs. Indeed, participants I interviewed who had attended architecture program at both level admitted that they approached graduate school with certain *professional* expectations and commitments.

for studies exploring learning in higher education, research on graduate-level education is disproportionately smaller than research on the undergraduate level, adding value to the findings of this study particularly for those outside the field of architecture.

#### 4.3 Cross-Sectional Cohort Design and Participant Selection

In order to capture various perspective along that timeline of education and across the school-to-work divide, I selected participants to fall within three cross-sectional cohorts. “Cross-sectional” studies are designed to capture moments across a developmental timeline by grouping participants into cohorts based on their position along this vector (see for instance Atman et al., 2008; Stevens, O’Connor, Garrison, Jocuns, & Amos, 2008). In this case, I grouped participants into cohorts of *current students*, *recent graduates*, and *emerging practitioners* (see Table 3). The cohort groupings were intended to help elicit perspectives from different timepoints in the educational process, with a shared program context, rather than to facilitate comparisons within each group.

An alternative approach would have been a longitudinal study. Several projects on similar topics have used this method to examine transformation of particular individuals over longer timeframes and to consider longer-lasting recollections of learning (see, for instance, Baxter Magolda, 2001; Case, in press). As Case points out, her participants were “able to look back on their university experiences from some distance, and also to locate these within the broader developments in their working and personal lives” (p. 3). For the present study, a longitudinal design would have required a longer timeframe for data collection, especially given my interest in capturing the transition from academic to professional identities. So although the results from this study cannot be used to compare narratives from a particular participant across multiple

timepoints, the composite narrative in Chapter 6 is meant to represent multiple and particularly salient developmental points along the student-to-architect timescale. Furthermore, extending this project into a longitudinal study using follow-up interviews with the same participants remains an option in the future.

Cohort number	Number of participants	Cohort name, description	Interview format used
1	4	emerging professionals: graduated 6-18 months prior to interviews, currently employed in architecture firms	1-on-1, in-depth (3 interviews each)
2	4	recent graduates: graduated 1-2 months prior to interviews, currently seeking employment	1-on-1, in-depth (3 interviews each)
3	4	current students: currently between first and second year of 3-year track of M.Arch program	focus group (2 sessions)

Table 3: Participant cohorts and details

The primary participants of this study were eight alumni of the UW M.Arch program. These participants were grouped into two cohorts of four participants each (see Table 3). The first cohort of *emerging professionals* graduated six to eighteen months prior to participating in the study, and each of these participants was employed in a Seattle-based design firm at the time they were interviewed.<sup>94</sup> The second cohort of *recent graduates* had completed their degree requirements within two months of their participation in this study. Following the recent submission of their thesis projects, each of these participants was in the process of seeking employment in an architecture firm at the time they were interviewed. A third cohort consisted of *current students* between their first and second year of the three-year track, at the beginning

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<sup>94</sup> The intention was that these participants were to have been out of school and working professionally long enough to identify as “emerging professionals.” The wide range of time between graduation and interviews was a result of two of the participants in this cohort having submitted their thesis projects in June, as opposed to most graduates who do so in December.

and end of the Summer Internship Program. For this third cohort, I decided to use a focus group format for reasons discussed later in this chapter.

The decision to focus primarily on recent graduates and emerging practitioners reflects my interest in how individuals construct meaning across the entire graduate school experience and including the transition between academic and professional contexts. Following graduation, individuals are able to look back on graduate school as a comprehensive experience, make sense of how it fits within their life history, and even draw out specifically transformative moments through reflection. This makes a certain degree of separation between experiences and reflective activity beneficial. As Krupinska (2014) notes, “The [architecture] curriculum can be so extensive that students hardly have time to reflect on what they have learned. Students may register the knowledge, but they may only be conscious of it later on in their studies or during practical work after their education” (53). In addition to the primary participants, interviewing current students and faculty allowed me to incorporate other perspectives on the program’s features and cultural character. The purpose of including Cohort 3, for example, was mainly to consider on the impact of the Summer Internship Program as an episode within the broader curriculum and timeframe of professional development.<sup>95</sup>

The sampling method I used for selecting participants can be characterized as “convenient” sampling, given that I had some relationship with each participant at the time of

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<sup>95</sup> In retrospect, the study design may have benefitted by including interviews with professional mentors/supervisors of participants in Cohort 1 for additional context regarding architectural education in the workplace. This is something that future studies might consider incorporating into study design.

selection.<sup>96</sup> I also employed “snowball” sampling in the sense that I selected participants within and across cohorts in an attempt to collect a range of participant voices. In part because this project was conceived partly as a “pilot study” designed to raise questions and identify areas for further research on architectural education, I determined that it was important to attain a certain breadth of voices within the single program context to understand how aspiring architects of different backgrounds and social identities construct meaning and exercise agency. Thus, within each participant cohort, an attempt was made to achieve a balance in terms of program track and gender, as these traits would presumably shape their academic experiences and professional identities.<sup>97</sup> Other identifying factors that seemed to contribute to participants’ narratives were raised by participants themselves throughout the course of their interviews. These included characteristics like: age (several had previous careers before entering architecture), ethnicity (three of the participants were visibly non-White), cultural background (two participants were born abroad, while two others were first-generation Americans), and living situation (i.e., those who commuted to campus shorter versus longer distances, those who were married and/or cohabitating versus single, those raising children, etc.).<sup>98</sup> In the hope of retaining a certain level

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<sup>96</sup> Prior to being recruited to participate in this study, I had some direct interaction with every participant—whether they were a student in a discussion section I had taught, they had taught with me as a graduate student assistant, we had taken a course together as students, or we simply knew each other through our participation in various Departmental or College events. For faculty participants, I had taught with/for three of the four and had interacted with the other previously. Ostensibly, my prior relationships with each participant allowed for a greater level of trust. Faculty were either aware of my motivations for researching this topic or at least felt comfortable asking, and graduate students and alumni were familiar with my connection to their program as well as our shared background as M.Arch students. In some cases, I held contact visits with participants prior to interviewing them as a way of helping them decide whether or not they wished to participate. See Appendix for Recruitment Letters and Consent Forms.

<sup>97</sup> Each interview cohort was comprised of two females and two males, and Cohorts 1 and 2 included two participants from each program track. Cohort 3 was entirely from the three-year track, as these are the students selected to participate in the Summer Internship Program following their first year in the program.

<sup>98</sup> For those factors in this list that I was aware of prior to recruiting a given participant, I took them into consideration to achieve overall balance and diversity. There were certainly factors that I did not consider, however. For instance,

of anonymity, I did not correlate narratives from a given participant to these particular identity traits in all cases. Yet, I accepted *a priori* that such factors would ultimately play a central role in each participant's narrative identity. For instance, it is reasonable to presume that becoming a *female* architect be considered distinct in certain ways from becoming a *male* architect—or that becoming an architect is always a gendered experience. But, rather than foregrounding these factors myself, I was determined to allow each participant to define the contours of their story.

While not achieved intentionally, another characteristic of participants that ranged somewhat within each cohort was academic achievement. Participants included students who consistently received accolades from the department in the form of awards and scholarships, as well as those whose achievement was recognized through other, less tangible means. I did not recruit students who dropped out of the program or who were otherwise considered “unsuccessful” students. While some participants voiced a greater level of dissatisfaction with the program and its assessment of relative academic achievement than others, all of those in Cohorts 1 and 2 ultimately graduated with plans to continue on the career path. Presumably, their retrospective decision to attend architecture school and enter/remain in the profession outweighed any remaining doubts or regrets.

In the case of Cohort 3, current students all from one program cohort, I achieved additional participant variety by selecting based on the type of firm to which they were placed as part of the Summer Internship Program. Using the firm assignments provided to me by the program administration, I recruited one participant who had been assigned to a small firm

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it turned out that none of the participants in the study were of the variety (like myself) who had decided they wanted to be an architect any earlier than entering an undergraduate program.

designing mostly residential projects, two participants assigned to larger firms doing mostly commercial/institutional/public projects, and one assigned to a research-based institution. This provided a range of internship experiences for our focus group discussion, such as the kinds of design projects they worked on and their professional roles and responsibilities.

The four faculty interviewed were also selected to achieve a diverse range of perspectives. I recruited them based on identifying traits, such as gender, academic rank, and age. Because faculty interviews were conducted after alumni interviews, I also sought those faculty who were mentioned by participants in Cohorts 1 and 2 during multiple interviews as having significantly shaped their experience in the program. Between the two male and two female faculty members, and based on my interactions with each of them prior to this study, I attempted to recruit voices that represented a wide spectrum of “practitioner” and “academic” identities. Although all four are licensed architects *and* tenured faculty members (this hybrid combination being fairly typical at this university), only one actively practices and could reasonably be considered a “practitioner,” whereas the others nominally maintain their licenses. Two of the faculty participants have taught at UW for over thirty years, whereas the other two arrived and were granted tenure within the past decade. In this sense, they fall into two generational identities, “elder” and “younger.” Finally, faculty participants were selected based on their close connection to the graduate student experience. Three of the four participants teach both lecture/seminar courses and studios in the M.Arch program, and all four are consistently involved with teaching and mentoring students during Thesis studio. As a group, their academic service duties include serving on the M.Arch curriculum committee and the M.Arch admissions committee, advising graduate students, as well as recurrent roles within the

program administration. Thus, they could each speak to the program more broadly than just a classroom or studio perspective.

#### 4.4 Interview Design and Interviewing Procedures

As Seidman (2013) notes in his introduction to *Interviewing as Qualitative Research*, “The purpose of in-depth interviewing is not to test hypotheses.... At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience” (p. 9). He adds, “If the researcher’s goal...is to understand the meaning people involved in education make of their experience, then interviewing provides a necessary, if not always completely sufficient, avenue of inquiry” (p. 10). The kinds of narratives this project intended to “capture”—recollections and reflections of experience over several years of one’s life—required they be elicited by the researcher/interviewer, as they are not “naturally occurring” (Riessman, 2008). For soliciting and eliciting stories from participants, in-depth interviewing is the most appropriate, and therefore the most common, mode of data collection for researchers interested in accessing meaning-making:

Telling stories is essentially a meaning-making process. When people tell stories, they select details of their experience from their stream of consciousness...In order to give the details of their experience a beginning, middle, and end, people must reflect on their experience. It is this process of selecting constitutive details of experience, reflecting on them, giving them order, and thereby making sense of them that makes telling stories a meaning-making experience (Seidman, 2013, p. 7).

Although my analytical strategies ultimately did not directly engage with this perspective, I entered interviewing cognizant of Mishler’s (1986) conception of the methodological activity as fundamentally dialogical:

[A]n interview is a form of discourse. Its particular features reflect the distinctive structure and aims of interviewing, namely, that it is discourse shaped and organized by asking and

answering questions. An interview is a joint product of what interviewees and interviewers talk about together and how they talk with each other (p. vii).

Thus, everything considered “data” in this project—including the transcripts, profiles, and memos—were produced through, and inevitably reflect, this dialogical process. For analytical purposes, I have frequently omitted my voice as interviewer in this dissertation—but this should not be construed as though I am disappearing from the narrative production process. Rather, this decision reflects my primary interest—which I believe to be of greatest interest to the architectural community—in examining and representing the *content* of such narratives, as opposed to the linguistic structure or cognitive mechanisms behind their production.<sup>99</sup>

I interviewed all participants in the semi-private settings of a classroom or office on campus (with the one exception being a coffee shop located conveniently near a firm). For Cohorts 1 and 2, the emerging professionals and recent graduates, each primary participant was interviewed three times, and an attempt was made to schedule all three interviews within a 7-10 day window (however, in some cases, interview sessions took place up to two weeks apart). Recorded portions of each interview lasted between 60 and 100 minutes, and interviews were recorded using a digital voice recording device. During the interviews, I took notes on the general

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<sup>99</sup> As scholars have noted, there is a whole set of ethical issues inherent to narrative- and interview-based research, many of which are paradoxical or otherwise inescapable. These range from epistemological (stemming from the act of interviewing itself) to representational concerns related to writing up this form of qualitative research. For instance, an interview is predicated on certain power relations and the sharing of personal information. There are inherent issues of positionality (the relationship of the researcher to the research subject and research participants) and closure (having to impose limits on the content of what gets discussed, what gets interpreted, and what gets represented in the final manuscript). Finally, there is always the potential for misrepresenting participants in the process of retelling their stories. It therefore becomes crucial for researchers to make it clear to their readers that interviewing is inherently a dialogical process and that narrative inquiry is collaborative. Furthermore, interpretation occurs along a series of fronts. As Riessman (2008) notes, even after interviewing, narratives continue to be co-constructed by researchers *and* readers.

course of the discussion, noting topics that might be significant enough to revisit, as well as non-verbal gestures and background noise sources to include in the transcripts.

For Cohorts 1 and 2, protocols were designed based on a three-part, semi-structured model for interviewing in education contexts, as developed by Seidman (2013; see Appendix for Interview Protocols, Cohorts 1 and 2). The first interview covered the participant's life history—specifically their decision to pursue architecture, their perceptions of architecture before entering any architecture program, and what led them to graduate school at the University of Washington. The purpose of the second interview was to gather details of each participant's experience in the UW M.Arch program, such as formative courses, supportive individuals, moments of doubt, and so forth. Whereas the protocols for the first two interviews were identical for all participants in Cohorts 1 and 2, the third interviews were tailored significantly to each participant. In this final interview, each participant was prompted to reflect upon their overall experience in the field of architecture, to clarify or offer greater detail to particular topics raised in the first two interviews, and to describe what issues they believed to be most pressing currently facing the profession. In general, all three interview sessions were similar in length for each participant in Cohorts 1 and 2.

For Cohort 3, comprised of the four current students who had recently completed their first year in the 3-year program, I decided to use a focus group format for several reasons. These particular students were existing members of a sub-community within the M.Arch program, and a particularly socially cohesive cohort by their own description and mine. This shared background and understanding suggested the potential for a more communal, dialogical, and informal

interviewing experience. Because the content of their interviews was to be less focused on their individual life histories and more about the immediate experiences of their first year and summer internship positions, I decided this difference in, and narrower focus of, subject matter was more conducive to a community-based dialogue. In other words, a focus group session meant that they could share with each other their experiences, rather than simply telling personal stories to me, the interviewer.<sup>100</sup>

For Cohort 3, I scheduled the two focus group sessions to coincide with the Summer Internship Program, with one occurring between the end of their first year and the start of their internships and the other occurring between the end of the summer and the beginning of their second year. The protocol for the first session included topics like academic background (reasons for entering architecture and attending UW specifically), memorable experiences from their first year, and general expectations heading into their internship (see Appendix for Interview Protocol, Cohort 3). The second session covered their internship experiences and the value they believed that it added to their professional development. Whereas each participant in Cohorts 1 and 2 had 3-4 hours of total transcription, Cohort 3 totaled roughly 2.5 hours of transcript from two focus group sessions, with the reduced amount of interview time reflecting their relative lack of experience within the program curriculum. Focus group sessions followed a certain conversational pattern, with each participant first responding to questions sequentially, one at a

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<sup>100</sup> The decision to employ a focus group format also offered the possibility of considering the pros and cons of each mode of data collection for future research of this kind. On the one hand, the focus group sessions elicited significantly less depth from each participant, resulting in no individual narratives. On the other hand, a certain cohort narrative was produced comprised of various lines of consensus and difference. And the focus group session allowed participants to construct and engage with this narrative in a more dialogical way.

time. Throughout the course of each session, however, the conversation would open up, with participants exchanging in more conversational dialogue and occasionally prompting each other on some topics.<sup>101</sup>

I interviewed each of the four faculty participants once, with interviews lasting 65 to 165 minutes. Faculty interview protocols were also semi-structured, with topics including their academic and professional background, their perception of the UW M.Arch program and their involvement in it, as well as their knowledge of other M.Arch programs (see Appendix for Interview Protocol, Faculty). I asked them to describe the departmental culture and its strengths in relation to other programs with which they were familiar, as well as the kinds of traits that students who have typically succeed in UW's program. Finally, as with student and alumni participants, faculty were asked to discuss what they believed were relevant issues and challenges facing the profession today. These questions were primarily intended to define and contextualize the cultural character of the architecture department and M.Arch program. In fact, I asked certain questions to every participant (including faculty, alumni, and students) meant to elicit answers that could serve as perspectives on the program's cultural character.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Every student and alumni participant heartily thanked me for the experience of being allowed to be interviewed, as it gave them an opportunity to reflect on a challenging but utterly transformative time in their lives—and also start thinking about their future trajectory. This appears to be a common occurrence for researchers employing in-depth interviewing, especially in educational contexts (see Seidman, 2013).

<sup>102</sup> Rather than transcribing faculty interviews in their entirety, I used a less time-consuming technique: while listening to the recording, interview questions and topical themes were noted with a time stamp. Then, individual quotations were transcribed that were considered particularly relevant for the aim of understanding and conveying the program context.

#### 4.5 Data Reduction and Transformation

My experience with “what to do with the data” was very much an exploratory process. The nature of my project directed me to experiment with several approaches, ultimately cobbling together an iterative approach to fit my aim of representing and clarifying, more so than explaining, what it means to become an architect. In part because I wanted this project to be most compelling and digestible to an architectural audience largely unfamiliar with qualitative inquiry of this kind but accustomed to storytelling, I tended towards the more “everyday” analytical and representational strategies. For guidance on moving from transcripts to manuscript, I turned to scholarship on qualitative data analysis and found Seidman (2013), Wolcott (1994), and Dey (1993) to be most relevant and useful.<sup>103</sup> In addition, I was drawn to McCormack’s approach of “storying stories” (2004), which she presents as an alternative to the problematic approach that “fractures transcripts” into smaller segments of text and then recombines into “themes which move across stories, across people, and across contexts” (p. 231). As McCormack argues, through this traditional process, the “authentic” and individual voices of participants tend to get lost.

Table 4 lists the operations I ultimately took to “transform the data” from transcripts to this manuscript, using a collection of data reduction, analysis, and interpretation strategies.<sup>104</sup> As soon as possible after each interview, I transcribed each recording, including perceptible

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<sup>103</sup> Although I do not consider my approach to be interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), I also found Larkin, Watts, and Clifton’s (2006) description on the two complementary commitments of such work particularly instructive. These are to: 1) inductively understand and “give voice” to the concerns of participants, then 2) interpret, contextualize, and “make sense” of their concerns in relation to relevant theories.

<sup>104</sup> This full set of operations applies to data collected from Participant Cohorts 1 and 2. Data from Cohort 3 interviews followed a similar set of operations, but due to the focus group format did not elicit individual profiles or memos.

interviewer and interviewee spoken content, as well as background noises, utterances, and length of pauses. Immediately after transcribing, I printed and read through the interview transcript, marking and bracketing passages of various narrative themes from the protocol (Operation 1), as well as passages that expressed particular narrative strategies (Operation 2). Such strategies included: inner voice; reflexive voice; recollections as dialogical exchanges; editorial asides; passages with vocal emphasis of some kind (change in volume, pacing, accent). Finally, I noted lines of discourse that could benefit from follow-up questions in the third interview protocol. Because participants were replying to questions from my protocol, their responses tended to be organized around the following themes: entry into architecture; formative experiences; program context and structure; personal identity and transformation; struggles, transitions, and turning points; investment and membership in architecture. Marking these narrative themes in the transcript allowed me to identify passages that appeared “orphaned” from the rest of the passages related to that theme and later relate one participant’s discussion on a given thematic category across different passages/interviews. This allowed me to better report on the actual content related to each these themes (i.e., which experiences *were* formative? what *kinds* of struggles?).

1. Identified passages related to the following narrative themes: entry into architecture; formative experiences; program context/structure; personal identity and transformation; struggles, transitions, and turning points; investment/membership in architecture
2. Identified passages employing the following narrative strategies: inner voice; reflexive voice; recollections as dialogical exchanges; editorial asides; passages with vocal emphasis of some kind (e.g., change in volume, pacing, accent)

3. Identified narrative themes and patterns *across* participants and cohorts, wrote section on perspectives/concerns by cohort
  4. Constructed first-person participant profiles: reduced/reordered transcripts; shared this version with participants; incorporated their feedback and reduced further
  5. Wrote third-person memos for each participant based on profiles
  6. Constructed composite narrative structured around major content themes, incorporating passages from every participant
  7. Identified occupational dimensions across all transcripts—doing, being, becoming, and belonging (d+b<sup>3</sup>)
  8. Interpreted findings from analysis, reflected on broader significance
- \*Note: operations were not entirely linear/sequential but followed an iterative process

*Table 4: Operations involved in data reduction and transformation*

Following the last interview with each participant, and having marked each of their transcripts, I wrote a memo of initial reactions related to my research questions. I also reviewed the content themes from each marked transcript, then entered these sequentially into a database. Following the final interview for each cohort, I wrote another memo of preliminary thoughts, reflecting specifically on the diverse and common aspects within each cohort. I would later refer back to these memos after further operations, checking whether I had covered all relevant aspects in analysis and interpretation. Following all data collection, I produced a revised memo for each cohort (Operation 3), considering how participant narratives related to one another and emphasizing the particular concerns from each cross-sectional perspective.

The major operation involved in reducing the data to a descriptive account consisted of constructing “profiles” for each participant of Cohorts 1 and 2 (Operation 4, Participant Profiles

included in the Appendix). This method, borrowed from Seidman (2013), involves transformation of the “raw” transcript by iterative reduction and minor reorganization,<sup>105</sup> a “winnowing process” aimed at generating a compelling story from the direct voice of each participant,

to find and display coherence in the constitutive events of a participant’s experience, to share the coherence the participant has expressed, and to link the individual’s experience to the social and organizational context within which he or she operates (Seidman, 2013, p. 123).

In this process, as the researcher, I used “a close reading plus judgment” to consider what is most meaningful from each participant’s narrative (Seidman, 2013, p. 120; see also Marshall, 1981).<sup>106</sup>

Constructing such profiles is meant to elucidate participant narratives from the transcript as an expression of each participant’s voice and life history, “cleaning up” the raw transcripts so as to be shared with participants and readers, as well as for use in my ensuing analytical procedures.<sup>107</sup>

In the crafting of profiles, I made both intuitive and aesthetic judgments. In general, I left passages in the order in which they were spoken. However, in cases where participants returned to a particular topic at a later point in the transcript, I relocated these passages to aid in the legibility of the profile as a narrative. Speech and passages omitted included my voice as the interviewer, those that I deemed to be inconsequential to the emerging narrative, as well as those that may isolate the identity of the participant to a single, recognizable individual. Interruptions in the dialogue, verbal fillers (i.e., ‘um’, ‘y’know’, etc.), or asides were represented

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<sup>105</sup> Another approach I found useful to reference in this process of moving from interview transcript to interpretive story was McCormack’s (2000a, 2000b).

<sup>106</sup> As Seidman points out, in reference to Mishler’s work, “The story is both the participant’s and the interviewer’s. It is in the participant’s words, but it is crafted by the interviewer from what the participant has said” (p. 122).

<sup>107</sup> All the while, I tried to keep in mind that “data are tainted with an analytical or interpretive cast *in the very process of becoming data*” (Wolcott, 1994, p. 16, emphasis in original), and that such descriptive accounts as participant profiles have already undergone “implicit analysis” and “implicit interpretation.”

by ellipses. Ultimately, each participant's profile was narrowed down to 10-20% of their total transcript length. Once I considered this reduction process relatively complete, I shared each profile with respective participants to confirm that their profile reflected their voice and their recollection of interviews, and that their identities were sufficiently ambiguous. Based on participant feedback, I made several minor changes to the profiles to improve clarity. Each participant responded to these requests and approved their profiles and pseudonyms.

Following the reduction of data into profiles, I wrote a third-person memo for each participant (Operation 5), distilling the content of their profile to two to four paragraphs. Whereas the profiles were more or less intended to express each participant's "voice," these third-person memos expressed what I as a researcher considered to be the most significant content themes and arcs from each participant's narrative connected to my research questions on the meaning-making and transformative aspects of architectural education. Returning to content themes across all participants and cohorts, I began constructing a composite "collage" of narratives (Operation 6) organized roughly by chronological moments in the educational timeline that related to themes of navigation, agency, identity, and transformation. From the previous data reduction operations, I had identified key transcript passages to include or reference directly in the dissertation, specifically those that evoked some aspect of the educational experience using a particular narrative strategy. Up to this point in the process, most of my attention remained focused on a combination of description and interpretation. As defined by Wolcott (1994), the aim of the former is "to stay close to the data as originally recorded...repeat[ing] informants' words so that informants themselves seem to tell their stories," whereas the aim of the latter is "to make sense of what goes on, to reach out for

understanding or explanation beyond the limits of what can be explained with the degree of certainty usually associated with analysis” (pp. 10-11). My analysis conducted to that point, therefore, had employed a set of intuitive operations borrowed from narrative inquiry in an attempt to convey architectural education within my case study context as a coherent story.

To offer another interpretive perspective, I decided to return to the transcripts for a more structured content analysis of the data “that proceeds in some careful, systematic way to identify key factors and relationships among them” (*ibid.*: p. 10). In this case, I marked transcript passages that I interpreted as expressions of each of the dimensions of occupational engagement—*doing, being, becoming, and belonging* (Operation 7).<sup>108</sup> As discussed in Chapter 3, having stumbled upon this set of concepts late in the analytical stages of my project, I surmised that it offered a useful secondary lens through which to analyze and interpret the data. Borrowing from Wilcock (1999, 2006), Hitch et al. (2014a; 2014b), and Ennals et al. (2016), these four dimensions are considered a unified framework of how individuals engage with their “occupations” and thereby construct meaning from their daily activities, commitments, aspirations, and sense of self. Hitch et al (2014) argue that, “Each dimension is interdependent on all others, and their actions cannot be understood in isolation” (p. 258). They go on to claim that, “A holistic perspective must acknowledge both the individual dimensions and their interdependence on each other” (*ibid.*: p.

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<sup>108</sup> I prefer not to use the term “coding” for this process, as it connotes a particularly formal and decontextualized set of operations that I do not think matched the spirit of this project. In contrast to “coding,” in my approach I remained cognizant throughout of each participant’s life story and my role as an interviewer in their production. Thus, I subscribe to Mishler’s (1999) contention that coding in narrative research presents significant limits:

The purported strengths of coding procedures restrict their relevance and applicability for studying how individuals construct meaningful accounts of their lives.... This radical decontextualization of discrete exchanges removes from view and analytic attention exactly those textual strategies that provide coherence and organization to respondents’ accounts as representations of their lives (p. 23).

259). Understood in this way, I considered “architectural education” as a particular form of “occupational engagement” and sought to elucidate how it operated as such.

Because these terms emerged from occupational therapy (OT), I first needed to operationalize them for the purposes of my study. Thus, I developed provisional definitions for each dimension (see Table 5 below). I used definitions presented by Hitch et al (2014a) as a basis but revised them to account for the emerging findings from this study, as well as my general understanding of architectural education from literature and personal experience. In this sense, my method for developing the conceptual definitions below fell closer to the “grounded” end of the spectrum. Continuing on, I worked back and forth between these definitions, analysis, and interpretation as a way of exploring how this framework might operate in architecture’s educational context. Ultimately, this exploration confirmed my initial impulse to identify particular transcript passages as “content-rich,” as I discuss below.

**Doing** includes active engagement in meaningful activities over various timescales, from the singular to the recurring. In this study, *doing* most frequently refers to the broad set of mental, social, and physical activities related to architectural design, whether in an academic studio or a professional office environment. But it also covers activities associated with the rest of the graduate curriculum—such as researching a topic for a paper—as well as extracurricular or day-to-day activities—such as going to happy hour or commuting to school. In an office context, *doing* also includes tasks not directly related to architectural design, such as marketing activities.

Most of the time, references to *doing* were made in the first-person and in past or present tense (as in “I took a class” or “I’m working on a project”), since interview questions were directed toward the participant’s first-hand experiences. However, more general statements, say, regarding “what architects do” were common across participants, as well. Finally, statements evoking reflective or meta-reflective activity—referring to moments after some *doing* took place when participants “discovered” or “learned” or “realized” something—were

also considered *doing*, though separate from any reflective work ostensibly done through the experience of being interviewed itself.

**Being** refers to one's social and occupational identity, or who someone "is" when they adopt roles such as a student, an intern, or a licensed architect. This covers the more "loaded" identity traits—like gender or racial identities—but also seemingly mundane references to *being*—like when someone refers to themselves as "someone who likes to draw" or as someone with a particular philosophy towards the architecture profession or the design process. Personal interests, insofar as they form part of one's identity, therefore link together *being* and *doing*. And just as *doing* included "what architects do," *being* also includes general statements about "what it means to *be* an architect" or the predominant personality traits, interests, and backgrounds embodied by the architectural community writ large.

While *being* statements were often made in past tense to refer to previous states of *being*, the use of present tense—particularly when appearing parenthetically within a passage spoken in past tense (i.e., "I'm a skeptical person, so I wasn't convinced.")—evoked the perceived stability, or at least longevity, of certain aspects of one's identity.

The dimension **becoming** denotes aspects of human growth and development. It can include reflections on the past ("I became a different person") as well as aspirational futures ("I want to become self-sufficient"). In either case, *becoming* relates at least two points in time and marks a shift from one state of being to another, evoking the perpetually changing nature of identity. Most often, this is at the level of the individual—but it comprises social *becoming*, as well. *Becoming* can also evoke the provisional, conditional, and unknowable aspects of the future, in statements like "Someday, I think I'll want to..." or "I can't predict the next few years...." In statements evoking *becoming*, a speaker may express a certain orientation toward the future and their place in it (i.e., as optimistic, skeptical, or apathetic). In this sense, *becoming* is very much tied to the notion of agency, as it evokes how individuals feel more or less able to author their growth and define their future selves.

*Becoming* utterances are logically made in the future tense more consistently than the other dimensions. However, they can also be made in past or present tense to refer to, say, one's past or ongoing development (i.e., "By the time I graduated, I was a different person").

**Belonging** refers to the relative sense of connectedness one feels at various scales of community. While *belonging* is intimately tied to one's social and environmental context, it is not simply a description of that context. Rather, one's social context gets evoked through reference to sensations and relationships that mark entrance into communities (acknowledged

or otherwise) and passing between communities (when one crosses or runs up against thresholds). In this way, *belonging* can illuminate access and barriers to membership in various communities along an individual's life history. Statements of *belonging* thus frequently evoke feelings of relative acceptance or ostracization. Of course, *belonging* can also take on a more active dimension, when speakers themselves formed communities. This usually occurred through a process of identifying others with shared interests or experiences and then coalescing into a social group in some way to deepen their pre-existing spirit of *belonging* with one another.

Just as *belonging* can be permanent or temporary, given or chosen, the communities we belong to can range in terms of their qualities and impact. Some of these communities might operate at a deeper level on one's identity—as in being a middle-class American, a Millennial, or belonging to the broader intellectual and professional community of aspiring architects. Others might be more obvious to us, explicitly forming part of our identity, like being a member of a program cohort, some subset of that cohort, or joining the American Institute of Architects. Finally, just as the term “community” connotes particular people and groups as well as places, *belonging* might refer to ways that individuals feel connected to the environments they inhabit. For instance, in describing specific places they might “escape” to by themselves to concentrate or reflect, participants were suggesting that these places supported their sense of *belonging* (or lack thereof) to a particular environmental context.

*Table 5: Definitions of the four dimensions of occupational engagement, as developed through, and operationalized within, this study*

Using these definitions, I read back through each transcript and attached one or more of the dimensions to particular phrases based on my emerging definitions of each. Then, I created a table to document the content of these phrases, their location in each transcript, and which dimensions I had associated with them. After analyzing the first cohort of participants, I began analyzing cross-dimensional content, or what themes emerged at the intersection of two dimensions (borrowing from Hitch et al's [2014b] notion of “dimensional dyads”). For example, what topics were discussed in the passages coded with both *being* and *belonging*? As the authors who assembled definitions of these terms to be used as a conceptual framework have argued, the interactions between dimensions are often more telling and more compelling than

dimensions in isolation. Therefore, using the definitions of *doing*, *being*, *becoming*, and *belonging* above, I took the next analytical step of interpreting the content of transcripts passages that included the intersection of two dimensions of occupational engagement (see Table 6). This notion of dimensional “dyads” is borrowed directly from Hitch et al (2014b). It allowed me to better understand, interpret, and convey the ways in which dimensions interact with one another as an interrelated framework.

***Doing ↔ Being***

These dimensions come together around the notion of “occupational identity” or one’s sense of self as determined by participation in meaningful activity insofar as it relates to one’s personal interests and skillsets. Participants spoke of “finding their voice” or the process of self-discovery achieved through design and scholarship activities. They also described cultivating a philosophy towards design in terms of how the values they hold shape their personal design process. Some participants reflected on how shifts in their identity have been *informed by* changes in habits, on the one hand. In other words, they realized that they had become someone else *because of* the kinds of activities in which they were engaged. On the other hand, participants noted that shifts in their identity *demand* changes in habits, meaning that in order to become someone else, they felt *compelled to* engage in different kinds of activities or approach them differently.

***Doing ↔ Belonging***

The notion of collaboration, in its most general sense, forms the backbone of the intersection between doing and belonging. This includes the sense of togetherness that one acquires through studio socialization via shared design activities (including but extending beyond collaborative design projects and group critiques), shared points of cultural reference, shared interests, and shared project or course objectives. Participants reflected on their tendency to oscillate between working collaboratively and in isolation, in order to balance their needs both for wellbeing and productivity.

Many participants discussed how they compared and distinguished themselves from their peers based on their work habits (presumably, they were also being compared and distinguished from and by others, as well). At times, these comparisons even came to determine some participants’ sense of self-worth. Also at this intersection is the value of support from peers and mentors during times of struggle, insofar as the struggle is tied to the activities one is doing. Finally, several recent graduates noted their desire to “unplug” from or escape the architecture social circle—either while still in school or once they graduated—by spending time alone or with individuals outside the design community.

***Doing ↔ Becoming***

In this dyad, participants spoke of how activities and experiences related to and shaped their future plans and future self. Adjustments were made to their identity horizons based on new experiences that changed their perspective on, say, the design process. Many reflected upon how instances of learning or “epiphanies” related to their sense of self occurred primarily while engaging in activities and experiences. They also spoke of times throughout graduate school when they were consciously “trying on” occupational identities or thoughtfully deliberating on possible future identities and activities.

***Being ↔ Becoming***

How does one’s current position and sense of self relate to their future plans and future sense of self? Imagining oneself in a future position and believing it is possible to get there meant having the confidence to do so. Participants reflected on how shifts in their identity that occurred during their education demanded a recalibration of their future self. They also noted times when it became clear to them how much they had changed throughout the course of graduate school. Finally, this dyad includes the shift for participants in Cohort 1 who were gradually transitioning from primarily student to primarily practitioner/intern identities.

***Being ↔ Belonging***

At this intersection is the notion that one’s identity and personal interests are related somehow to one’s peers and professional community. Participants discussed searching for and finding like-minded members of the architecture community (i.e. those with shared values) in school and the profession. They also described moments of feeling ostracized or stigmatized for their point of view or title (i.e., “intern”), and how this affected their wellbeing. Also in this dyad is the value of peers and mentors for offering support during existential crises. In the case of a few participants, their views toward collaboration as extending to the psychological realm formed a central aspect of their worldview.

***Becoming ↔ Belonging***

Lastly, this dyad includes reflections on how changes to one’s self occur in relation to peers and one’s sociocultural context. This includes shared points of reference between peers in terms of career objectives, as well as the communal experience of transforming together (although this change was often most noticeable by those outside the community or social circle). It also includes the value of role models and mentors in terms of advising future plans and personifying identity horizons. Entering a community of professionals/practitioners was described as a significant point in a participant’s life history. However, for some who were already practicing, they had yet to sense this membership. Some participants reflected on how their future goals and future selves related to their broader community of practitioners, marking them as relative insiders or outsiders. Finally, there was a sense from some participants that self-discovery, one of the key aspects of their education, was in fact a collaborative project that required active dialogue and participation with others.

*Table 6: Dyad content of occupational engagement dimensions*

Finally, I considered those passages that I had marked with content expressing three or four dimensions. It quickly became clear that these passages were those that I had already identified as particularly “content rich” in past readings. Thus, as a methodological framework, the application of these dimensions simply reinforced those passages that I had already considered particularly evocative. Although it did help illuminate parts of narratives that had fallen “under the radar,” the application of this framework was also an instance of post-rationalization, providing me with a way of explaining *why* such passages read so meaningfully to begin with. In Table 7 below, I include dialogue from the very end of Monica’s last interview as an example of the ways that I identified the four dimensions of occupational engagement within an interview transcript. In terms of content, it is a transcript passage that is a particularly revealing in terms of themes related to architectural identity, structured as it is around a relationship between all four dimensions.

*J: Last time, you mentioned feeling like you’re between communities. And I guess, one way to interpret that would be what you were talking about before, [between being in] school and [being] an architect. You’re in the on-the-job training mode. But is that what you meant?*

*M: I sort of meant that I don’t feel like a hundred percent in either camp. [laughs, pauses] That even once I get my license, I’m not sure I’m gonna feel like ‘an architect.’ [laughs]*

*So it wasn’t in-between temporally?*

*No, I mean it like permanently between! [laughs] I mean, there is also the temporal side of it. But I felt like that before, not [only at] this particular juncture. Like in school here, I felt like I was part of the broader university community and at times felt like I was well-entrenched in the departmental community. But also [pauses] just felt like I wasn’t quite as there as other people. That I either wanted or was*

*Being  
Becoming*

*Belonging*

looking for ties to other things that weren't just *this*, in the professional creative sense.

*Doing*

*So it was a conscious decision? I mean, I guess there's the other side of it, of not feeling like you could enter the—*

No, it's always been there! I could just like be a hundred percent 'Yay, architecture! Yay, architects! I am one!' But it doesn't feel like a natural fit to say that or buy into it to that degree, I guess. [aside] Maybe I just like making things hard for myself! [laughs] But I don't know. I feel like I hit a wall with architecture at a certain point. And I get to that place, and then I need to go elsewhere for creative inspiration or whatever. [laughs]

*Being*

*Doing*

*But do you tend to view it more in that sense that there's this thing and you're kind of around the edge of it? As opposed to you, 'I'm redefining what it means to be an architect!'*

Well, I hope it's that! That would be great, y'know?

*But that's not the kind of day-to-day feeling that you carry around?*

Yea, it's hard—I mean, it feels really inflated to say that I'm doing that. It's like, 'I'm doing all these really lofty things.' I definitely don't think that on a regular basis! [laughs, pauses] I feel like I approach the discipline and the profession in a way that makes sense for me, and I hope that I encounter people that feel similarly or similarly different about it. It's not that we even have to have the same approach, but just finding people out there who are doing something different than the party-line of how you do architecture. And I did find people like that here! Other students or faculty members who had a vein of dissonance in whatever they were doing. So I don't feel like I'm the only one or like a 'trailblazer' or anything like that. But it's something that you're doing, and you don't really know what you're doing, and you're just kind of trying to do it to do what feels right for you, and you hope it gets you somewhere productive and interesting. And if it's productive and interesting for other people then that's even better! But I don't know. Maybe I should have a more conscious understanding of what I'm doing, [laughs] but I feel like I don't really.

*Doing + Being  
Belonging*

*Belonging + Doing*

*Being*

*Doing*

*Belonging*

*Becoming*

*Well, it just sounds like you're talking about it as if it's a gut feeling of comfort and what feels right as opposed to writing down a manifesto of 'This is my project, and*

*I'm going to fulfill it in these ways.' It's more of just kind of a pragmatic going-about-it.*

Yea. And there are lots of days where I feel like it's not going well! [laughs] And other days where I feel like, 'Yea, ok. I made the right choice and I am getting something out of it.' But it's a definite cycle.

*And do you feel like you'll just have to live with that—?*

I don't know! I keep wondering if I'm gonna have an epiphany moment where I'm like, 'I know exactly what I want to do, and how I want to do it!' And sometimes I think that would be really nice, but I don't know if it's gonna get to that point. I mean, even when I took this job, I had applied to so many places. I sent out like thirty applications before I sent this one out. And none of them I was really excited about. I mean, they were all places that would be 'good' to work, y'know?.... But this was the first one that felt like any sort of match, that felt like something where I knew I could contribute something that wasn't being contributed. [pauses] And I think I'll stay here as long as I feel that way. But if it stops feeling that way, then it'll be time to do something else. But I have no idea what that would be! [laughs] And I really wish I did! 'Cause I have no five year plan! Y'know, 'Where do you see yourself in five years?' I'm like, 'I don't know. Employed hopefully. Hopefully.' [laughs]

*Becoming*

*Belonging  
Doing*

*Becoming*

*But you still mentioned that if and when you get licensed and perhaps feel totally comfortable with construction documents and construction management and everything, you'd still wouldn't feel—you'd feel how? You said you wouldn't really feel like you're an architect, in some sense.*

Yea! I don't know. 'Cause there are things about it that I probably still won't like, y'know? There are things about the job that I think kinda suck! [laughs] And I know a *lot* of talented people that have a lot of great ideas that started off in architecture and have gone completely different directions. And part of me wonders like, 'Did they have the right idea? Why am I force-fitting myself into something that isn't a perfect fit?' But maybe they wouldn't have left if somebody that shared their perspective had stayed. So yea, I guess I do have this broad, vague, somewhere-in-the-future desire to expand what it means to practice in some way. In some very-small-corner-of-the-world way. [laughs]

*Being + Belonging*

*Becoming + Doing*

*But you don't want to fit into what you think a typical architect is, so that's perhaps why you'd feel uncomfortable about being titled?*

I don't wanna drink the Kool-Aid, y'know? I don't wanna wake up one day and be the entity that I was criticizing ten years ago. I do want a paycheck! [laughs] I do wanna continue to be employed. But yea, I don't know. I think it's just gonna be largely about finding avenues on which I can actively be that and challenge it at the same time. And I feel like I'm working for someone now that is doing that, in some ways. And I feel like there's something to learn from that, and that I can sort of take what she has done and learn from that and figure out what that might mean for how I could do something similar.

*Being + Becoming*

*Being + Doing*

*Belonging*

*Doing + Becoming*

*Table 7: Diagrammed dialogue from transcript of Monica's final interview*

## Chapter 5: Case Study Context

The accredited M.Arch degree program educates students already grounded in the liberal arts and sciences to become registered, licensed architects who assume enlightened, responsible, and imaginative roles in society. Design studio projects in the M.Arch program are often set within urban environments in the Puget Sound region and respond to and foster its distinctive sense of place. In addition, many studios focus on issues surrounding the making of architecture—tectonics, design/build, wood and metal craft—this reflects a strong craft heritage in the region. Studios frequently include a significant community service component, reflecting the department’s commitment to the people of the city and the region.

We value our presence in a multidisciplinary college within a public research university, and critically engage our city as a physical, cultural and ecological system.... We advance the discipline and practice of architecture by educating architects who are responsive and responsible to society, culture and the environment.

University of Washington, Department of Architecture’s Profile,  
from the ACSA’s “Study Architecture” website (2016)

### 5.1 Chapter Introduction

In this chapter, I describe the setting for the present study: the M.Arch Program housed within the Department of Architecture in the College of Built Environments (CBE) on the University of Washington’s (UW) Seattle campus.<sup>109</sup> In elucidating this nested context, my intent is to imply how it may structure the experience of architectural education in ways specific to this place and time.<sup>110</sup> On the other hand, the experience of becoming an architect must be understood in relation to the broader national and global traditions and trends of architectural education as described in Chapter 2. Thus, the cultural character of the program should be considered as embedded within both its geographic location and its disciplinary position.

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<sup>109</sup> Data collection took place from 2014 to 2015.

<sup>110</sup> Despite similarities owing to accreditation requirements and pedagogical lineage, architecture programs in North America can vary quite drastically from one another—across time and place—in terms of their cultural character. In fact, the National Architectural Accrediting Board (NAAB) has explicitly encouraged the preservation of each program’s unique character against any normalizing effects their standards and requirements might impose (see ACSA, 2013).

A distinct characteristic of this particular architecture program, and one that it frequently projects, is its strong relationship to place. The primary objective of the program is, first and foremost, the training of graduates with the potential to contribute the local architecture firms. In return, the firms supply the program with, among other things, a sense of purpose and legitimacy. The two communities are thus intertwined in a cooperative arrangement, meaning that architecture's processes of social reproduction within this context follow a decidedly localized pattern.<sup>111</sup> And, as noted by its faculty, the program's position of relative geographic insulation fosters teaching and learning practices that tend to be based more on time-honored architectural and regional values than innovative trends. In this sense, the program's pedagogical character parallels the region's spirit toward design. Here, regional values such as material craftsmanship and community service are manifested in the program's ethos, curriculum, and pedagogy. Students may consider handsaws to be as valuable tools in their education as a laser cutter.

Partway through this study, the departmental chair announced he would be stepping down after eight years in that position. A new chair was appointed in June 2015, immediately following the department's centennial celebration. With my research already underway, this sequence of events prompted lively faculty discussion among the faculty in terms of the program's historic trajectory. Just as with individuals, institutional and academic communities construct and maintain narrative identities to make sense of and connect their past, present, and

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<sup>111</sup> As one alumni participant put it: "There's this real tight, messy set of relationships between the practice and the study of architecture in Seattle."

future into a coherent, if fragmented, whole. These community-scale identities then inform and make legible the identities of their constituent individuals.

Certainly, not every case study includes such a detailed description of its context. But I believe it is necessary for such an interpretive project to acknowledge the significance of contextual factors and attempt to articulate them somehow. As the researcher, this chapter reflects my interpretation of the cultural milieu co-produced by participants of this study, meant to allow readers sufficient detail to interpret for themselves the narrative content presented in Chapter 6 alongside my interpretations. Put another way, if Chapter 6 is meant to illuminate agency and experience at the student level, this chapter is focused on structure and context at the institutional level. Finally, this chapter is meant to offer a sense of how the UW program's culture is situated within the broader disciplinary context presented in Chapter 2.

## 5.2 Regional and Institutional Context

The University of Washington is located in the city of Seattle, the Pacific Northwest's primary urban and cultural hub. The region is home to several globally significant industrial-manufacturing corporations, most notably Boeing and Weyerhaeuser, as well as a growing number of software- and web-related corporations, joining Microsoft and Amazon. The University's strong connections to local industry are evident in its popular aeronautics, computer science, and bioengineering programs. Associated with growth primarily in these industries, metropolitan Seattle is currently undergoing substantial urban development and increased density. The impact of this change has generated much consternation and heated public discussion of gentrification, affordability, and preservation of the city's historic fabric. For its part, the College of Built Environments has strategically positioned itself as moderator and

interrogator in the regional and global discourse on what makes 21<sup>st</sup> century cities livable, as well as what kinds of graduates are needed to plan, design, understand, and manage them.<sup>112</sup>

In the wake of the 2008 global economic downturn, the local architectural community has recovered and is now flourishing. Several Seattle-based design firms are internationally renowned, primarily for their environmentally conscious approaches to regional modernism as evidenced in various civic-oriented projects.<sup>113</sup> Critics consider the Pacific Northwest's architectural aesthetic to be a combination of formal modesty and an appreciation for quality craftsmanship.<sup>114</sup> The Bullitt Center—designed by the Miller|Hull Partnership and purported to be the greenest commercial office building in the world (see Figure 2)—and the Chapel of St. Ignatius (see Figure 3)—an example of architect and UW alumni Steven Holl's careful consideration for the “haptic realm” of architecture—are perhaps most representative of these dual characteristics of contemporary Pacific Northwest design.<sup>115</sup> Providing some contrast to this

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<sup>112</sup> The following excerpt from the CBE Dean's message reflects this strategic positioning:

As our world changes, we know that innovative thinkers and collaborators are vital to the needs of our increasingly urban lives. Thus, our goals are simple—to produce graduates who will lead the industry and contribute to the creation of smart inclusive communities; and to pursue research that addresses solutions to the issues of urbanism, globalism and sustainability. In practice, this means our faculty are teaching students the foundations of art, history, theory, craftsmanship and technical skills, while challenging them to explore their creative ideas. To be capable, prepared professionals, we provide our students with extended opportunities to work in the field—partner projects with industry, government and community make our students well-rounded problem solvers who know how to work collaboratively (UW CBE, 2016).

<sup>113</sup> Three Seattle-based firms have won the national AIA Firm Award since 2003: The Miller|Hull Partnership in 2003, Olson Sundberg Kundig Allen Architects in 2009, and LMN Architects in 2016. Several other firms who have received this recognition also have offices in Seattle.

<sup>114</sup> Miller's *Towards a New Regionalism* (2005) lays out the basic principles of Pacific Northwest regional design. Note that this was written by a celebrated local practitioner, who went on to serve as the Chair of UW's Architecture Department from 2007-2015. Another local practitioner describes the region's approach to design as such:

The best Northwest architecture falls under the category of really great background buildings. We don't really do 'splash!' and the reason is simple: the weather. We have to keep the rain out and that tends to make our structures more like flannel shirts and Gore-Tex jackets than flashy runway ensembles (van der Veen, 2016).

<sup>115</sup> The Bullitt Center is also a literal connection between UW's architecture program and the local design profession, as it was designed by the Miller|Hull Partnership with assistance from the Department's Center for Integrated

approach, firms from beyond the region have recently left more formally daring marks on the city, including the Central Library designed by the Office of Metropolitan Architecture's (OMA) Rem Koolhaas (see Figure 4) and the Olympic Sculpture Park by a design team led by Weiss/Manfredi Architects. My own sense, as someone who has lived in this region for decades and experienced its recent changes, is that the amalgamation of modesty, boldness, pragmatism, and whimsy reflects the region's dichotomous cultural character quite well. Indeed, critics have commented on the oddly "schizophrenic," passive-aggressive cultural politics in the region—recognized for its innovation and progressivism, on the one hand, but remarkably conservative, even neo-Victorian, on certain matters of culture, behavior, and taste (see Berger, 2009: p. 92).

Within a regional context of relative economic and architectural prosperity but relative geographic isolation, the UW Architecture Department operates as "the only game in town" in terms of offering an accredited, professional architecture program.<sup>116</sup> The relationship between the program and Seattle's professional design community is particularly salient when it comes to understanding this case study's context. The two function in a reinforcing, reciprocal loop of reproduction, one largely undisturbed by outside forces. This relative stability has its benefits and drawbacks. On the one hand, the local professional community provides the program with a tangible point of reference, a figurative open door for its graduates, as well as a source of highly qualified design instructors, guest lecturers, and project reviewers—all of which grants the program and its activities an aura of cultural legitimacy. On the other hand, it has led to a certain

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Design, now housed in it. The building itself operates as a teaching and learning laboratory for experimenting with and evaluating various sustainable building systems.

<sup>116</sup> Program faculty interviewed were each quick to discuss this matter as both a strength and a weakness, following the recent Visiting Team Report's characterization of the program as relatively "provincial."

level of stagnancy with regard to architectural discourse. As one faculty member I interviewed proclaimed, “In Seattle, we have the problem that there’s no architectural criticism in the city *at all!*” And as another contended, “We don’t have a lot of controversial discussion about architecture amongst the faculty or with students.”

The Department of Architecture, which in 2014 celebrated its centennial, is housed within UW’s College of Built Environments alongside units in allied fields, including landscape architecture, construction management, urban design and planning, and real estate. Based purely on the connotations of this particular collection of disciplines, the College’s predominant orientation toward professional practice and the cultivation of future practitioners is evident. Secondary goals might be characterized as knowledge production, community engagement, and social/environmental justice.<sup>117</sup> At the college level, students and faculty run the full gamut of Pacific Northwest phenotypes, from dress shirt and sports coat-sporting intellectuals to hardhat and overall-donning builders. Implicit in the 2009 rebranding project that renamed the College of Architecture and Urban Planning the College of Built Environments was the potential for greater synergy, cohesion, and interdisciplinary collaboration. While this remains an aspirational endeavor, continuing efforts seek to capitalize on the College’s diverse range of worldviews and areas of expertise.

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<sup>117</sup> Lest I portray the College as overly complacent in local politics, it should be noted that, at times in its history, faculty have been vocal leaders in resisting regional trends. For instance, architecture professor Victor Steinbrueck famously roused local residents sufficiently enough to block the demolition of Seattle’s Pike Place Market and Pioneer Square, helping both sites receive historical landmark status and ultimately sparking the historical preservation movement. Likewise, Richard Haag, professor emeritus in the Department of Landscape Architecture, famously preserved the towers in his design for Seattle’s Gas Works Park much to the chagrin of local politicians and neighborhood groups.

Most College and program facilities are housed within two buildings, Architecture Hall and Gould Hall.<sup>118</sup> The former, built as a venue for the 1909 Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition, is about as Classical a building in appearance as one finds in the region (see Figure 5). It faces east towards the historical center of campus. Residing across the street is Gould Hall, a Brutalist concrete structure from the early 1970s with large skylights and ribbons of windows facing north (see Figure 6). Running between the two buildings is 15<sup>th</sup> Avenue, a main north-south arterial that separates the core campus of greenspaces and plazas from its westernmost fringe where spaces become organized along the city grid pattern. Thus, the College's environmental identity straddles the border between picturesque and urban landscapes—not unlike other professional programs along the edges of the UW campus, such as the Schools of Medicine and Social Work.<sup>119</sup> At the scale of the two buildings, the odd pairing of Beaux-Arts and Modernist styles is perhaps a fitting metaphor for the M.Arch program itself, which—in terms of the approach toward design predominantly espoused by faculty and as reflected in student design work—remains reverent towards the architectural canon while espousing the Modernist tradition of minimal embellishment and simple geometry.

Studios, offices, computer labs, lecture halls, and classrooms are spread between Architecture and Gould Halls, but the primary public gathering space for the College community is in the latter. A four-story atrium known as Gould Court hosts a range of social, academic, and

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<sup>118</sup> As mentioned above, the off-campus Bullitt Center also houses departmental facilities, as do several other sites around Seattle and in Rome, Italy. However, all M.Arch students presumably graduate considering Architecture and Gould Halls as the two buildings that primarily embody their educational experience.

<sup>119</sup> Incidentally, Schön (1987) once described architecture schools as occupying a peripheral, institutional identity: "Although some schools of architecture are free-standing institutions, most exist within a university, where they tend to be marginal, isolated, and of dubious status" (p. 18).

community events—everything from design reviews, symposia, and job fairs to temporary exhibits and Friday afternoon happy hours (see Figures 7-11)—a truly multipurpose space if there ever was one. Opening directly onto Gould Court is the large and often-bustling wood, metal, and digital fabrication shop, which maintains a central location in both the spirit and spatial orientation of the program. The poured-concrete staircase, which appears to float in the middle of Gould Court, offers opportunities to gaze down into this public space, peer into the various studio spaces that are seemingly never vacant, and wave hello to familiar faces occupying on any of the above-ground levels of the building (see Figure 7).



*Figures 2 (left) and 3 (right): The Bullitt Center, the “greenest commercial office building in the world” (2013), and the “haptic” interior of the Chapel of St. Ignatius (1997) on the campus of Seattle University. Source: author.*



*Figure 4: The Central Library designed by OMA (2004). Source: author.*



*Figure 5: Architecture Hall, on the University of Washington campus. Source: author.*



Figure 6: Gould Hall, on the University of Washington Campus. Source: author.



Figure 7: Gould Court being used as a final review space. Source: author.



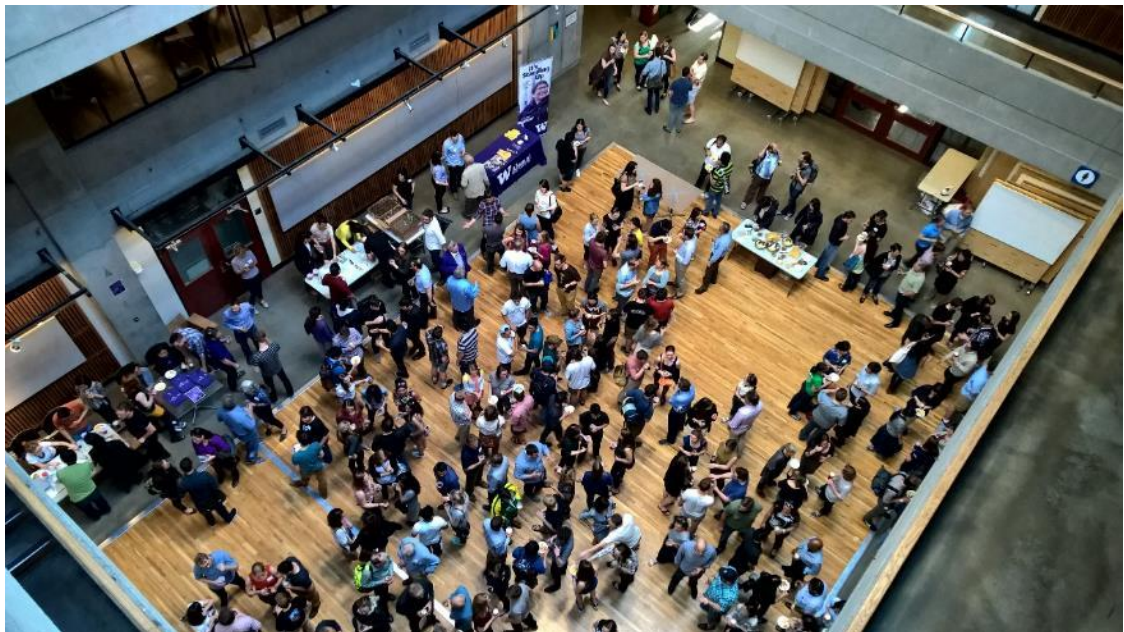
*Figure 8: Gould Court being used as an exhibition space. Source: author.*



*Figure 9: Faculty and students engaging in a “desk crit” in Gould Court. Source: author.*



*Figure 10: Gould Court hosting the CBE's annual career fair. Source: author.*



*Figure 11: Gould Court being used as a social gathering space for an alumni event.  
Source: author.*

### 5.3 Program Context

The 100-plus-year history of the Architecture Department at the University of Washington parallels broader trends of architectural education in North America—beginning with its adaptation of pedagogical features of the Beaux-Arts tradition and eventual incorporation of a Modernist aesthetic, followed by the post-World War II adoption of Bauhaus-based pedagogy. Based on his historical assessment, Professor Jeffrey Ochsner posits that every 10-15 years throughout its history, the Department has undergone a “healthy” process of incorporating new ways of teaching architecture, “stirring up” periods of relative pedagogical and cultural stability but without the revolutionary fervor experienced at points in other architecture programs’ histories.<sup>120</sup> According to Ochsner, the character of the program today can be largely traced to novel approaches to teaching developed around the 1960s. Most notably, Philip Theil believed in the value of shop-based pedagogy for educating aspiring architects, Richard Haag professed design as something “discovered, not invented,” and Victor Steinbrueck led a political movement that led to several local historic preservation districts. Individuals including the latter two faculty members are commemorated by inclusion in the College’s Roll of Honor, comprised of practitioners who made significant contributions to the built environment. Today, their names ring the interior of Architecture Hall’s large auditorium.

The Department’s Master of Architecture program was established in 1961, attaining professional accreditation in 1968.<sup>121</sup> As a nationally-accredited professional degree program,

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<sup>120</sup> Much of this historical account is from Ochsner’s public lecture “Back to the Future: Architecture at UW, the First Fifty Years 1914-1964” presented on May 6, 2015 as part of the Department’s Centennial Celebration (see also Duff, 2014; Johnston, 1991; Ochsner, 2007, 2012).

<sup>121</sup> The M.Arch is the primary professionally accredited program in the Department, which also offers: two Bachelor of Arts degrees; a one-year post-professional M.Arch degree in high-performance building; and a Master of Science

the program meets the standards set by NAAB, meaning its graduates are eligible for obtaining state licensure as practicing architects following their completion of the National Council of Architectural Registration Boards' (NCARB) Intern Development Program (IDP) and the Architect Registration Examination (ARE). The designation of accreditation imparts certain standards and constraints on the program curriculum by demanding that particular "student performance criteria" be met. However, NAAB does recognize the autonomy and distinctiveness of accredited programs, allowing for circumstances and contexts unique to each program to inform how their standards get interpreted.<sup>122</sup> Like all accredited programs, up to every eight years, the program must produce a self-study and self-assessment in advance of getting peer-reviewed for quality assurance and quality improvement by an outside team of reviewers selected by NAAB. Besides examining aspects like the quality of program facilities, policies and promotional literature, and the qualifications of its faculty, the main focus of this process is to review student work, curated by faculty, to confirm that "graduates are learning at the level of achievement" as defined by the most up-to-date NAAB criteria (NAAB, 2013).

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degree with two streams—design computing and history & theory. Although the undergraduate degree used to be accredited as a Bachelors of Architecture, since the 1990s, the M.Arch degree is now the primary professional degree offered by the Department (Ochsner, 2015). This effectively means that students who graduate from the undergraduate architecture programs must attain an M.Arch before they can be eligible for professional licensure. These shifts are reflective of the trend across North American schools of architecture, where M.Arch degrees have become the standard, B.Arch degrees are gradually disappearing, and other non- and post-professional (mainly research-focused, as opposed to design-focused) degrees are proliferating (see Waldrep, 2014; Williamson, 2012).

<sup>122</sup> As the NAAB (2013) claims:

The U.S. model for accreditation is based on the values of independent decision-making by institutions, the ability of institutions to develop and deliver postsecondary education within the context of their mission and history, the core tenets of academic freedom, and the respect for diversity of thought, pedagogy, and methodology...The NAAB Conditions for Accreditation are broadly defined and achievement-oriented so that programs may meet these standards within the framework of their mission and vision, allowing for initiative and innovation.

As with most North American M.Arch programs today, the UW program is characterized by two tracks in terms of admissions procedures and curricular structure. The two-year track is for students with prior academic backgrounds in architecture, whereas the three-year track is for students whose academic background was in a tangential field (which ostensibly could be any field, given architecture's diverse character). Three-year students matriculate for a full year before being joined by two-year students and forming a full cohort. Cohorts tend to consist of about 50 students, with roughly half from each track and more or less evenly split by gender. Student backgrounds can range substantially within each cohort, in terms of academic/professional experience and other biographical factors. However, faculty and students readily admit that the program suffers from a general lack of ethnic, racial, and socioeconomic diversity—a concern held widely by architecture schools across the country for some time.<sup>123</sup>

Departmental administrators maintain that, “Most of our students intend to become practicing architects” (Miller, Anderson, Young, & Cauce, 2013, p. 17). As one faculty member I interviewed put it:

The vast majority of students that apply to our program—I'm saying like 98 percent—they apply to our program because they are interested in practicing architecture in more or less the quote-unquote conventional sense of the word...They actually want to design buildings that get built, that serve the community. That's what most of the students come here to do.

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<sup>123</sup> The current ACSA President recently wrote: “The diversity of our schools, programs, degrees, and approaches is a strength. The lack of diversity in our student bodies, faculty, and profession is not” (Lindsey, 2016). Stevens (1998) convincingly argues how architectural education “favors the privileged” primarily by ignoring privilege (pp. 189-204). And as one of the faculty I interviewed acknowledged, “One characteristic of a lot of students who come here—and I think this is probably true of every school in the country, for the most part—is our students are the sons and daughters of engineers and doctors. They're the sons and daughters of professionals in most cases. Because they have the luxury, then, to pursue architecture.” In response to such factors, McClean (2009) argues that architecture's pedagogy must be revamped to embrace diversity in learner types, perspectives, and motivations.

This belief guides much of the program’s approach to curricular content and structure. In the Department administration’s terms, the program is designed to cultivate “students who understand their ethical responsibilities in professional practice, including obligations to the traditions of the discipline, the mores of the profession, and the needs of clients and society” (Miller et al., 2013, p. 25).<sup>124</sup> This, paired with the strong connection between the program and the local community of design professionals means that students are poised to join and contribute to this community soon after graduating. As the program’s recent NAAB Report put it, “Since most graduates stay in the Seattle area, the values and skills taught in the Department ultimately make their way back into the professional community” (Chronister, Ameri, Golden, McEnroe, & Malek-Aslani, 2014, p. 1). On average, about 50 students graduate from the program each year (Miller et al., 2013).<sup>125</sup> From faculty, student, and alumni interviews, it was clear that, for recent graduates of the program, working in a local architecture firm after graduation was considered both normal and expected, though there was no consensus as to which firm type or size is considered most desirable. Recent statistics tracking the professional status, discipline, or location of program alumni were not available; however, ARE pass rates by UW alumni averaged

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<sup>124</sup> With its goal of “preparing graduates for practice,” the NAAB (2013) makes a similar claim about the traits of any M.Arch graduate:

A NAAB-accredited degree prepares students to live and work in a diverse world: to think critically; to make informed decisions; to communicate effectively; to engage in lifelong learning; and to exercise the unique knowledge and skills required to work and develop as professionals. Graduates are prepared for architectural internship, set on the path to examination and licensure, and prepared to engage in related fields.

<sup>125</sup> The majority of each cohort completes the program and graduates within the standard timeframe, although it is common for individual students to extend their thesis projects or study abroad for an extra quarter, or to remain enrolled in order to complete dual-degree requirements.

79% from 2010-2014, with between 25 and 50 graduates passing exam divisions in each of those years (National Council of Architectural Registration Boards, 2016).<sup>126</sup>

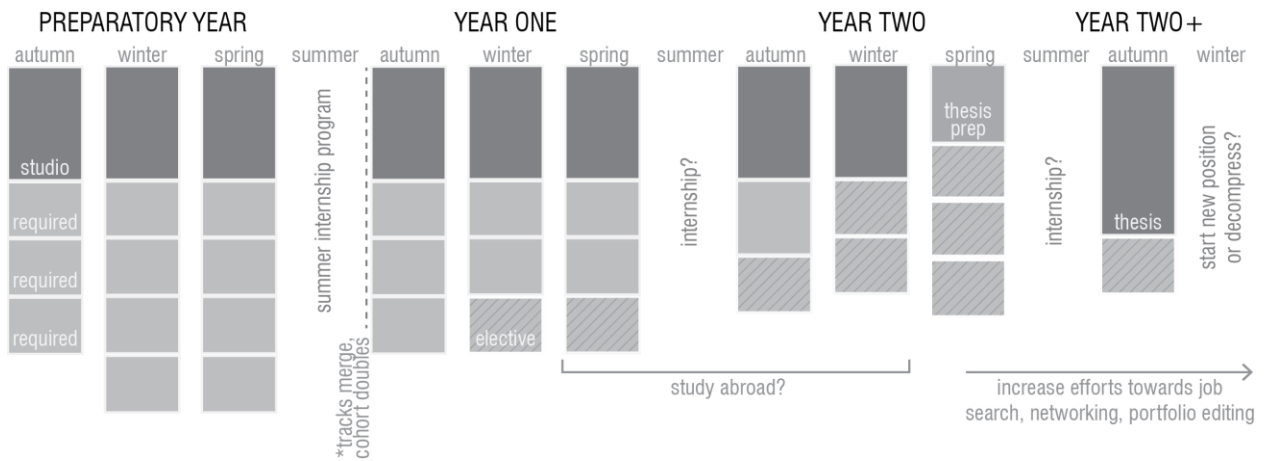


Figure 12: Typical UW M.Arch curricular structure

Being an accredited architecture program, the M.Arch curriculum is highly structured to ensure that all of its graduates receive a range of course content and are sufficiently prepared for expectations as dictated by local firms and the Internship Development Program.<sup>127</sup> Students typically take one studio every academic term along with a set of required and elective courses (see Figure 12).<sup>128</sup> Each studio is focused on particular themes or learning objectives, providing a scaffold to the overall curriculum aimed at meeting the set of NAAB accreditation requirements.

<sup>126</sup> In this sense, UW does *not* appear to match the typical trend of architecture programs. From surveys conducted in the late 1990s, the AIA estimated that only 30% of students *entering* NAAB-accredited architecture programs go on to become licensed architects (compared to 98% for medical and law school *graduates*) (Jann, 2010). More recently, Waldrep (2014) writes: “Anecdotal estimates suggest that only one-half of architectural graduates pursue licensure” (p. 269).

<sup>127</sup> The NAAB’s 2014 Student Performance Criteria (SPC) include realms of “critical thinking and representation,” “integrated building practices, technical skills and knowledge,” and “leadership and practice,” each with subcategories of criteria. According to the NAAB, the SPC are intended to “help accredited degree programs prepare students for the profession while encouraging education practices suited to the individual degree program” (NAAB, 2013).

<sup>128</sup> Because UW is on the quarter system, students typically take three 10-week studios each year. This institutional structure impacts teaching and learning in that projects are shorter but more numerous than schools on semester systems.

For instance, whereas introductory studios might focus on representation skills, ordering systems, site analysis, and the use of precedent studies, more advanced studios address the urban context, master planning, building tectonics, sustainability, and comprehensive building systems. A typical studio project early in the curriculum might be a neighborhood branch library, whereas a more advanced studio might solicit designs for an affordable housing complex for a hypothetical client with a limited budget.

As is typical in architecture programs worldwide, studio lies at the center of the curriculum and student life. The program's required "Studio Culture Policy" (University of Washington Department of Architecture, 2014) states the following:

The department assumes that the skills and the knowledge necessary for the professional practice of architecture are developed and synthesized in the studio. While there are many non-studio courses in the department's [M.Arch curriculum], their content integrates with the work done by students in the design studio, either in direct support of specific studio projects, or indirectly by fostering an ethos of professionalism, ethical practice, and craft that is espoused in the department's design studios.

The studio's pedagogical and cultural character is intended to foster a supportive environment, where "students benefit from peer feedback and a sense of common purpose unusual in other university courses" (Miller et al., 2013, p. 5). Thus, even if projects are completed individually by students, the studio is intended to function as a collaborative learning community:

Instruction in the studio shall foster a collaborative environment conducive to the mutual interests of the students and faculty. The department strongly encourages students to do as much of their studio course work in the studio as possible, in order to take advantage of the collaborative opportunities the studio space allows and to develop a strong sense of class cohesiveness (UW Department of Architecture Studio Culture Policy, 2014).

The claim is frequently made by UW students and faculty—and universally in studio-based programs—that, upon fully embracing studio culture, students learn more from each other than from their instructors. Vanessa, for instance, looked back on her studio experience fondly: "I

loved that element of being in a room with everybody that has this goal, and you're working towards this goal, and you get to feed off of each other, and you derive inspiration from each other."<sup>129</sup>

For studio, grading is conducted differently than in other courses. Instead of a grade point, students receive a performance review form that includes scores for various criteria shared across the Department and a qualitative evaluation written by their instructor(s) for that term. Based on their assessment, instructors ultimately deem whether each student receives a "commend" (exceptional performance) "pass" (met faculty expectations), or "marginal pass" (significantly below faculty expectations) evaluation. Students who consistently fail to meet expectations may be placed on academic probation.

The relatively informal interactions bred in studio, as well as the number of hours spent in contact, means that students often build close social bonds with their studio instructors. Although one participant referred to certain faculty as possessing a "god-like" status among the student body, studio instructors also serve as role models, mentors, and unlicensed therapists or counselors. Participants, for example, noted instances when they requested and received desk crits from instructors they had for previous studios. And, particularly later in the curriculum, the content of advising discussions between students and faculty often extends beyond design projects to career and post-graduation advice.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> In this quotation, Vanessa is explicitly referencing *doing* and *belonging*. But there is also an underlying sense that the collective and collaborative nature of studio extends even to dimensions of *being* and *becoming*.

<sup>130</sup> When asked to describe faculty who significantly impacted their development and graduate school experience, participants' responses ranged based on what developmental aspects they considered most significant. One generality that was too glaring to go unnoticed or unmentioned, however, was the gendered quality of student-faculty relations. Female faculty were much more often attributed with caring and nurturing qualities, whereas male faculty were more often considered role models as successful practitioners (although female participants did

Non-studio or “support classes”—a term despised by some faculty but used by other faculty and many students—consist of lectures, seminars, and workshops on design drawing, architectural history, structures, environmental systems, materials, and theory. Among the non-studio courses considered most formative by participants was Professional Practice, a required course “intended to prepare the groundwork for internship by establishing the context, categories, and issues that characterize normative architectural practice” and “intended to prepare students for the transition from design education to professional practice” (Miller et al., 2013, p. 161). In addition to meeting many of the NAAB Student Performance Criteria, the course has customarily offered students a chance to conduct a case study on an architecture firm whose work they admire. The syllabus reads: “As a result of this course, students should be able to plan the first or next steps in their career effectively, to understand their choices, and their place as an emerging architect within the profession and in society” (*ibid.*: p. 161). Once students have reached a more advanced stage in the curriculum, elective or “selective” opportunities open up, allowing them to tailor the classes for which they register to suit their interests. Whereas several participants noted that this curricular flexibility and diversity was a primary reason for applying to UW—the feeling like they could “determine their own path”—it is unclear such a quality is unique to this program.

For students in the three-year track, the first year is typically the most intensive experience because, as one faculty put it, “There’s so much ground that needs to be covered very quickly.” Besides the demanding schedule and potential for “burnout,” it can be psychologically

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mention certain female faculty as practitioner-role models). This depiction matches the gendered division of labor observed for decades in the architectural academy (see Groat & Ahrentzen, 1997).

intense in other ways. This is when socialization and inculcation processes are most palpable, as students are becoming acquainted to the studio as a pedagogical environment and the broader cultural norms of the profession and architecture school. Alumni that I interviewed from the three-year track recalled contemplating during their first year either transferring schools, dropping out, or jumping off the balcony (this last route presumably being in the proverbial sense). Several participants across both tracks mentioned attending counseling sessions with a therapist to cope with the stress of being an architecture student—typically early or midway through the curriculum—and to develop strategies for leading a more balanced and healthy lifestyle.

Upon graduation, nearly all students from the UW M.Arch program have first-hand experience working in the profession. This can be attribute largely to a recently implemented initiative with the Department’s Professionals Advisory Council (PAC) that guarantees a supervised, paid summer internship for all three-year students following their first “preparatory” year. Students who qualify by maintaining good academic standing are matched with firms by faculty and PAC members using an “intern-workplace match protocol.” The internship opportunity is meant, in part, to ease the school-to-work transition by providing workplace experience within the graduate-level curriculum (UW Department of Architecture "Master of Architecture Student Internship Program," 2014).<sup>131</sup> Through the program, students and firms

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<sup>131</sup> In this document, the Department also expounds on the reciprocal benefits of the internship program:

A student’s practical work experiences can offer special insights into the complex range of tasks encountered in architecture and the building industry, thereby supplementing the learning that takes place in the classroom and studio. Benefits of this learning format also accrue to the workplaces where students complete their internships. The students bring fresh design insights, skills with emerging technologies, and curiosity as assets to workplace performance.

are encouraged to have interns participate in all IDP categories, if feasible. As one faculty notes, the program also reduces the potential rift between the two tracks of students once they merge together, providing three-year students with a “leg up” in terms of exposure to a professional context that many two-year students already have. And, because it provides an opportunity for professional experience, networking, and mentorship, the Summer Internship Program becomes an attractive feature for prospective students. For instance, a recently accepted M.Arch student revealed to me that the strong connections between UW and the local professional community was the deciding factor for them deciding upon which graduate program to attend.

When three-year students return from their summer internships, they immediately merge with the incoming two-year students. What faculty refer to as “forced integration” (and one recent graduate referred to as a “shit-show”) is a highly choreographed moment in the M.Arch curriculum, when students with and without previous architecture degrees are brought together to form a single cohort.<sup>132</sup> Faculty pedagogically structure this fall quarter studio around various collaborative activities with “the goal being that our students encounter other ways of doing architecture,” as one faculty member put it. Faculty also see it as a means to foster a social dynamic of cohesion and mutual respect within the cohort, “to create one class out of a very

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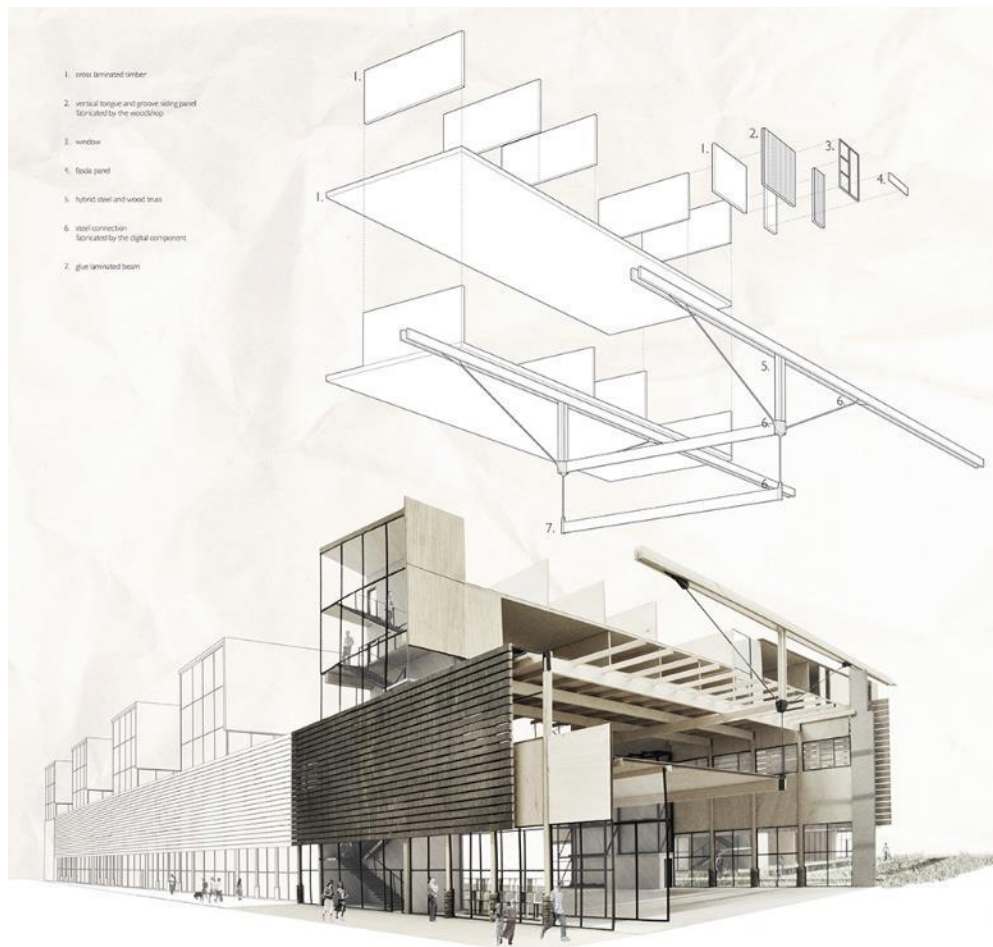
<sup>132</sup> Only a handful of students in each cohort’s two-year track are recent alumni of UW’s undergraduate programs in architecture. Possible reasons why this is the case include: faculty and administrators are actively advising undergraduate students against attending the same school for both degrees; recent graduates from the undergraduate programs are finding positions in local firms soon after graduation and/or putting off obtaining an accredited degree; the M.Arch program’s admissions process is particularly competitive, thanks in part to a large out-of-state applicant pool presumably drawn to the “Seattle brand.”

disparate group of people...People *have* to get to know each other, and they have to appreciate each other's skills. They have to *learn* from each other...Students have to depend on each other."

The ultimate output from students in conventional studios primarily takes the form of digital drawings: orthographic views, perspectives, and diagrams produced from three-dimensional digital models and often accented with hand-drawn elements. These are then typically accompanied by well-crafted physical models, also constructed through a combination of digital and analog modes (see Figure 13). Some studios are structured around national or international design competitions, and faculty encourage students whose projects they found notable to submit them for awards external to the Department's own accolades. Following an announcement of recent student honors, a program administrator noted in a departmental email that, "This is the seventh time in the last three years that a project from our department has been recognized in an ACSA national student design competition." Even more recently, the ACSA's 2015-16 "Timber in the City" competition announced its winners, and teams of UW M.Arch students won first and third place, as well as one of two honorable mention awards (three of the top five awards, from nearly 200 national entries from over 50 schools). This consistent level of national achievement speaks to the "strong conceptual thinking and design skills" by its students and the program's dedication to relevance within the disciplinary community, as recognized by significant national and professional bodies.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> According to the Timber in the City competition website, "The purpose of the Competition is to engage students to imagine the repurposing of our existing cities with sustainable buildings from renewable resources, offering expedient affordable construction, innovating with new and old wooden materials, and designing healthy living and working environments" (<http://www.acsa-arch.org/programs-events/competitions/2015-2016-timber-in-the-city>).



*Figure 13: Example of student work in a collaborative competition studio, combining digital and analog media. Source: UW Architecture Department website.*



Figure 14: Student work from Furniture Studio. Source: UW Architecture Department website.

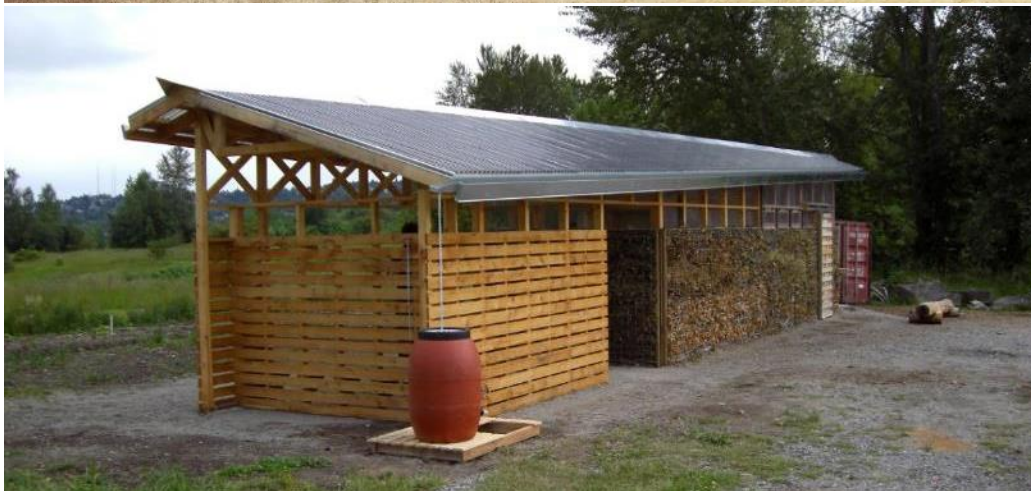


Figure 15: Student work, as designed and built, from the Neighborhood Design-Build Studio. Source: UW Architecture Department website.

In reviewing student design work, the most recent NAAB Visiting Team Report observed what they considered to be a “surprising level of homogeneity” and recommended that faculty consider ways that they might “expose students to diverse design approaches” (Chronister et al., 2014, p. 2). Multiple faculty members and alumni interviewed expressed similar feelings.<sup>134</sup> As one faculty suggested, this could be a result of the relatively similar project types and design problems:

I think that our studios are too similar. It’s my big concern about how we teach, especially design at the moment in this school...The problems are relatively similar, and the approach is relatively similar, so the outcome is relatively similar.

Students are frequently encouraged to defer to the practicalities of the profession and real-world constraints, with most design projects located on feasible building sites in the Seattle area.<sup>135</sup> Similarly, the general ethos of faculty is that there are no longer any unprecedented design problems, only new configurations of previously proposed solutions. Thus, as one alumni participant phrased it, the architectural designs produced by UW students tend to be relatively “respectful towards the past.” Since the criteria for judging the “quality” of a design here is considered less tied to formal innovation and more in terms of how appropriately a design responds to its context, most students tend to seek out solutions that, while imaginative, are ostensibly constructible and acceptable to the general public’s sensibilities. In this sense, although most studio designs never get built, students develop a sense of responsibility toward

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<sup>134</sup> In my view on this topic, not only does most student work fit a certain quality, it tends to reflect the aesthetic of the local profession’s design work. Every year there is an exhibition of work in Gould Court of local professional projects, and every year there is an end-of-year show of student work. These two shows look very similar to one another, suggesting that the graphic sensibilities and design philosophy of the two communities have aligned.

<sup>135</sup> In an introductory architectural history lecture to students, a faculty member proclaimed that, “Architects have to be practical. Buildings have to get built!” (May 11, 2015).

their clients, the public, and the environment. This is contrasted with other programs where “searching for novelty” through architectural form or design process is a defining characteristic.

Certainly, not all studios follow the conventional model that results in the design of an imaginary building. Two of the department’s most recognized and longest-standing courses are the Neighborhood Design-Build Studio and Furniture Studio, together reflecting the school’s ethos of architecture as fundamentally concerned with making and service to the public (see Figures 14-15).<sup>136</sup> Indeed, these broader characteristics extend beyond just these two studios, such that architecture is considered first and foremost a craft that ultimately leads to the assemblage of tangible materials in real space meant to improve the lives of everyday citizens.<sup>137</sup> Besides craft and making, the program imparts to students that architecture is fundamentally about serving various communities. In their Program Report, the faculty argue that, just as the studio environment “encourages a culture of intellectual exchange and exploration,” it “fosters many opportunities for students to extend their learning into the communities we serve—particularly in publicly oriented studios and international programs” (Miller et al., 2013, p. 5). Studios in the program, and the College more widely, regularly produce documentation or construction projects meant to directly serve community organizations, such as a pavilion in one of Seattle’s neighborhood gardens or a prototype for a girls’ school in Afghanistan. So while not

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<sup>136</sup> Students can elect to take either of these studios, along with international studios, once they have completed the four previous required studios in the curricular sequence.

<sup>137</sup> Ochsner (2012) argues that the Furniture Studio reflects a pedagogy based on craft and making that extends beyond the single course. As one UW faculty member claimed in their interview, “We teach more about building detailing, putting materials together, and how things are made than almost any other school of architecture in the country.” Another noted in an interview that the program is “very much about understanding architecture as something that is actually fabricated or constructed.” Whereas the emphasis on analog making (apparent in hand-drawing skills, design-build studios, and furniture-making) might be considered passé in other regions and programs, UW faculty point to examples of graduates utilizing these skills in local professional contexts after graduation.

all students elect to take Furniture or Design-Build studios (and others cannot fit it into their schedules or the demand is simply too high), nearly every participant in this study remarked upon various opportunities they had in other courses for tangibly exploring material properties and/or designing projects in cooperation with real clients. Not surprisingly, these opportunities were consistently considered formative moments in participants' graduate school experience.

The program also offers a range of international programs to students, including quarter-long and summer studios (usually to Rome, Mexico, India, or Scandinavia), as well as shorter exploratory and data-gathering trips at the beginning of a studio sequence (often to Japan or Australia). Some of these studios are interdisciplinary and/or vertical, in that they include students from multiple departments and/or across undergraduate and graduate programs. Two regularly occurring studios provide students the respective chance to meet with designers at the Gehl Studio in Copenhagen and Glenn Murcutt, a Pritzker Prize-winning architect in Australia. The approach to place-based design exemplified by these two renowned designers in distant urban and rural contexts, respectively, are very much reflective of the ethos of the UW M.Arch program and the sensibility it seeks to instill in its graduates. As one might imagine, students who participate in any of the program's international study opportunities also describe this experience as particularly formative.<sup>138</sup> They can also provide opportunities for breaking down the cultural barriers that mark conventional, on-campus studios—between faculty and students, undergraduate and graduate students, or students from programs in different disciplines.

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<sup>138</sup> Vanessa recalled how studying abroad inspired her so much because it reminded her why she decided to study architecture and become an architect in the first place. Adam, on the other hand, mentioned how the immersive experience of international study with practitioners as instructors led him to realize that, as an architect, "you're never really off the clock."

The final sequence in the curriculum, typically extending from January to December of a student's final year, includes Thesis Research and Preparation (or "Thesis Prep") and Thesis Studio. This process involves writing a proposal, researching relevant theories and building precedents, and ultimately presenting the work visually, orally, and in written/graphic document. This culminating experience serves a host of objectives for the student, program, and discipline. First, it provides an extensive opportunity for students to develop their research and writing skills, thus meeting a variety of accreditation requirements. Thesis also is when students are able to define and work through their own design problem and process, operating fairly independently while discussing their objectives and progress with faculty along the way.<sup>139</sup> The Department claims that the experience of producing a thesis is meant to expand a student's "understanding of architecture as a cultural discipline" (Miller et al., 2013, p. 165). Finally, because thesis projects mark the culmination of their academic experience, students consider its meaning-making value both in terms of looking backward (one participant referred to it as "a true amalgamation of all my experiences in graduate school") as well as looking forward (another participant recalled their advisor asking them to envision themselves professionally for the decade following graduation as a way of helping define their project). In this way, for many students, the experience of thesis becomes a strategic opportunity to orient their identities towards certain areas of professional practice, thus helping align their present and future selves.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> The sense of ownership and responsibility students ultimately feel towards their thesis projects is why several participants described it as "their baby." This metaphor also arose during my own experience in an M.Arch thesis studio, when the program hired an assistant who referred to herself as a "doula."

<sup>140</sup> At the time of this writing, the Department is considering revising the M.Arch curriculum to shorten it by one quarter and allow students the option of taking Thesis Studio or a culminating research studio of some kind.

Beyond the curriculum and the experiences directly associated with courses and studios, the architectural community at the University of Washington frequently hosts and participates in various extracurricular activities. These include: public lectures by faculty and invited guest speakers, exhibits of student and professional work, student groups, publications, job fairs, alumni events, and a college-wide happy hour. Most of these events are held in Gould Court (see Figures 7-11). Besides knowledge-sharing and informal socializing, another function of these activities is presumably to maintain the strong connection between the school and the local professional community. Another function is to strengthen the identity of the program more generally, either by sustaining certain traditions or founding new ones. On the other hand, with the exception of hosting the ACSA's Annual Conference in 2016 and the former CBE Dean serving as ACSA president from 2010-11, the UW architectural community seems to direct relatively little effort toward building its national or international profile.

Following renewal of its accreditation in 2014, the centennial celebration in 2014-15, and the announcement of a new chair in 2015, UW architecture faculty recognized this moment in history as an opportunity to identify and build upon the Department and program's strengths and identity. In a series of faculty and curriculum committee meetings, they deliberated on this topic. While faculty considered the program's current character to be "largely identified as preparing students for practice," they challenged themselves to develop a more compelling identity that extended "beyond practice" by considering: "What do we want to see in our students when they graduate from our programs? What can we do to facilitate their achieving this through our teaching and the organization of our curriculum?" (UW Department of

Architecture "Chair Search Discussion," 2015a). Members of the Curriculum Committee responded with the following:

We would like our students to be highly motivated, creative, independent thinkers and risk-takers who value design as a critical contribution to society, and who understand the place of research, technical knowledge, and broad social and humanistic knowledge in the realization of meaningful architectural design. We see the necessity of preparing students for a continually changing work environment in which architectural knowledge is understood and applied broadly to many different arenas related to the built environment (UW Department of Architecture "Curriculum Committee," 2015b).

In response to criticism from the Visiting Team Report that the program needed to expand its demographic and pedagogical diversity, faculty also sought ways to respond structurally by amending the curriculum and admissions processes. Thus, there was discussion of implementing "radical changes to course sequence, content and teaching methods," "strategies to increase the diversity of our students, faculty and teaching methods," and ways "to encourage development of broad perspectives and diversity of views in faculty and students" (UW Department of Architecture "Curriculum Committee," 2015). Still, many faculty judge the success of M.Arch program on its ability to produce young practitioners able to contribute meaningfully to the local professional community soon after they graduate, if not before. This dual commitment of architectural education—to produce motivated, capable practitioners *and* critical, engaged citizens—ultimately manifests itself in the constant need to calibrate content and approaches across the curriculum, balancing the more liberal/transdisciplinary and the more technical/disciplinary sides of the equation.

While it has not always been the case in the M.Arch program's history, faculty believe that, "Practitioners see our school now as a source for new employees." To continue satisfying

the local profession requires concentrated effort on the part of faculty. Noting the diversity of demands this entails, one faculty noted:

We have to be all things to all comers. Firms that want students more oriented to detailing, we have to somehow keep them happy. Firms that want students more oriented to overall formal design, we have to keep them happy. Firms that want students...capable of doing working drawings and the latest softwares, we have to keep them happy. So we have to be more things to more people, not just to our students—but the profession expects that.

Transcending the various commitments and value systems embodied within the UW M.Arch program, this seems to be the one thing everyone agrees on: that the school has a responsibility to supply the profession with individuals able to contribute and become architects, and that it is currently fulfilling this obligation.

## **Chapter 6: Participant Narratives**

### 6.1 Chapter Introduction

Having presented the context of architectural education and the UW M.Arch program, and having framed this project conceptually and methodologically, in this chapter, I present the narrative-based interpretive portion of this study as an output of the iterative analytical steps described in Chapter 4. The patchwork quality of the chapter is a result of my exploration into various ways to read, interpret, and represent the stories of research participants. Ultimately, I sought to evoke how aspiring architects construct meaning from the collection of experiences that comprise their professional education at various cross-sections. In particular, I was interested in how participants navigated into, through, and out of the graduate program, then into the professional realm—and how this broad timeframe of experience impacted their narrative identities. Likewise, I was drawn to the ways in which participant narratives incorporated and related the four dimensions of occupational engagement as a way of expanding and adding nuance to the everyday notions of architectural education that currently inform teaching, learning, and mentorship practices.

As I argued in the opening chapters, current discourse in architectural education resonates with research that conceptualizes higher education as a process of meaning-making and personal transformation. Research-based exploration into how this alignment might improve our understanding of architectural education and shape the future of professional training demands innovative approaches to scholarship that can incorporate such a perspective. Moreover, institutional and professional bodies have made it clear that they are seeking more authentic stories (and ways of representing those stories more authentically) in terms of how

aspiring architects experience the transformative aspects of their education. This chapter is a response to this implicit demand for descriptive content and methodological exploration.

The chapter is organized around a sequence of analytical and representational strategies, each of which can be traced back to interview transcripts and subsequent participant profiles, the latter of which are included in the Appendix. Readers are encouraged to consider this chapter alongside these first-person profiles. The following section of this chapter seeks to convey the collective concerns and attitudes of each of the three participant cohorts—in relation to the other cohorts and in terms of their position on the student-to-architect developmental timeline at the time of their interviews. Presented chronologically in terms of these developmental stages, this section reflects the cross-sectional design of the study, emphasizing differences and commonalities within and between cohorts. The next section consists of individual “memos” on each of the eight alumni participants, or brief summaries of each participant’s narrative written in third-person. Section 6.4 then presents a composite narrative or “collage” of content organized around a set of motifs, patterns, and themes that emerged across participant profiles. As there is certainly no single, collective experience of architectural education, this collage is meant to capture vectors of difference and repetition from the narratives of participants within this particular case study context. Based on my literature review of architectural discourse and scholarship on higher education, I was particularly alert to strategies used to navigate certain aspects architectural education already theorized, such as its diverse cultural landscape, its disconnected social contexts, its tacit socialization processes, its contradictory belief systems, and its myths related to occupational identity. I was also interested generally in how such navigational strategies operated as meaning-making strategies, and how the four dimensions of

occupational engagement fit into the narratives as a performance of one's identity. I end the chapter by elucidating how the four dimensions of occupational engagement—*doing*, *being*, *becoming*, and *belonging*—manifest themselves across participant narratives. In doing so, my aim is to convey the notion that architectural education functions as a form of occupational engagement.

## 6.2 Perspectives/Concerns by Participant Cohort

Since participants in this study were selected to form cross-sectional cohorts of *current students*, *recent graduates*, and *emerging professionals*, it is worthwhile to preface the subsequent narrative content derived from individual interviews with a discussion of particular concerns reflected within each cohort and how these may relate to their relative positions along the professional development timeline. This developmental position can be understood as each participant's frame of reference for connecting their past, present, and future architectural selves. Moreover, one's immediate and long-term concerns and commitments are inherently (though not entirely) dependent on this position along the student-to-architect timeline. In other words, their narratives are logically situated within "this metamorphic transformation from layperson to architect" (Cuff, 1991: p. 116). Even though each participant's narrative, in this case, centered largely on recollections of *being* an architecture student, the content and construction of their narratives are expected to change over time depending on changes to how they are personally engaging with architectural education as an "occupation." Considering the perspectives of each participant cohort can thus aid in our understanding of the dynamic and evolving nature of architectural identity.

### 6.2.1 Cohort 3: Current students

Students in this cohort participated in two focus group sessions between their first and second years of the three-year program—before and after their summer internships at local architecture firms. Typical of three-year M.Arch students, they entered the program mainly with academic backgrounds in design-related fields or the humanities. Some had a reference point for an understanding of architectural practice—by either working professionally in a design firm before graduate school or knowing someone in the profession personally. They characterized themselves as entering graduate school with a diverse range of architecture-related skills and interests. However, they raised several commonalities within their program cohort, such as the lack of ethnic or socioeconomic diversity and a certain level of shared cultural interests (i.e., “a connection to the outdoors and craft”). They also identified, as a group, a relatively ethical inclination toward their vision of architectural practice—as it being oriented towards some idea of social/environmental justice and serving the public interest.<sup>141</sup> One student noted that a professional degree would allow her to not only acquire expertise in the form of skills and knowledge but that it would help her be taken more seriously in the realm of community development and urban place-making.

The *current students* spoke of becoming “like a family” over the course of their first year together, eschewing the socially destructive aspects of academic competition, supporting one another as autonomous designers and social beings, and acknowledging their diverse approaches and skillsets as a collective asset. Because they each entered the program with some idea of the

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<sup>141</sup> As compared to pursuing careers in art or business, for instance, they spoke of the potential for architecture to “actually impact lives” and to “make a more lasting contribution to people’s lives.”

purpose they wanted architecture to serve in society, they sought opportunities in studio projects to test and demonstrate how this internal compass might inform their personal design process. Thus, a chief complaint among them was the feeling that they were designing for their studio instructors rather than in a way that supported self-discovery and personal growth.<sup>142</sup> Another frustration with the curriculum thus far stemmed from having to adapt to different faculty approaches to design or competing “schools of thought” without having a good sense for how transitioning between these discrepancies was valuable for their development. Generally, they admitted to struggling with time management and the effects of burnout. Moments they considered most positive in their experience thus far came mainly in the form of reflecting back, either on the progress they made as designers or their resilience in terms of persevering through the many struggles of architecture school.<sup>143</sup> Entering their second year, they each continued to believe that architecture held promise as a fulfilling enterprise and career track after a roller-coaster year filled with confusion and frustration.

Heading into their internships and with only one year of experience as architecture students, there was a consensus among these four students of wanting to challenge cultural preconceptions of architects as egotistical and self-serving, on the one hand, and yes-men or market-driven cogs, on the other hand. They believed that it was not enough for architects to simply design projects to serve the public or act “professionally”—that they must also practice

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<sup>142</sup> The students seemed surprised by the “regimented” nature of studios in the first year and lack of “individual exploration.” Echoing participants from Cohorts 1 and 2, one student posited, “I think one of those things about design school is that it’s the time that you can do things that don’t make sense, y’know? ‘Cause the moment you have to be a real architect, you *have* to do [certain] things.”

<sup>143</sup> All of these positive and negative sentiments echo McClean’s (2009) findings from his study on undergraduate architecture students at a school in Scotland.

and act in particular ways that exemplify and promote a more sustainable and more just world. They saw the greatest challenges facing the profession as ethical challenges: “It seems there’s a lot of questioning in the field right now. Like, ‘What is right?’”<sup>144</sup>

Having asked them to describe their expectations for their summer internship in advance, and then to reflect on how well it met their expectations afterward, the general sentiment among these four students was that the experience allowed them to observe, and occasionally adopt, professional identities. Several of them noted that the experience changed the trajectory of their career objectives by altering their perspectives or opinions on the realities of design practice. While three of the four students were given opportunities to feel like they were operating as meaningful contributors to their firm, the fourth student attributed his lack of opportunity to a limited skillset in addition to the firm’s culture of organizational hierarchy and micromanagement.

Upon embarking on their second year of the program, the *current students* all believed that their approach to studio projects would change—although not in the same ways as each other. Some felt like they would become more practical in their approach, as a way of simulating professional practice (“I kind of like the idea of making my studio projects feel like they could be really built, as well”). Conversely, others thought they would take advantage of studio as an environment free from professional constraints (“I’m excited about...the freedom to play with

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<sup>144</sup> This differs radically from the observations of aspiring architects from past generations, such as Howland (1985), who described his colleagues as continuing to cherish the notion of the “heroic, unfettered artist” even into their professional careers. It does, however, point to Peter Drucker’s distinction between “doing things right” and “doing the right thing,” as referenced by Russ Ackoff in his 1994 lecture on organizational management: “Doing the wrong thing right is not nearly as good as doing the right thing wrong.” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OqEeIG8aPPk&feature=youtu.be>)

ideas and not being bound to a developer’s budget!”). Generally, the feeling was that the internship experience, along with reflecting on their first year of graduate school, had increased their comfort and confidence in being an architecture student and becoming an architect. Entering their second year, they each expressed how they felt poised to take more ownership over their learning by setting personal goals for each studio, designing more “for themselves,” and pro-actively taking advantage of learning and networking opportunities that could help position them for particular professional roles in the near future.<sup>145</sup> Several of them were planning on continuing to work for the firms they had interned for during the school year.

### 6.2.2 Cohort 2: Recent graduates

I interviewed this cohort of participants within two months of defending and submitting their thesis projects, while each was looking for entry-level professional positions. One common theme from their recollection of graduate school was the process of developing their own personal “voice” in terms of workflow and visual identity. To them, this meant figuring out how they work best and what sort of architectural representations best represent them as a designer. Generally, it was not until they had the freedom afforded by thesis studio that they really felt they had cultivated this voice. They also each noted the increasing sense of agency they felt in graduate school to critically challenge design constraints in a project brief—that what instructors say is not always what they mean, or that “rules” are in fact flexible and negotiable. Finally, in terms of their work habits, they each recalled settings that worked best for them in terms of productivity or providing opportunities to reflect on their design projects and process. Often,

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<sup>145</sup> Presumably then, their internship experiences had given them the opportunity to reflect on their education more broadly. In this way, they had met one of the primary challenges of architecture school as described by McClean (2009): “The placing of greater onus on the individual with regard to managing his or her own learning” (p. 207).

these were times and/or places of solitude that complemented the frenetic environment of studio during daylight hours—whether at home, in the windowless room on campus, on the bus, or at night in studio. This resonates with Williams’ (2016) notion of how architecture students balance identities as both “in place” and “out of place” (pp. 60-63). According to his interpretation, “students held in tension two often conflicting desires”: to benefit from the social advantages of studio and “simply ‘be’ in the presence of others” while creating for themselves spaces and opportunities that could foster their creative potential and allow for efficient production. This led to quite a range of social/work strategies and relative feelings of belonging. The two male participants in my interview Cohort 2 recalled only going home to shower and sleep, whereas the two female participants recalled academic terms when the only time they spent in the studio space was during the scheduled course time.

All four *recent graduates* described their current state as a period of psychological and physical recovery, a time to pause briefly and reflect on their strengths and career goals before (or as part of the process of) embarking on the job search. A key part of this transition and recovery period between school and work included revising and assembling their design portfolios. They saw these documents not merely as a physical compendium of their school work but as a meaning-making exercise of their emerging disciplinary identity. So, although they had been revising their portfolios throughout graduate school, this particular occasion compelled them to consider what kind of identity they wanted to project to the professional community. Likewise, they mentioned how being interviewed by me granted them an opportunity to make sense of their school experiences and draw lessons that might help them transition into, and succeed in, the professional realm.

Two of the four recent graduates expressed apprehension about entering the professional community—but all four of them said they felt prepared to learn on the job without prescribing themselves a particular career path in advance. Despite the notion of confidence being a strong theme in their education thus far, they did not seem to lack confidence in terms of entering the profession. They simply hoped to find firms that matched their value system and interests while allowing them to participate in a range of learning opportunities. Like the vast majority of graduates from the program, they were all hoping to find work locally. Their initial choice was to work in a firm doing more or less conventional work, but they each referenced potential tangential fields or roles that they would be happy to enter, if only temporarily. For one participant, this had to do with not feeling fully committed to architecture as a profession. But the broader sense from this cohort of *recent graduates* was that, in architecture school, they had developed skills that they believed would allow them to pivot to alternative career paths if financially necessary or if they so desired.

### 6.2.3 Cohort 1: Emerging professionals

At the time of their interview, this cohort of individuals had been out of school for 6-18 months. Despite considerable time away from school, they each retained an academic identity of some kind, using their experiences in graduate school and who they were as a student as a point of reference for navigating and making sense of the transition into the professional realm. For instance, they found themselves frequently reflecting on how learning, collaborating, or designing in school differed from professional contexts. Each participant was currently employed in the local design workforce, working towards licensure but with broader goals than just becoming an architect in the titular sense.

Each of these participants had identified and cultivated a particular passion towards architecture either before or during their architectural education. This was an “agenda” of some kind based on their value system that propelled them to invest in an architectural career path and sustained them psychologically through challenging moments along the way. They each looked fondly back at school, either nostalgic for the camaraderie of studio or because they enjoyed more academic pursuits. Thus, some expressed a degree of frustration that they were not yet granted sufficient autonomy in the professional world to explore their passions in ways they were able to while students. Now that they were in a professional context, they felt like they were having to become invested in architecture all over again by shifting their perspective. In most cases, this meant getting excited about learning skills (by treating work like school) and perhaps suspending some of their idealism until later in their careers. In general, these *emerging professionals* expressed a concern (or at least the desire) for maintaining their passion for architectural practice as a fulfilling activity—whether this meant intellectually, psychologically, or socially. They likewise wondered how to remain true to their personal value system without succumbing to cynicism or malaise. Yet, their agenda or “personal architectural project” remained very much on their minds, as they continued to adapt their identities and goals within the structural constraints of the profession.

From their perspective of having been out of school for some time, participants in this interview cohort each noted a certain shift in their identity over that period. Being an architecture student had in many ways taken over their entire identity while they were in graduate school. Previous friendships and familial connections were severed—either by choice or out of necessity—and hobbies not directly tied to architectural interests or development were

abandoned or suspended. Having now graduated and reflected on this issue, they each expressed a desire to achieve more balance in their lives and to construct identities that included more than just being a design professional. This typically meant favoring friendships and events *not* associated with the design community or cultivating hobbies that granted them time and space in their lives to be more than just a member of the architecture profession.

#### 6.2.4 Comparison of Cohort Perspectives

Participants across cohorts shared much in terms of their general approach to architectural education and the profession. The level of apprehension towards becoming a stereotypically egotistical architect and the corollary desire to somehow improve the image and effectiveness of the profession remained strong across cohorts. This suggests that the experience of architecture school, if anything, simply reinforces this ethos of wanting to bring about change “from the inside.” By and large, participants initially entered architecture to contribute meaningfully to the world, and because they imagined that doing so would give them a sense of personal fulfillment. Since they acknowledged that such meaningful contributions may not be available to them for several years after graduation, they found ways of sustaining their passions and coping with experiences they considered negative through rationalization, resilience, and imagination. Several participants mentioned the value of mentors. However, mentorship in this case was not about guiding them through their education or professional development as much as (somewhat passively) serving as a role model. Despite the camaraderie and collectiveness of studio, there was a sense that each participant needed to write his or her own narrative—that self-authorship was an essential element in the process of becoming-an-architect.

What differed somewhat subtly between cohort perspectives—in certain ways attributable to where they fell on the developmental timeline—was the mode and depth of their occupational engagement. With their strong ethical compasses and increasing sense of belonging to the local design community, students and recent graduates in Cohorts 2 and 3 were seeking (and acquiring) confidence while they looked for ways they might contribute meaningfully to the built environment in the near future. My sense was that participants were trying to align their social identities to an architectural identity, asking “who do I want to become?” In evaluating their career options, many were considering what kinds of firms or projects they imagined themselves working for, while others were questioning whether or not they wanted to continue on this career pathway or “pivot” into a tangential career. Generally, they were leaving their options open rather than limiting themselves—although staying in the Pacific Northwest seemed less negotiable. Many participants had strong feelings towards the kinds of firms for which they did *not* want to work, tied to the kinds of (social) work environments and less (socially) meaningful projects that they attributed to large, “corporate” firms.

The biggest difference between Cohorts 2 and 3 was that the *recent graduates* had undergone the experience of Thesis Studio, which had granted them the opportunity to cultivate a greater sense of independence as a designer, both aesthetically and psychologically. They could then use this experience as a benchmark for the considering the kinds of firms and projects that would bring them fulfillment in the future. Similarly, participants in Cohort 1 noted that they frequently made reference to their thesis projects (if only with their inner voice) while working professionally, even after a year or more had passed. There was a feeling among the participants in this cohort of *emerging practitioners* that they were “starting over” after graduation, in some

sense. However, they were generally able to put a positive spin on this feeling, as they looked for ways to align their academic identity with a professional one.

### 6.3 Individual Participant Memos

With the previous section having provided an impression of each interview cohort’s general outlook and position, the following participant memos for participants in Cohorts 1 and 2 provide greater detail in terms of each individual’s personal, architectural narrative identity (see Table 8). Again, the content of these third-person descriptions were developed through my interpretive analysis of each participant’s profile. These memos are meant to complement the previous section’s descriptions by highlighting mainly particularities within each narrative.

<b>Interview Cohort</b>	<b>Participant Pseudonym</b>	<b>Program Track</b>	<b>Identifying Features from Participant Narrative</b>
2	Irene	3-year	Struggled with confidence, criticism, and investment until Thesis Studio; remains uncommitted to field
2	Adam	3-year	Circuitous path into field; discovered personality match with culture of architecture while studying abroad
2	Patrick	2-year	Enjoyed social community and camaraderie in studio most of all; hoping for that in professional realm
2	Emilia	2-year	Struggled with confidence and competition until feeling empowered by Furniture Studio and Thesis Studio
1	Vanessa	3-year	Constantly seeks to justify switching careers; still searching for sense of belonging and personal fulfillment
1	Matthew	2-year	Dual-degree student; fascinated by cultural adaptation between institutions, disciplines, and learning contexts
1	Monica	2-year	Resisted entering architecture but eventually found a place among dissonant voices and “counterexamples”
1	Robin	Transfer student	Sought opportunities for “radical creativity” in school, now trying to achieve a sense of professional autonomy

*Table 8: List of primary participants by cohort with identifying features from their narratives*

### 6.3.1 Cohort 2: Recent graduates

After finishing high school in her home country, **Irene** immigrated to the U.S. to attend college. Although she had considered becoming an architect while in high school, a career advisor steered her away based on her grades and test scores. So she initially went into interior design, presumably because she considered it a less-demanding but related career path. Once in an undergraduate interior design program, Irene did not feel like she fit in with the other students. To her, different kinds of people do interior design and architecture, and she soon realized she did not belong in the former group. She graduated—but after struggling once again with her self-confidence and finding it difficult to get a job in interior design, her family convinced her to apply to architecture graduate programs. Irene attended a summer career discovery program at UW to test her interest, which was where a UW faculty member commended her work during the final review. This ultimately is what convinced her that she could succeed in graduate school.

In fact, this theme of seeking and requiring faculty approval continued into the M.Arch program. Irene noted her tendency to take design criticism too personally. She also was aware that her approach to design had been significantly shaped by the expectations of faculty members—specifically, that designs “needs to be practical and theoretically stand up.” For most of the early studios, Irene would complete projects feeling “defeated” because her design failed to meet expectations. These feelings led to her to question whether she would ever become a successful designer. She attributed finishing the program mostly to her own perseverance, of wanting to prove to herself and her family that she could finish what she started.

A critical moment occurred during a group project when, inspired by a more defiant group member, Irene saw the benefit to challenging faculty criticism and standing up for her design

decisions. Thesis was another transformative period, as she considered her design something that she “actually cared about,” and she was given the freedom to frame the project’s constraints. Like many students, Irene sees her thesis project as helping her define what she wants to do for the rest of her life in architecture. It was actually not until working on her thesis that Irene discovered the true value of working in studio. Previously, she had limited her time in studio and actually found the bus rides to school as particularly productive times for coming up with design ideas. The more time she spent in studio during Thesis, however, the more she and her peers would give each other “impromptu desk crits.”

Having recently graduated, Irene did not yet feel fully committed to the profession of architecture. At the time of her interview, she was finding it difficult to land a job and felt a deflated by the possibility that an architecture career was not a good fit after all. There was a sense that, having invested three difficult years of her life in architecture school and having the profession fail to reward her with a job, the profession may not deserve her unconditional commitment. So Irene admitted to approaching the next stage of her life with a certain level of apprehension. She even was considering going back to school for a graduate degree in another design field. For her first job (which she was ultimately able to land soon after our last interview), Irene simply hoped to find a place where she could learn and find joy in her work. Although she has a “personal architectural project” that she would like to advance in the profession, she does not believe she will be able to convince anybody of its relevance until she moves up the professional ladder. Achieving this, she believes, requires skills, experience, and time.

**Adam’s** path to architecture was substantially more circuitous than that of other participants—a path he described as a “chipping away” from a broad set of interests towards

architecture. After treading into several other fields, he found architecture to be a discipline that best engages his faculties, interests, and the desire to effect a lasting and substantive social impact. Ultimately, Adam was able to make sense out of the long sequence he followed—from the humanities, to law, to construction, to graphic design, to architecture—synthesizing various aspects of each discipline and his childhood interests into his current identity. In fact, he acknowledged several factors instrumental to his entry and success in architecture related to his upbringing and family history, including: the identities of members of his family as professionals and design enthusiasts; his early access to architectural monuments through family trips; and his family’s unconditional support for his extended period of career discovery. What tipped the scales in favor of architecture once and for all was befriending a member of the local building industry, which presented Adam with the opportunity to imagine himself as a designer of physical environments. Then, before applying to graduate school, Adam deliberately formed a social network within the architecture community—including with students in the UW M.Arch program—to confirm his desire to pursue this career path.

Given his circuitous path to graduate school, Adam considered himself to be more self-aware and more invested in architecture than his peers when they started. He also believes that he held himself to a higher standard than his peers to succeed; given his age, he felt like this could be his last chance to explore an entirely new field. In moments when he questioned architecture as a career path, it was reflecting upon his own development that convinced him to “stick it out.” Although he has felt completely invested in becoming an architect since putting together his portfolio for graduate school applications, Adam also feels like he could transition to a tangential career path pretty comfortably without losing his investment.

A constant theme throughout his education has been the struggle to build his self-confidence to the point where he believes he could be successful. Looking back, he thinks that his feelings of insecurity were intentionally fostered by studio faculty through design criticism—but he sees this as “a necessary thing” since it helped him develop his own critical voice as a designer. Ultimately, his thesis project showed him that he is fully capable of taking a project from idea to execution, which gave him a newfound sense of confidence. Although initially, Thesis felt much like the first quarter of graduate school, Adam had more fun during Thesis than at any other point in the program. In his mind, “The idea of Thesis, is that you, as a designer or as a critical thinker, have to develop your own ideas, push ‘em forward without anybody helping you along.” Thus, he finished graduate school with a sense of independence and critical self-confidence.

Adam associates his struggles in graduate school with investing too much of himself into his design work, beginning in the first studio where he completely closed himself off from the outside world, non-studio courses, and even his peers. But he believes the more collaborative nature of professional work will help temper this tendency in the future by distributing the personal association with each project across team members. Like many other participants, he also was looking forward to re-cultivating the non-architectural aspects of his life, like friendships and hobbies.

Besides Thesis, Adam’s most formative experiences in graduate school were while studying abroad. Away from campus, he came to realize that being a good designer meant being fully immersed in architecture, that “you’re not really ever off the clock.” Studying how his studio instructors went about their days—something he was only able to do because of the significant

amount of time they spent together—Adam learned “how to live as an architect” and think like one outside of a studio setting. He began to take on this persona, recognizing that there was a natural overlap between what he now believed being an architect demanded and his own personality (“being so enthusiastic about experiences and learning”). In professional settings, Adam continues to study how practitioners go about their work and critically consider how their identities compare to those cultivated in an academic studio setting.

In each M.Arch cohort at UW, there are a few students who graduated from the College’s undergraduate program in architecture, and **Patrick** is one of these cases. And in fact, of this study’s Cohorts 1 and 2, he is the only participant to have spent his entire life in the Pacific Northwest. Though he had imagined himself going to graduate school on the East Coast, he does not regret his decision to stay in Seattle, and sees the experience of attending the undergraduate and graduate programs as distinct. He even made the decision to not take any courses with faculty that he took classes with as an undergraduate. Patrick noted the primary differences between the two programs are that a) students in the graduate program tend to form a more cohesive social group and b) they treat school more like a professional environment. He described the return to graduate school as entering a different context, one where students were more self-conscious of how they might be viewed by others as more or less professional and therefore tended to “stand up a little straighter.” Many students in Patrick’s cohort were returning to school after several years in the workforce and therefore were bringing skills and identities from their professional experience. Along with his classmates, Patrick viewed school as an opportunity for each student to explore their own personal workflow and design process, borrowing from software techniques and graphic/aesthetic approaches they had been exposed

to over the years. For Patrick, much of this exploration was with an explicit consideration for time management—how to be most effective and efficient with the tools at one’s disposal. By setting personal goals for each studio that stemmed from these professional development aspects of learning, Patrick was able to make graduate school more personally meaningful than focusing simply on grades or faculty expectations.

Patrick stated that he never felt like quitting graduate school, attributing this partly to his “sadistic pleasure” in keeping busy, getting limited hours of sleep, and rarely leaving campus. But most of the pleasure that Patrick took from architecture school and professional work emerged from the relationships he formed within the community. This included learning from peers, coming into contact with mentor and role model perspectives, and getting exposed to diverse backgrounds and interests. Patrick described the first quarter of graduate school as “bad” largely because he had yet to get to know his peers. And the studio experience he ultimately considered most formative was so because he was challenged to collaborate with a classmate with whom he did not get along. Patrick also recalled a course taught by a structural engineer, in which students were asked to adopt professional identities of various allied fields in dialogue-based skits. This role-playing exercise granted students an opportunity that even those with professional experience had yet to encounter. Like every participant, Thesis was a significant experience of graduate education. But for Patrick, much of the value and joy of Thesis derived from the camaraderie he felt within his program cohort—collectively experiencing the process as a community with diverse voices and feeling invested in the success of the entire group.

Having recently graduated, Patrick is not in a rush to become a licensed architect, although that is his ultimate goal. Not only is he comfortable looking for jobs in architecture’s

allied fields given his multi-disciplinary interests and studio-based education, he considers a more diverse background to be particularly valuable given the inevitable economic uncertainty of the urban design professions. Not surprisingly, Patrick's main criteria for the kind of firm he wants to work for has to do with the social environment and level of camaraderie. This, he believes, is largely tied to a firm's size—not too small as to be lacking in energy but not too large that he cannot get to know all his colleagues.

**Emilia** labeled herself as a non-traditional undergraduate student, having transferred into UW from community college at a slightly later stage in her life than most of her peers. Before immigrating to the U.S., she began training for a medical career but ended up deciding on architecture once she had spent a few years working as an artist. She believes that her parents' social status, occupational identities, and expectations led her to only consider professional careers, like architecture or medicine. After excelling as an undergraduate student at UW and believing she could someday be an architect, Emilia continued directly on to the graduate program. At the beginning of the program, she claims to have still approached school as she had as an undergraduate: "as a series of tasks" that she had to "complete in order to get a degree," an approach she later recognized as placing limits on her educational experience.

In the "boot camp"-like experience of the M.Arch program's early studios, Emilia was immediately faced with insecurities in graduate school that she had not encountered as an undergraduate. Viewing the studio environment as overly competitive—stoked largely by her tendency to compare her work to others'—she began to fear whether she could ever become a successful architect. Quitting was never an option for her, though, as she would be letting too many people down. It eventually took Emilia over a year to regain her confidence, which she

came to believe is more important than skills for becoming an architect. She achieved this by adopting a more solitary and introspective approach to design, which helped her refrain from comparing herself to her peers and concentrate on the inherent demands of each design problem rather than faculty expectations. Eventually, Emilia became very aware of how much she has changed throughout graduate school, noting “I’m not now who I was.”

In the final two studios of graduate school, when Emilia regained her confidence, she identified themes of empowerment. This was partly a gendered sense of empowerment, of feeling like she could fabricate a piece of furniture “as a girl.” She also found faculty, all female, with whom she was able to relate and who could empathize with her feelings of insecurity. Thesis was ultimately the experience that allowed Emilia to develop a strong sense of what it means to be an architect. To her, it means approaching a design opportunity on its own terms, and developing enough judgment and conviction about the particular site and place to where you can educate the public/clients. She also determined that a chief goal of architectural education is “removing the fear aspect from learning new things,” which she believes will allow her to excel in any firm environment. As she entered the professional realm, Emilia considered herself somewhat apprehensive and cynical but with sufficient confidence and thick skin to eventually succeed.

### 6.3.2 Cohort 1: Emerging professionals

Before deciding to attend grad school in architecture, **Vanessa** spent a decade of her life working in another field. Though she made plenty of money, she felt a “loss of meaning in her life” that she thought might be resolved by attending architecture school. Before and during graduate school, Vanessa’s travels abroad were particularly formative experiences in exposing

her to the potential social impact of urban design, and solidifying her understanding of design as a mode of political expression and intervention. Before applying graduate school, she landed a job in a local architecture firm to experience the professional realm and attended a summer career discovery program to confirm she enjoyed architecture school.

And it was mainly architecture *school* that Vanessa found attractive. She knew going into graduate school that there was no guarantee that she would become an architect, licensed or not. But the fulfillment she experienced in her initial exposure to studio culture before graduate school was enough to switch careers. She started the M.Arch program with joy and excitement, yet soon struggled with feeling like she was unwelcome and like she did not belong, as though she was not among her peers. Vanessa initially had trouble finding her voice as a designer, as she felt her designs were an interpretation of what her instructors wanted her to do. After the first year, she felt discouraged and seriously considered quitting before she invested any more in architecture, or switching to another program where she might feel as though she belonged. But Vanessa eventually found support from peers, those students who were “rebellious against the dogma” of the program, as well as from certain faculty members she could turn to for criticism. Still, the theme of ‘belonging’ remained on her mind throughout graduate school. Through several study abroad experiences and her thesis project, Vanessa eventually recaptured the initial appeal of architecture. She was able to construct an identity around an “agenda” of architecture she considered meaningful such that, ultimately, she was able to find fulfillment in school projects by imagining how architecture might address social issues as a tool of empowerment.

Now in the professional world, Vanessa is having to find fulfillment all over again in more menial tasks and practical projects. To do so, she continues to remind herself what drew her to architecture school in the first place, hoping not to succumb to cynicism about how long it might be before she can apply her agenda as an independent designer. In her quest to find happiness and fulfillment in her everyday work and therefore justify leaving a high-paying career, Vanessa feels the need to constantly demand more responsibilities at work and to regularly exhibit her skills and potential to her colleagues. Also, having come from a field with a culture of corporate mobility, Vanessa has been shocked by the hierarchy evident in the architecture profession. She feels that being labeled and treated as an “intern” limits her ability to participate meaningfully in the design process, leading to frustration and her transferring to several different firms in the first few years out of school. At the end of her last interview, she disclosed: “I’m really ambivalent about architecture right now because here are these ideas that I have about what architecture should be and do, yet I feel completely powerless on a professional level to do any of those things.” Still, she is able to glean meaning out of her daily work by considering the potential impact it has on users and clients.

After high school, **Matthew** was unsure about what career path he wanted to pursue. But he was encouraged to enter architecture by his father, who himself is an architect. Early in his undergraduate program at another university, Matthew struggled with the demands of being an architecture student. The workload was difficult with being a competitive athlete, and he experienced “a constant sense of failure.” Perhaps stemming from his athletic background, Matthew enjoys competition and feeling challenged—but the difference with architecture was that it did not immediately provide him with any sense of redemption. Eventually, “it really

started clicking” and Matthew found himself enjoying the academic pursuit of architectural ideas once he committed to architecture more fully. He worked briefly after he graduated from college but found the job and firm uninspiring. To rediscover the potential for design to meaningfully engage with the lives of urban dwellers, Matthew participated in a service learning program led by designers he considered role models. Following this experience, he was excited to return to school where he could further apply his passions.

Matthew spent the first portion of his time at UW trying to adapt to the change in culture from his undergraduate program. In his mind, the two programs represent different schools of thought regarding the role of design in academic contexts—with UW’s program focused on “being an architect,” “that which is built,” and what has already been built, as opposed to the other program, which valued the role of provocation, novelty, and the value of risk. In the process of adapting to this new culture, Matthew decided to enter the Masters of Landscape Architecture program and earn both degrees simultaneously. Rather than being driven by practical thoughts of career paths, he was simply exploring his interests. Eventually, Matthew admitted to appreciating and adopting UW’s architectural ethos. But at first, he had a difficult time connecting with other students, who generally seemed less interested in staying at school past dusk and being “nocturnal.” At one point in his first year, he organized an extracurricular student group to conduct peer-to-peer critiques after studio hours. Besides the fact that he considered himself good at design criticism, this was his way of building a sense of community, given that most of the time he was in studio he felt isolated. Achieving the right balance between isolation and collaboration is something that has remained on Matthew’s mind into the professional world.

Hired recently by a landscape architecture firm that is “very architectural” with many colleagues who share his hybridized education, Matthew is “able to treat work pretty academically,” motivated as he is by new challenges and the joy of learning. He has come to realize that, owing somewhat to the culture of UW and his current firm, his interests in design have expanded to include both public participation and high-end projects, and he has become less apologetic about design culture. In the office, Matthew finds daily “design opportunities” in what may seem like menial tasks, such as the interpretation that comes with representing someone else’s design ideas. He also feels encouraged to share his interpretations and ideas with colleagues, as a way of feeling more engaged in the collaborative design process. Through his time in graduate school, Matthew has been able to locate himself in relation to both architecture and landscape architecture, having developed an identity he thinks lands more squarely within the culture of architecture but incorporates approaches and theories from landscape architecture. Eventually, he plans on getting licensed in both professions to take full advantage of his hybrid education.

**Monica’s** decision to enter architecture stemmed from her general interest in artistic and creative pursuits, and she has always been more interested in “those edge areas in where the discipline overlaps with other disciplines.” Throughout her undergraduate and graduate programs, Monica was more interested in engaging with “architecture as a medium,” as a means for exploring broader social issues. In fact, she was not interested in becoming an architect while an undergraduate. But her experience working in design for several years after graduation prompted a series of unanswered questions about the misalignments between designers and the

communities they ostensibly serve. So she returned to graduate school in part for the practical purpose of obtaining a professional degree but largely driven by this personal “research agenda.”

For Monica, architectural issues are far more expansive than what architects typically considered in their purview. And for her, the built environment is partly a reflection of architecture’s underlying epistemologies and cultural values, for better or worse. So her decision to go to graduate school was primarily to gain the tools for linking this agenda to her design process, to expand the architectural mode of practice. With this goal in mind, Monica used studio projects and research for non-studio courses to explore cases of alternative professional practices as well as her own emerging design philosophy. She started to be able imagining herself working “within the confines of the profession” while advancing her agenda, and got further affirmation from faculty and students at various points throughout the curriculum. Given these more radical interests, Monica connected best with “other students or faculty members who had a vein of dissonance in whatever they were doing” and particularly enjoyed those studios that were structured around open-ended and collective conversations about different approaches to the design process. Conversely, she clashed with those studio faculty who she felt did not allow as much creativity and self-exploration in more prescriptive approaches to design. For Monica, school should be a place and time to “formulate ideas about what *you* want it to mean to be an architect,” whereas learning how to “*be* an architect” can only happen in an office environment. Applying her emerging design philosophy in a collaborative thesis project with her cohort-mate Robin, Monica left graduate school with “a better understanding of [her] philosophy on design and process and how that differed from other philosophies.”

Being selective about where she would get enculturated into the professional world, Monica eventually landed a job working for a practitioner whom she considers a role model as a “counterexample” to the dominant mode of architectural practice. Now at the “bottom of the totem pole” in the professional world, Monica feels like she is “starting from scratch again” in terms of feeling secure in her knowledge and ability to contribute meaningfully to projects. Thus, she thinks she has yet to earn her place in the community and feels “between communities, like [she’s] just floating and waiting to attach to something.” But much of this has to do with her long-held perspective towards conventional architectural practice, as she doubts she will feel like an architect even when she gets her license. In the meantime, she seeks to change the public’s perception of the architect’s role and responsibility as offering more than a “luxury service,” through small-scale outreach opportunities that surface within every design project.

**Robin** described his entry into architecture as “consciousness” and “a new awakening.” Reading a book on sustainable design as an undergraduate and experiencing the power of well-designed spaces led him to recognize the social and ecological potential of architecture. He eventually determined that a career architecture could unite his background in the pragmatics of construction, his desire for artistic exploration, and his ethical compass. After attending a pre-architecture program and another graduate program, Robin transferred into the final year of UW’s two-year M.Arch curriculum. Like Monica and Matthew, having experienced architecture programs in two different schools of thought, Robin developed a critical understanding of his architectural training. He experienced first-hand the conflict surrounding the dual purposes of architecture school: the vocational role of training based on an apprenticeship model (which he

felt was more prevalent at UW) and the fostering of self-exploration by encouraging what he calls “radical creativity” (more prevalent at his first program).

Robin’s first studio at UW felt “stifling” and led to feelings of disenchantment, prompting him to find a “niche community” of “bad kids, who had been analyzing, critiquing the program for years already.” Much like Monica and Vanessa, Robin found support and a sense of belonging among a few students and faculty whose perspectives toward architectural education and practice were in the minority. Based on his experience at his first M.Arch program and the advice of faculty there, Robin was determined to use school as an opportunity for self-exploration and for cultivating his “internal compass,” assuming that such opportunities would be limited in the professional world. His experience working with Monica on their thesis project cultivated his appreciation for the psychological and intangible benefits of collaboration.

While in his first program, Robin found himself struggling to compartmentalize work and life commitments, which compounded health and social issues at the time. During what he refers to as a “failed experiment” of seeking work-life balance, he began asking himself: “How do I survive in this community, in this culture of architecture?” From this experience, before ever working professionally in architecture, he placed certain limitations on his professional future—that he would only work in settings where life outside of architecture, things like family and personal wellbeing, was valued. He now works for a sole practitioner who shares his values of attaining work-life balance and “unplugging” from architecture on a daily basis, even if they do not necessarily share an approach toward architecture design.

In his current position, Robin is intentionally trying to develop a foundation of practical skills broad enough to ultimately attain a sense of self-sufficiency. He values collaboration as a

general approach to living but seeks a level of professional autonomy, hoping to eventually “detach and do [his] own thing” professionally. Robin practices what he calls “radical creativity” in side projects (often with Monica) but sees the value of learning through an apprenticeship model for his own self-development and goal of professional autonomy. In reflecting on these values and goals, Robin is aware of his personal struggle between pursuing self-sufficiency and remaining dependent on others. Most recently, in reflecting on his personal evolution, he has noticed that he must now take more responsibility for his own professional growth rather than depending on institutional structures as he was able to do while a student.

#### 6.4 Becoming-an-Architect: Narrative collage

This section presents a series of five narrative “motifs”—significant themes or moments that collectively cover the breadth of content across interview transcripts of this study’s primary participants.<sup>146</sup> These have been assembled into a “collage” that holistically captures the navigational experience of architectural education. My use of the term “collage” is meant to connote the composite nature of content in this representational mode. It should not be read as a single, shared or unified narrative. And at times, I highlight contrasts between participant narratives to the degree they help convey the larger whole. Throughout this section, I also include

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<sup>146</sup> Motifs themselves were not entirely generated through an inductive process, since they rose directly from questions in the Interview Protocols (see Appendix). In this sense—and because I selected, organized, and assembled its “fabric”—authorship of this collage rests primarily with me, the researcher. Moreover, the content *within* each motif should be considered more significant than the categories themselves. In constructing such a collage, limits on narrative content became necessary, resulting in a certain level of incompleteness. Furthermore, the fact that a participant did *not* saying something does not mean it did not happen (thus the reason why I do not always include counts for exactly how many participants said what, as this study was not a survey). Likewise, my research was not designed to capture experiences of those who entered architecture school but ultimately did *not* reach the profession. Although the experiences expressed here imply various barriers to entry, I will leave it up to another research study to examine narratives of those who transitioned into and out of architecture.

my interpretive commentary to help contextualize narrative content within the broader concerns that motivated this project.

#### 6.4.1 Motif 1: Decision to pursue architecture, expectations when entering career path

Along with law and medicine, in modern American culture, architecture remains one of the most highly valued professions and career pathways.<sup>147</sup> Those in the field get accustomed to meeting new people who immediately share with them: “I used to want to be an architect.” But for all of those who consider architecture as a profession, very few actually take the next steps required to eventually become one. These include: being *interested*, *inspired*, and *encouraged* to pursue architecture as an intellectual pursuit; *deciding* to pursue it and taking the necessary steps to get educated; overcoming moments of *doubting* this course of action and/or one’s ability to become an architect; and ultimately *becoming invested* in architecture as a profession, one’s identity, and a professional community. Each of these mark significant periods or turning points in the narratives generated through this study, although not all of these conditions were present in every participant’s narrative.

To begin each participant’s first interview, I asked them to consider what earliest factors and experiences contributed to their initial decision to pursue architecture. This was intended to elicit a point of departure for their narrative of becoming-an-architect by marking a *when* and *how*. We did not dwell on this topic, as I was primarily interested in the “pre-packaged” version of their “origin tale” that they presumably have told before, either to themselves or others.

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<sup>147</sup> This is in spite of the constant hand-wringing among academics and educators that architecture has lost its social capital and is now just hoping “to not go ‘the way of the blacksmith’ and corner themselves into a professionally irrelevant pigeonhole” (Taylor-Hochberg, 2013).

Ultimately, I hoped to interpret what degree their earliest recollections of an architectural identity had a bearing, if any, on their more recent identities.

There is also a broader relevance regarding how and why individuals enter a particular career pathway, making it a topic that has garnered a fair amount of scholarly attention. A narrative of one's entry into a particular field presumably includes recollections through the eyes of a disciplinary "outsider" and perhaps points to what factors convinced the individual that their future identity could align with a particular occupational identity. As Kahn (2009) argues, deciding to attend higher education and embark on a career pathway itself becomes a form of agency, as a "personal project" that "may be viewed as part of a wider process to establish or reestablish oneself in a specific way of life"—what is known as a *modus vivendi* (p. 264). The particular course that such projects ultimately take are deeply connected to one's sociocultural context. Conversely, considering factors of entry also can help reveal reasons why others do *not* enter the field by implying through inference various social, cultural, economic, or psychological barriers. In their study of undergraduates' typical influences on career paths, Dick and Rallis (1991) found the following factors to be significant:

- Students' beliefs about themselves (self-concept);
- Perceived relative values of different careers (career values), determined by intrinsic (e.g., interest) as well as extrinsic factors (e.g. salary);
- Perception of attitudes and expectations of socializers (e.g. parents, teachers);
- Interpretation of past experiences

Narratives from the present study regarding entry into architecture corroborate these factors as being significant to one or more participants. Yet other layers of influences arose that are tied

particularly to the contexts of: professional education (as opposed to more general, liberal arts contexts), architecture (its position in society and its associated academic and professional structures), and adult education (in graduate school, many students enter already financially independent or with families of their own).

*Why and how did participants enter architecture—and why not other fields?<sup>148</sup>*

Most participants claimed to initially consider architecture in relation to other possible academic pursuits or careers. In other words, they recalled weighing and selecting architecture from a suite of career options, as opposed to feeling drawn towards architecture specifically.<sup>149</sup> Architecture was frequently contrasted with the arts and humanities and/or science (e.g. as more distinguished than art, and as more creative than science), as a blend of art *and* science (and therefore potentially more fulfilling for someone who considers themselves as gifted/interested in engaging “both sides of their brain”), or as one of several options in design-based fields (which Cross, 2006, argues now forms an intellectual trifecta with STEM and the Humanities/Arts). Several participants who considered themselves creative at a young age recalled their parents singling out architecture as more lucrative and nobler than purely artistic pursuits. For most participants, these deliberations were made in high school and early undergraduate years, often in consultation with parents or other authority figures. Even for those participants who embarked

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<sup>148</sup> For reference, Lewis (2013, pp. 2–39) has developed a list of reasons to become an architect (creative and intellectual fulfillment; contributing to culture and civilization; love of drawing—without a computer; service to others; teaching; a great profession for polymaths; money and lifestyle; social status; fame; immortality; fulfilling the dictates of personality; freedom to do your own thing) and reasons *not* to become an architect (odds of becoming an architect; lack of work; competition; inadequate compensation; ego vulnerability—getting lost in the crowd; the risks of envy; lack of power and influence; anxiety, disappointment, depression; personal encumbrances; lack of aptitude; lack of passion and dedication; legal and financial risks; disillusionment).

<sup>149</sup> Again, none of my participants happened to be of the stripe who decided upon architecture as a career path particularly early in their lives.

on other career paths before landing in architecture (i.e., Irene, Adam, or Vanessa), their entry narratives extend back to this time period or earlier, as they extricated interests and skills that they later identified as “proto-architectural.”<sup>150</sup>

Several participants (including Vanessa, Adam, and Robin) recalled particular memories or experiences in architectural spaces or with architectural ideas that they considered transformative—such as visiting a remarkable city or historic landmark, inhabiting a noteworthy contemporary building, reading a compelling book, or witnessing the construction process. This experience—what Robin referred to as “an awakening”—involved making a cognitive connection between powerful spaces within the existing built environment and the realization that their creation required design thinking and therefore a designer. In many ways, such “origin stories” became touchstones for these participants when they would later be challenged to remember or rekindle their passion for architecture, in school or in the profession.

This kind of story contrasted with participants whose entry narratives could be described more as “falling into” architecture (i.e., Matthew, Patrick, and Monica). These three participants specifically entered the career pathway as undergraduates, meaning that the decision to pursue architecture initially was mainly in the form of selecting a major within an academic context. Monica, in particular, separated this decision from the decision to become an architect—which she initially was opposed to. In contrast, when Vanessa, Adam, Irene, Robin, and Emilia entered the architecture career pathway, they were exiting other career pathways, or at least entering

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<sup>150</sup> A recent national ACSA-sponsored survey of prospective and current undergraduate and graduate architecture students “sought to understand how students, parents, and other influencers perceive the value of architecture education and architecture as a career” (Edwards Co., 2015: p.1). It found that, “Aspiring architects tend to discover their interest at a relatively young age—or they later connect a related interest to architecture” (p. 16).

from non-academic identities. For Vanessa and Adam, in particular, this decision meant leaving a blossoming or well-established career in another field. In order to justify such a leap, they considered the chance to engage in a field they believed had higher pursuits than their previous fields outweighed the risk and economic sacrifice. Pursuing what they considered the nobler career of architecture, therefore, was intended to make their *lives* more meaningful and fulfilling.

Roughly half the participants noted an early draw towards architecture was tied to its potential social impact—and for the other half, this became more salient during architecture school. In selecting architecture as a potential career, they hoped to contribute meaningfully to the betterment of society by participating in processes that improve the built environment.<sup>151</sup> Although their idealism may have been tempered along the way, participants from every cohort maintained their optimism throughout the course of their education and development by adjusting the scope, ends, or means of their pursuit over time to match their changing occupational context and altered perceptions.

Many participants expressed that they were initially hesitant about entering an architecture pathway because they felt they lacked the requisite confidence for being an architect (i.e., Irene, Emilia, and Vanessa). Although I did not probe why architecture requires more confidence than other professions or occupations, presumably it relates to both an architect's role as a visionary and their responsibility to the public. Alleviating this anxiety typically meant “wading into” the field in such a way that could affirm not so much their interest

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<sup>151</sup> Based on their survey results, the ACSA-sponsored study determined that, “Optimism and desire to have an impact drives students” (Edwards Co., 2015: p. 6).

or passion in the built environment but sufficient talent or gift in architectural practice in an academic context. I discuss this distinction in more depth in the following section.

*How does engagement with “architecture” change over the course of one’s life history?*

Most participants described their initial decision to enter the field of architecture as primarily an intellectual pursuit or *discipline*, as opposed to seeking the occupational identity of “architect.” This was partly due to the fact that most participants admitted not really knowing what architects do beyond common perceptions and stereotypes. Even those who had direct references from family members, for example, did not seem to be attracted to the professional practice side of architecture per se. It would not be until later, when participants had experience designing themselves, that they would become attracted to architectural *practice*.

Naturally, those participants with an undergraduate background in architecture entered graduate school with a stronger sense of what architecture is and what is expected from architecture students, whereas the remaining participants developed these perceptions just prior to or early in their graduate education. However, whatever notions they had of architectural practice, being an architecture student, or being an architect would frequently get challenged at various points in their narratives. Or rather, changing contexts and altered perceptions required participants to recalibrate their identity along the various dimensions of *doing, being, becoming, and belonging*.

Prior to formal training, one’s self-identity simply cannot logically align with an occupational identity. Thus, to embark on a particular career pathway, individuals must presumably imagine their *future* selves fitting an occupational role. This initial “goodness of fit” can be problematic, however, if one does not have a very accurate or complete portrait of this

occupational identity. Participants, in fact, admitted their ignorance when it came to images of the everyday activities performed by architects when they initially decided to pursue architecture in school. Thus, they understood that their initial experiences in professional settings were significant opportunities to generate such images.

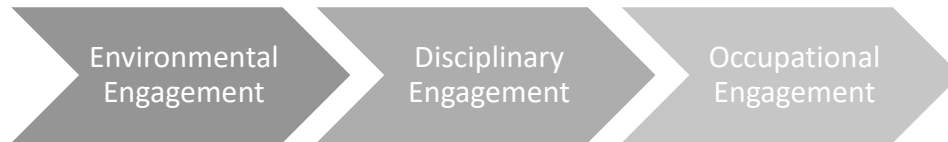


Figure 16: Accumulating levels of engagement with “architecture” along the educational timeline

But this alignment between one’s motivation to pursue architecture and an improved understanding of daily practice is more complicated than acquiring knowledge or experience. It marks a shift from architectural engagement as *environmental* to *disciplinary* to *occupational* (see Figure 16). By “environmental engagement,” I mean our bodily relationship to the world of designed products and environments, which begins as soon as we are born; by “disciplinary engagement,” I mean architecture as a subject matter, including the discipline’s history of ideas and representational strategies; and by “occupational engagement,” I mean full participation in all four dimensions of architecture: *doing*, *being*, *becoming*, and *belonging*. Based upon participant narratives, this proposed framework suggests that the transition into a disciplinary engagement often occurs within a pre-professional degree program, whereas a professional degree program allows for a shift into the third mode of engagement.

The primary inspirations that participants expressed for initially entering architecture—addressing the emotional, social, and ecological impact of the physical environment as a way of contributing to an improved society—is in certain ways detached from the daily concerns within

a conventional architectural practice. Certainly, alternative architectural pedagogies and practices are meant to address these disconnects—design-build and community design centers come to mind. But the issue remains true regardless: to sustain any passion one has for their occupation, either the impact of one's efforts have to justify those efforts or one must develop a certain level of pleasure or satisfaction from the effort itself. And in fact, participants expressed the latter scenario as developing in the process of their socialization. Depending on the structure of their studio project, and by structuring their activity and design process in ways that supported their wellbeing, they each found ways to experience joy or fulfillment in design practice.

This process then had to occur all over again once they entered professional contexts where design practice became only a fraction of their daily activity, if part of it at all. To sustain their passion, participants in the cohort of *emerging professionals* presumably had begun developing cognitive strategies for gleaning satisfaction from the broadening set of professional practices, not simply justifying them. Matthew found that critically observing how his firm operated was one way to access a more student-like perspective, sparking a sense of curiosity toward professional practice as a performance. Likewise, Robin and Monica decided to continue collaborating with one another on design competition projects after work hours partly as a way of engaging with creative faculties in a way that felt similar to an academic context. This presumably allowed them to access feelings not attainable through conventional professional practice. Whatever strategy they used, even participants with less professional experience noted that they would have to find ways to ward off the apathy or cynicism that would surely creep into their minds.

#### 6.4.2 Motif 2: Aligned, misaligned, and disconnected architectural identities

Analysis of participant narratives illuminated certain patterns in terms of how individual architectural identities aligned with their cultural context. Fundamental differences in value systems and personality traits contributed to different perspectives towards what it means to be an architecture student, what it means to be an aspiring architect, and the proper way of training someone to become an architect. These were then manifested in various psychological and social patterns through each participant's narrative. I have grouped these into what I am calling *aligned*, *misaligned*, and *disconnected identities*. These phenomenographic distinctions (in certain cases overstated for the sake of theoretical clarity) are based on a participant's self-identity in relation to their institution's cultural context and architectural culture writ large. In other words, the qualifying terms "aligned," "misaligned," and "disconnected" are meant to be qualify a relationship to dominant (local and social) architectural identities. It should be stated, however, that as an interpretive framework, these terms are not meant to be understood as fixed or absolute.<sup>152</sup> Those individuals who discovered a misalignment of some kind strategically adapted their identities to locate their identities within the profession. Likewise, those with less connected identities ultimately engaged with architecture in ways that allowed them to construct an identity alignment with their cultural context. Thus, in this particular case study, the different

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<sup>152</sup> It should also be noted that these categories are not meant to be reductive, deterministic, or isolated; instead, they should be thought of as vectors or clusters, with their separation somewhat artificial. They are meant to suggest, within the diverse ways that aspiring architects can successfully navigate entry into the profession, that there are certain groupings of patterns. Presumably, there are others besides these, as well. Within the larger study presented here, I adhere to Haggis' (2004) position that narrative and phenomenographic representations are potentially complementary as depictions of situatedness/individuality/difference and collectively/commonality, respectively.

identity classifications can be understood as pairing with different navigational strategies and pathways to similar destinations.<sup>153</sup>

### *Aligned Identities*

The characteristics of students that I refer to as *aligned identities* are implied through the narratives of Adam and Patrick (and to some degree Matthew).<sup>154</sup> Throughout the course of their education, these individuals recognize a personality match between their identity and the ideal architecture student and/or aspiring architect. They rarely, if ever, question whether or not they belong in architecture school or whether or not they will be accepted by the professional community. Thus, they consider their education less as a process of self-discovery and more as an opportunity to acquire certain skills they lack and gain membership into the profession's social community. They are not necessarily seeking to change architectural culture, and therefore do not see school as an opportunity to enact or lay the groundwork for their personal agenda. They spend relatively less time questioning the value of what their instructors ask them to do, instead concentrating on how they might play by the rules while at the same time meeting their personal learning goals. In navigating architecture school, they seek ways to excel as a student in ways defined by their institutional culture, presumably because they assume this will lead to more or greater opportunities in the future.

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<sup>153</sup> This section can be seen as a complement to Williams' (2016) study of how undergraduate architecture students fell along a spectrum of identities in terms of being more or less peripherally or centrally engaged in the studio's social community and access to its cultural capital. It also has many overlaps with a study by Douglass, in which he uses the terms "Seekers and Solvers" to describe those graduates of architecture programs who succeeded in two major varieties of alternative career paths (as reviewed in Pressman, 2008, pp. 319–325). Together, this set of studies suggests the need for longitudinal studies to examine what impact such identities have on future success in the profession.

<sup>154</sup> Matthew exemplified characteristics of both *aligned* and *misaligned* identities, perhaps due to his hybrid identity as a dual-degree student and varied experiences throughout his education.

All students seek role models that match their values and images of what it means to be a successful architect. Students with aligned identities, however, are able to easily locate such role models as their studio instructors who have gained recognition as practitioners and leaders in the local professional world. The amount and kind of contact time provides students with the opportunity to observe these instructors modelling professional behavior, begin “trying on” certain identities themselves, and ultimately construct an “identity horizon” (Côté et al., 2015) for their future self based on this direct experience.

Students with aligned identities tend to enact the stereotypical role of architecture student, staying in studio late and cutting ties with their non-architectural social circle. Likewise, they placed most of their effort into studio, minimizing the rest of the curriculum as “support classes.” They see this lifestyle as an inevitable and unavoidable part of being a successful architecture student.<sup>155</sup> Despite working late and in relative isolation, they often struggle with time management. And it takes them longer in the curricular timeline to realize that the amount of time put into design work does not necessary lead to better outcomes. Thus, it is less an issue of time management than managing their expectations and maximizing the efficiency of their workflow. Assuming they do not succumb to burnout, they will enter the profession with more excitement and self-confidence but less apprehension than other participants. Part of their optimism towards their future stems from the understanding that they are not limited to

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<sup>155</sup> This harkens to McClean’s (2009) description of architecture students: “Students typically vie with one another through the education process to demonstrate commitment to the task of professional assimilation through symbolic behaviors such as working all night and sleeplessness. Adoption of such rituals is quickly regarded as a badge of honor, and an indication of one’s commitment to the cause” (p. 77). Certainly, there is a case to be made that certain students actually require substantially more time-on-task or a more tranquil environment to allow “discovery” to take place within the design process and ultimately reach a certain level of design completeness.

conventional architectural practice—but that architecture school has trained them for a variety of careers in tangential fields.

### *Misaligned Identities*

Students with *misaligned identities*, reflected in the narratives of Monica, Robin, and Vanessa (and to some extent Matthew), experience architecture school as predominantly a series of internal and external conflicts. To them, school is a time for experimenting with and calibrating one's ethical compass in relation to architectural practice, perhaps bending them towards one another. Embedded in this view of school's role is a critique of contemporary architectural practice as inherently serving capitalist and pro-development forces and thus unable to adequately address systemic issues of social or environmental justice, for instance. These individuals are not planning on becoming academics, however, as they remain intent on effecting change on professional practice from the inside, presumably by practicing alternative modes of architectural production. These students recognize that most of their professional training is likely to happen in a professional setting. So to them, students should not graduate from architecture school with a fully-formed professional identity.

While students, they often clash with studio faculty, disagreeing about the role of school in professional development. Generally speaking, they consider design projects in school as opportunities to practice architecture in a way that would be impossible (or less acceptable) in the professional context given various real-world and practical constraints. So to them, intellectual flights of fancy may be more productive than having studio projects simulate

conventional professional contexts too closely, assuming that “radical creativity” can open up new territory of possible architectural futures.<sup>156</sup> When faculty do not allow them opportunities to enact their less conventional approaches to design, they consider these scenarios as constraining both their creativity and their ability to explore alternative professional identities while students. Logically, they seek out faculty who share their views of architecture school being a site/time for exploring one’s personal design process and considering various identity horizons. However, they may only find role models of exemplary practitioners beyond their local context. Despite graduating with certain lasting, negative memories of school, they may eventually feel nostalgic for the academy as a space, time, and community of immense creative and intellectual energy.

Students with misaligned identities often experience existential crises in and out of school. In relation to most of their peers and instructors, they consider their perception of architecture and architectural culture to be in the minority. They often consider the ways that the program selects awards and accolades to be based on opaque or problematic criteria. They frequently ruminate on notions of belonging to their immediate community and the profession at large, including issues of social, emotional, and physical wellbeing. A long-term goal is to achieve balance between their architectural identity and their broader sense of self, between work and life. Often, these individuals seek moments of solace to “unplug” from the culture of architecture. But they also seek social support within their community of peers and mentors.

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<sup>156</sup> This raises the question of whether or not an aspiring architects seeking to develop a “counter-hegemonic” identity, as it were, requires education in conventional practice before they can effectively challenge dominant norms. In the meantime, NAAB accreditation requirements remain largely structured around “conventional practice” as understood by institutional and professional bodies.

After graduation, they pursue ways to restructure their lifestyle and social life, to reinvest in non-architectural interests and individuals. This is their way of ensuring that their identity is not restricted to *just* architecture, as they felt was necessary while in school.

Once in a professional position in an office environment, those with misaligned identities may need to work harder to find fulfillment through their everyday activity. This requires them to look for ways to contribute architecturally without compromising their value system. They may find ways to glean meaning from what had seemed like mundane activities. Or they may resort to daydreaming of a time when they gain enough professional autonomy to enact more radical modes of architectural practice.<sup>157</sup> To get there, though, they recognize that they must acquire the practical skills to be successfully autonomous and autonomously successful.

### *Disconnected Identities*

Someone with a *disconnected identity* experiences architecture school and being an architecture student neither as the norm (like those with aligned identities) nor the exception (those with misaligned identities). Irene and Emilia's narratives follow this pattern. For these individuals, there was a sense that the psychological hurdle of entering architecture in the first place was particularly significant due to personal insecurities. Students with disconnected identities tend to limit their time in studio to only what felt obligatory. They structure their days and their design process around working outside the studio environment. The frenetic and, in their minds, competitive nature of studio makes them feel insecure, and they tend to have non-architectural commitments or interests to attend to anyway. Thus, they rarely participate in the

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<sup>157</sup> Of course, this kind of leap would require a certain level of financial autonomy, a point that none of the participants raised.

social life cultivated in studio after hours. They struggle with the culture of the design studio that encourages perpetual criticism and judgement between students, preferring to leave it up to their instructor's evaluative criteria to determine what is "good."<sup>158</sup>

Eventually, however, they recognize that approaching design projects as a set of rules or simply seeking approval detracts and distracts from their personal development. They ultimately determine that they cannot allow faculty criticism to dictate their feeling of self-worth—that they must be more pro-active about setting personal goals for each studio, for architecture school, and for their career ambitions. Once freed from feelings of insecurity and seeking approval, they can begin to sense feelings of empowerment through design activities. This allows them to begin constructing an architectural identity beyond just being a student and "going with the flow."

Even with professional experience, they may not have necessarily begun constructing a professional identity by the time they graduate. At this point in their career, they likely separate their value systems and architectural interests from any day-to-day office activities, seeing their entry-level position as a skill-building opportunity more than a higher calling. More than anything, at this stage in their career, they are seeking confirmation that their substantial investment in architectural education was worth it, that there is indeed a place for them in the professional community.

#### 6.4.3. Motif 3: "A breaking down and building back up of self-confidence"

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<sup>158</sup> These characteristics were also found in a minority of students in Williams' (2016) and McClean's (2009) studies of studio cohorts in their own institutional contexts.

The motif of “confidence” or “insecurity” arose in every participant narrative.<sup>159</sup> The focus group of current students discussed confidence as one of the major outcomes of their internship experience following their first year in the program. And confidence and insecurity were particularly central themes in six of the eight primary participant narratives. Participants tended to apply the term “confidence” in relation to their design process or when discussing the difficulty they had in imagining themselves as future architects. For them, entering and navigating architectural education can be largely characterized as an ebb and flow of self-confidence. This section will provide some context as to how confidence emerged in their narratives and what value participants attributed to confidence in terms of shaping their identity development. Two points are worth making as a preface. One, these individuals represent all three identity groups from the previous section—the aligned, misaligned, and disconnected identities. This suggests that crises of confidence are not limited to particular modes of experiencing architecture school. Second, at the time of their interviews, presumably because they had graduated, every participant in Cohorts 1 and 2 seemed to have reached relative stability on their confidence roller-coaster ride. I got the sense that, in terms of existential crises, study participants did not expect to experience anymore as low of a low or as high of a high as those felt while in graduate school.

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<sup>159</sup> The former term was used by participants themselves, whereas the latter term is one I selected to express the sentiments evoked by participants. Based on his study, McClean (2009) argues that “Without [confidence] the individual is likely to retain a dependency in their learning. It is contended therefore that the development of learner confidence is a fundamental first step in the creation of independent learners. The fostering of confidence at an individual and collective level is also key to achieving successful transition from diverse background to architecture education” (p. 278). He also notes that confidence relates to personal resilience and wellbeing, time management and study skills, clarity of learning objectives, a sense of belonging and support, an understanding of individual progress, as well as “the culture of enthusiasm, stimulation, and encouragement cultivated by academic staff” (p. 283). Thus, he concludes by stating: “The cultivation of confidence can...be said to lie at the heart of a pedagogy seeking to nurture independence and embrace the diversity of individuals” (p. 293).

The theme of confidence or insecurity tended to follow a similar narrative pattern for all six primary participants for which the theme was centrally significant: a certain level of confidence was required to initially apply to graduate school or psychologically enter the career path;<sup>160</sup> it then dropped soon after starting graduate school during the initial “shock” experience (even though these were different moments in the curriculum depending on which program track one is in); then, it underwent one or more set of peaks and valleys of varying amplitudes; and ultimately ended at its highest point, with the culmination of thesis studio. Invariably, this pattern was tied to their studio experience from quarter to quarter, with the struggles and challenges typically associated with design pedagogy and the design process. Likewise, students in Cohort 3 characterized their first year as a series of challenges that they overcame, but were looking forward to entering their second year with a renewed sense of confidence—to not just survive but thrive in architecture school.

Interestingly, the lack of confidence participants recalled was never a fear of failing in terms of academic standards. Instead, confidence was expressed more in terms of willpower or there being too considerable of a discrepancy between their present and future selves. Participants recalled moments in school when they doubted the career pathway (thinking to themselves that architecture was “the wrong choice”), and many considered dropping out. However, these feelings were never because they felt like they *could not* graduate, rather they were considering cutting their losses in terms of investment based on the feeling that they would not find fulfillment or success in their careers. As Irene claimed, “I equated making it through the

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<sup>160</sup> Several participants noted how they struggled even prior to school, believing that there weren’t “smart enough to be an architect.” It is also likely that entrance into the “tribal” character of architecture school culture requires a certain level of self-assuredness.

program to being an architect,” implying that dropping out of school was not an option because it would have meant giving up on her architectural identity prematurely.

Besides “confidence” appearing in particular moments in the curriculum and their personal development, several participants ruminated on the idea of confidence as central to architectural identity more generally. Matthew, for instance, sees the oscillation between seeking and undermining self-confidence as essential for personal growth:

I need to be challenged...to push myself or to motivate myself.... You have to keep challenging yourself. And in challenging yourself, I think you're shaking your confidence, in a sense. So the process of regaining that is the challenge.... There's always more to learn, read, challenge yourself on. It's endless—and that's what's exciting!

From the ways in which participants described the notion of confidence in this way, it could be understood as a spectrum running from “doubt” to “arrogance”—where the polar extremes limit the impact of one's design. This echoes Krupinska's (2014) essay “Humble Assertiveness” in which she writes,

The pendulum must swing back and forth between humility and self-certainty.... During education the teacher starts the pendulum swinging and should, ideally, stimulate the search for basic knowledge at the start, but also hone the student's sensibilities and reinforce their self-esteem.... It's not about reaching one pole—of humility or self-certainty—but to continually swing between them.... I think that an architect neither hears nor dares anything when the pendulum between humility and self-certainty stops swinging (pp. 43-44).

This conception of an oscillating pattern, as opposed to seeking a central point of balance or stability also resonates with Monica's feeling of entering the professional world feeling like “knowing nothing all over again.” Like Matthew, Monica believes that this oscillation of recurring, humbling challenges to her confidence levels is positive for her personal development:

[It's] probably really healthy in the long run for intellectual and social development—but it's really challenging. It's good for humility. But it does sort of make you feel like it's going

to be a theme in your life, where every five years or so I'm just gonna feel like I know nothing again.

This "humble" perspective towards education presumably is a prerequisite for the kind of lifelong learning demanded of professionals. Similarly, Emilia expressed how her graduate education prepared her for the demands of professional practice:

That whole removing-the-fear aspect from learning a new thing is very, very important. I think it's one of the biggest things in school...Just not having that fear of failure when you learn something new. That's, at least for me...very, very important. Being more excited rather than scared about learning new things...

In this passages, participants are beginning to construct their identities as recent graduates and emerging practitioners able to cope with the uncertainty and insecurity that, through their education thus far, they learned is part of being (and forever becoming) an architect. Such a strategy reflects a certain degree of psychological resilience, which appears to be required for becoming an architect.

#### 6.4.4 Motif 4: Formative experiences

Each participant narrative ascribed particular courses, projects, interactions, or extracurricular activities with formative significance in terms of shaping the participant's personal growth and the trajectory of their identity. The strongest of these experiences included: studying abroad, collaborating on a design project with other students, and thesis.<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> Kuh (2008) coined the term "high-impact practices" (HIPs) to refer to those that are "thought to lead to higher levels of students performance, learning, and development than traditional classroom experiences" (Brownell & Swaner, 2010). My study's particular context (HIPs are typically considered as a strategy to revive liberal arts values for undergraduate curricula across disciplines) suggested that borrowing the term might be problematic. However, I will note that five of the ten practices that Kuh identifies overlapped with those identified through my study: internships, collaborative assignments and projects, diversity/global learning (including study abroad), service/community-based learning, and capstone courses and projects (including portfolios and theses).

### *International Study*

Four of the eight participants in Cohorts 1 and 2 (Adam, Vanessa, Robin, and Matthew) participated in term-long international study programs, and described these experiences as fundamental in shaping their graduate education and architectural identity. Each conveyed the importance of the change of context allowed by such opportunities. To them, this meant not only seeing and experiencing cultures and places that were distant geographically but engaging differently with architecture in other ways: through the change in pedagogies, social relations, and perspectives that come with interacting and designing outside of one's home-based studio. The two participants discussed below each had multiple study abroad opportunities while in graduate school.

Studying abroad was particularly formative for Adam in terms of shaping his identity and understanding of architectural culture. The wider set of design-related activities, increase in contact time with his instructors, and more informal nature of their relationship while abroad allowed Adam to study their behavior as practitioners and discover "how to live as an architect," as he put it. For Adam, this notion was tied to the idea that, as an architect, "you're not really ever off the clock," that your understanding of the built environment starts to take over the way that you engage with the world around you and even your sense of self in relation to your environment.<sup>162</sup> Then, comparing this notion of what it means to be an architect to how he

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<sup>162</sup> Other studies have found that architecture students begin to consider their lives and their career path or discipline as inseparable. Reviewing Thomsen's (2006) study of architecture students in Denmark, McClean (2009) writes: "Architecture students defined their subject as a way of life, as an all-embracing entity that contributes significantly to the definition of self, compared to many other disciplines where the boundary between professional activity and personal lifestyle was identifiable" (p. 78).

understood himself and his experience of graduate school, he determined that his enthusiastic personality and the personality of a successful architect were “a good fit.” In recognizing this “overlap,” Adam claimed: “That’s how I started to think of myself...Thinking like that suited who I was as a person.”

For Vanessa, living abroad was an experience that allowed her to “find her voice” even prior to architecture school. After a difficult first year in the program, she remembers how traveling abroad allowed her to “rediscover her calling” by reigniting the passion for architecture that initially inspired her to change professions mid-career. There, she was presented with the work and lifestyle of a practitioner whose approach to architecture served as a model for what she aspired to become. Another value that Vanessa attributed to her experience abroad stemmed from the difference in studio pedagogy from back home. She was granted a higher level of pedagogical freedom than she was used to thus far in her education, which allowed her to adopt a more research-oriented approach. More specifically, she was able to determine the focus and scope of her project in a way that allowed her to feel a similar sense of authorship as in Thesis Studio.

### *Collaborative Design*

For Irene, Monica, and Robin, collaborative design experiences in school were particularly significant in terms of their professional and personal development. Whereas other participants discussed their perspectives toward collaboration in fairly conventional (and fairly abstract) terms, for these participants, collaboration played more of a *narrative* role in their identities.<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> These three participant narratives are discussed in further detail in Thompson (2017). Other participants discussed collaboration in their narratives. For instance, Patrick struggled through working with a difficult studio partner, learning the importance of group dynamics. And both Adam and Matthew discussed the value they place

For Irene, working in a group with another student who was more assertive in challenging their instructor's criticism provided her with the opportunity to defend her design decisions. Up to that point, she had always sought and followed the directions of her instructor, noting that she was raised in a culture that obeys authority. Following the lead of her partner in this particular project, however, Irene realized that she could, in fact, challenge criticism as long as she felt strongly about her decision. Later, during her thesis project, she noted how she had to depend on this approach without faculty around to confirm every design decision she made. In this sense, Irene came to recognize and develop her own agency as a designer. In her interview, she expressed her belief that this is the kind of personality required for being a professional architect.

For Robin and Monica, who developed their thesis in partnership with one another, their greatest takeaway related to the psychological or non-instrumental benefits of collaboration. Robin sees collaborative work as something that should not be reduced to its financial benefit or its impact on the design outcome. As he put it:

I find the experience of isolated work by myself—in the communal sense of being human—is dehumanizing.... And [collaboration] just makes me happy! Like, that is aside from rationalizing it. Just feeling like other people have my back and that I have their back in this way, that we're a team, is just a way in the world that I feel most comfortable.... And actually, *hard* things in life were happening in different points during the process, the eight-month thesis. And having someone else be in the back-and-forth, and to actually feel supported...

The experience of working with Monica on their thesis project cemented in Robin's mind that collaboration is not merely a means to an end but should be an end in itself, a "way of being in

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on collaboration in professional contexts. For Adam, collaboration allowed him to spread the investment of a particular project to the entire design team, rather than placing it all on his shoulders—which he had a tendency to do while working individually in school. These lessons, however, were not considered to be *narratively* significant—or at least as narratively significant those of Irene, Monica, and Robin.

the world.” His ultimate goal professionally is to establish or join a practice of some kind that is founded on this perspective toward collaboration. For both Robin and Monica, the emerging professional identities that they developed through their thesis collaboration are inextricably tied to the notion of collaboration being not only a fundamental aspect of design but a fundamental part of being a designer who lives a psychologically healthy life.<sup>164</sup>

### *Thesis Studio*

As the final punctuation of the M.Arch curriculum, the thesis experience holds a particularly central place in participant narratives. Still fresh in the minds of Cohorts 1 and 2, participants spoke of how thesis offered a unique opportunity to further their personal agenda and explore their unique approach to the design process. By intent, a typical M.Arch thesis process promotes a student’s autonomy as a designer to a greater degree than previous studio projects, in terms of problem-setting, goal-setting, decision-making, and time management.<sup>165</sup>

Adam’s description of how Thesis differed from other studio projects is indicative of this development at the culmination of the curriculum:

This was the first time, just being on my own, I *had* to have that confidence to be able to move forward—and not rely on outside feedback or...somebody telling me, ‘Yea, you’re on the right track.’...It was more like it was a requirement. And this is the idea of Thesis, is that you, as a designer or as a critical thinker, have to develop your own ideas, push ‘em forward without anybody helping you along. And I felt like, finally, I had enough confidence to do that on my own.

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<sup>164</sup> Monica and Robin’s collaborative partnership echoes Hall’s (2016) investigation of student design collectives in Brazil and how they enact design identities that counter the identity of the architect as lone genius. Likewise, she claims that such collectives bridge the “discrepancy between architectural practice and teaching” in a “visceral not cerebral” way to examine “whether their training can be used to challenge the norms of professional behavior.” Finally, she writes that the design collectives support “a culture of extended curiosity and learning that is lost after graduation” by replicating “some of the freedoms of being a student.”

<sup>165</sup> Citing Bore (2006), Krupinska (2014, pp. 96–97) argues that curricula in creative fields like architecture should be structured as a sequence of “uncertainty, visioning, realization, and readiness.” In terms of how participants of this study described their thesis experience, it captured this full range of sensations.

This autonomy was undoubtedly what led to participants to describe their thesis experience as “empowering” (Emilia), “fun” (Adam, Patrick, and Monica), “impactful” (Irene), “less stressful” (Adam and Emilia), and “personal” (Vanessa and Adam), but also “a struggle” (Vanessa) and “tough” and “rough” (Adam). Participants also noted a change when it came to feelings of authorship and ownership.<sup>166</sup> Vanessa, for example, identified thesis as “just easier to defend” than typical studio projects:

Why I had such a difficulty in my other studios was because I felt that they were just lacking in substance...None of it was something that I had conviction about. It was really more like, ‘We’re designing this program on this site because this is what we were told.’

The presumption is that the structure and expectations of thesis projects demanded, and allowed for, more psychological investment, thus heightening the reward for students.

Irene—who also described her thesis project as “something that I actually cared about”—claimed that it helped define “what I want to do for the rest of my life in architecture.” This was another theme related to the experience of thesis raised by participants: that the project is an opportunity *not* to simulate professional practice but to deepen the exploration and commitment towards one’s architectural agenda now that each student had acquired certain skills and ways of working that allowed them to do so. For Patrick, when it came to approaching his thesis project as a way of articulating his voice, he considered this self-exploration in terms of architectural typology (what kind of building?), aesthetic sensibility (how do you present yourself graphically?), and design process (do you focus your time and attention more on precedent research, programming, etc.?). Ultimately, thesis encapsulates and embodies one of the key objectives of

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<sup>166</sup> The metaphor of a thesis project being each student’s “baby” (mentioned by Patrick) is fairly commonplace in the broader architectural discourse—so much so that my own M.Arch program at the University of Minnesota hired a “Thesis doula” to aid students developing and delivering their project.

the academic portion of architectural education: students graduate with a sense of confidence, self-understanding, and purpose, on the one hand, and a curiosity towards learning together with the capacity for self-direction, on the other.

#### 6.4.5 Motif 5: Transitioning into the professional sphere

For Cohort 1, the group of emerging professionals, narratives were strongly centered on their making sense and meaning of the transition from school to work, and the corollary transition between student and intern/practitioner identities. This also appeared as a motif in the other two participant cohorts (given that every participant had professional experience at the time of their final interview) but to a lesser extent. Much of this sense- and meaning-making included coming to terms with what each participant considered to be the purpose of architectural education, as well as the distinction and relationship between learning in school versus on-the-job, in terms of content and pedagogy. Participants generally believed that school was an opportunity for aspiring architects to orient their internal compass and find their voice as a designer, by exploring their interests and process. Some also considered school a time to begin making connections to the local professional community. Participants had begun considering the kind of projects, firms, and professional roles that might suit their interests and personalities best.<sup>167</sup> Some had placed certain limits on their future positions, like a firm's size, predominant project type, or philosophy. But others seemed to prefer letting their futures unfold more organically.

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<sup>167</sup> Jonkmans, Wurl, Snelders, and van Onselen (2016) argue that if design students consider the “value congruence” between themselves and the first company they work for after graduation, this can reduce “value conflict” and frustration. Of course, this requires that students are aware of their values and able to evaluate those of their potential employers.

Internship opportunities during school generally served to demystify aspects of professional life in the minds of participants. Having spent time working in local firms, they ostensibly would be entering the profession after graduation with a narrower gap to bridge between their perceptions/ideals and the realities of practice. Only one of the current student participants (Cohort 3) thought that this experience would change his approach to school by orienting him to mainly practical issues over conceptual ones. For the rest of this cohort, internships had the opposite effect: they would double-down on employing their creative faculties knowing that opportunities to do so in the professional world would be limited.

None of the participants seemed particularly interested in starting their own firm—at least not anytime soon.<sup>168</sup> The general approach to entering the profession was that it would be a time of intensive learning and “paying one’s dues.” While every participant had plans to become licensed architects at some point in their career, they all seemed to buy into the perspective that school should not be reduced to technical training. However, in their transition to the professional world, participants in Cohort 1 expressed a shift in their approach to day-to-day activities to where they accept apprenticeship-like training. This meant acquiring skills and knowledge primarily through observation and collaboration, passed down to them from their mentors/superiors, while remaining curious, patient, and humble. They seemed to believe that

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<sup>168</sup> Many participants discussed the ways they believed firm size impacts the developmental experience, particularly early in one’s career. The firm type generally considered the best for intern development was either mid-sized (based on assumption that it would allow for wider access to project types) or very small (based on the assumption that it would allow direct experience with the widest range of professional roles and responsibilities). The consensus among participants was that the worst firms for professional development were large, corporate-style firms where one could get pigeon-holed into a specialized role—although none of them had actually had worked for such a firm.

moving up the company ladder or gaining the experience necessary to lead projects would take several more years of experience.

Robin had a certain vision for how he wanted to eventually “detach” and embark on his own to form or join a firm based on a philosophy of genuine collaboration. But he believed that the way to get there was to occupy a more conventional, apprentice position until the point in time when he feels a certain level of “self-sufficiency,” “competency,” “capacity,” and “confidence”:

I think that I value knowing everything I need to know, so that I don’t have to work for a big firm that might not be doing what I want. I think I want more control over how and with whom I work and collaborate.... I wanted to start in this place where I’m learning a really large breadth of skills rather than start at a firm of like forty and fall into a niche that maybe takes ten years to get out of. My hope is that I’m going to get this broad perspective and then be able to do my own thing in a certain area, or more intelligently find a place in a bigger group to collaborate in a way that I think I really want to.

Having reflected on this proposed pathway, Robin understood that it would require certain, additional ontological leaps in his personal evolution to adopt new roles, something that would probably only be clear in hindsight. He understood that, ultimately, he would be responsible for making these leaps as opposed to in school where Robin recognized that he was dependent on the institution and teachers to guide his development.<sup>169</sup>

The four participants in Cohort 1 used two primary strategies to make their current professional situations meaningful. The first involved taking a certain perspective toward their projects and the positions they held, with all four participants contributing examples. For Vanessa, it was a matter of finding some fulfillment in her everyday activities by imagining the ways in which her work will ultimately improve the lives of users. As this was the primary reason

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<sup>169</sup> McClean (2009) discusses the sense of learner dependency in traditional design studio pedagogy.

she left her previous career for architecture, she felt the ongoing need to glean some deeper meaning from her daily activities to justify the investment. Robin described opportunities to “inject his values” into projects, for example, by convincing a client to save an on-site tree: “I take some of the most joy in finding little areas that I can care about that no one else is paying attention to.” Monica mentioned how, even for single-family residential design, she sees every project as a “small-scale outreach opportunity” but not necessarily just through the design product itself: “You’re still talking to someone who is not an architect, and that’s still an opportunity to change the perception of what your profession does, or what your profession cares about.” Finally, Matthew discussed how tasks at work that involve interpreting and representing his colleague’s design ideas, despite being “not readily apparent,” were “interesting design opportunities.”

Another strategy involved what I interpreted as sustaining one’s student identity beyond graduation. Robin, for instance, continued to seek out design competitions and other “side projects” with Monica, depending on these as creative outlets to balance out the more mundane everyday work and projects in his firm. Similarly, Monica, having been tasked with developing content for her firm’s blog, used this as an opportunity to continue her critical exploration of ethical issues underlying architectural practice. At the time of her interviews, she claimed to feel “between communities,” having not completely left her academic identity behind nor fully adopted a professional identity.<sup>170</sup> Finally, Matthew described approaching professional life in an academic way, in that he would participate in, observe, and critique his firm’s approach to

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<sup>170</sup> The passage from Monica’s transcript covering this topic is included at the end of Chapter 4.

collaborative practice. In this way, he claimed that he was “able to treat work pretty academically.” Each of these examples represent various ways that participants were bridging the transition between the academy and the profession, and thereby conveying strategies for constructing their narrative identities across this gap.

### 6.5 Conclusion: Architectural education as occupational engagement

No one enters a career path with a complete or accurate understanding of what it means to *be* the kind of practitioner they are seeking to *become*. Navigating a pathway of professional education, and thereby investing in that career, means grasping the problematic nature of this transformation and recognizing one’s agency. This includes acknowledging that one’s identity is shaped by, and interpreted through, *doing* certain activities, adopting certain ideologies, and *belonging* to various communities. *Reflecting* on the impact of significant learning experiences and one’s personal evolution, then *projecting* one’s identity onto a possible future self is part of this meaning-making process. Navigating the process of becoming-an-architect requires some degree of meaning-making across all four dimensions of occupational engagement as one constructs a framework of interdependent relationships between these dimensions. One might consider, for instance: *How do the activities I am involved in inform who I am and what I want to become in relation to my peers?* Narrative strategies provide the structure for the psychological work required to negotiate and adapt to the inevitable misalignments between one’s expectations and convictions, on the one hand, and one’s interpretation of experience and unknown contexts, on the other. In this way, personal narratives are expressions of individual agency.

Amid the backdrop of the everyday experiences comprising being an architecture student and working professionally, aspiring architects are making meaning and thereby constructing their identities. Less frequently, they are “writing” their occupational identities into their life histories through narrative practices. For the participants of this study, the most significant moments of narrative performance seemed to occur both before and after architecture school—when they were confronted with thresholds between social/pedagogical contexts (into academia and into the profession) and therefore had the opportunity to reflect on deeper questions of their place in the architecture world. Not by coincidence, this is also when aspiring architects expend considerable time and energy toward their design portfolios, which becomes a reflection of what they have done (*doing*) and who they are (*being*), together implying who they might (seek to) become (*becoming*) in relation to their peers and the broader professional community (*belonging*). Yet, at various points throughout their education, participants recalled reconsidering their identities and making adjustments to their identity horizons, often to justify their investment in the architectural career path. Ultimately, sustaining an architectural identity meant affirming (or confirming) architecture as a meaningful and fulfilling, perhaps even noble, occupation. This suggests that, at least insofar as one hopes to continue along the career path, one must routinely recalibrate their sense of *being* and *becoming* in relation to one another, as well as in relation to *doing* and *belonging*. For practical and psychological purposes, this narrative work is a critical element of navigating architectural education and becoming-an-architect. It is how aspiring architects develop (or at least express) the psychological resilience necessary for the struggles and paradoxes of transforming into an architect.

## Chapter 7: Conclusion

### 7.1 Project Summary and Significance

Addressing the lack of research on the topic, this project has examined the holistic experience of architectural education through narratives of aspiring architects. In doing so, its findings provide us with a more detailed and more authentic plotline for understanding the contours, complexities, and contradictions that make up architecture and its contemporary mode of social reproduction. This work comes at a time when the field is experimenting with methods for educating future practitioners to, on the one hand, preserve its professional prestige while, on the other hand, adapting to ongoing changes to the architect's role within the building industry and in society at large. Thus, just as important as contributing to our understanding of architectural education, this project changes how we might define "architectural education." It does so by illustrating the ways that education can be considered an ongoing meaning-making activity through which individuals engage in a lifelong process of constructing and maintaining their occupational identities.

Ultimately, laypeople do not become architects by simply graduating from architecture school, logging hours of work at a firm, and passing an exam that tests their competencies in disciplinary skills and knowledge. Rather, they join the architectural community by grappling with architecture across these temporal scales and social/pedagogical contexts, encountering it as an "occupation" through various modes of engagement until they construct a coherent occupational identity. This is accomplished by constructing a narrative that incorporates the *doing*, *being*, *becoming*, and *belonging* aspects of their experience and belief system. Even once they have

achieved this much, they continue to develop strategies to maintain and/or revise their narrative by continually recalibrating their architectural identity.

This perspective towards architectural education does not necessarily contradict the general discourse among those in the field. Indeed, administrators and institutional bodies representing architecture schools and the profession have made it clear that they must account for and cater to the ways that aspiring architects expect, seek out, and ultimately find personal fulfillment by becoming an architect. However, the holistic view of architectural education represented by the narratives in this study reveals a set of values and priorities that do not align with mainstream teaching and mentorship practices. It positions architectural education from the perspective of the future professional, as including what we traditionally consider “learning” and design-based activity, certainly, but more evocatively as a period when one fashions meaning and an identity out of the psychological challenges and internal contradictions that constitute becoming-an-architect. This foregrounding of the human dimensions of education implies a whole host of structural implications—in areas such as program curricula and learning outcomes, internship and mentorship programs, accreditation requirements, paths to licensure, and so forth. If this study accomplishes one thing, then, it is to add some theoretically and empirically grounded content to a topic that is already taking place. My hope is that this then inspires further studies on the topic—in other contexts and using other methods—eventually leading to a more complete picture of “this metamorphic transformation of layperson into architect” (Cuff, 1991: p. 116).

One of the significant themes that emerged from the narratives produced through this study was the continued evidence that architecture’s cultural landscape of occupational

identities is both irreducibly diverse and irreconcilably in conflict. This pluralistic tension gets manifested in the range of identities that comprise architecture schools—among their faculty and students—as well as in the profession.<sup>171</sup> We are currently in a period in architecture's history where this cultural quality is seen as, on the whole, productive and enlivening. This concern can easily be expanded to (or understood within) the broader contours and premises of higher education with its long-recognized dualities such as the relationship between liberal arts education and vocational training. One tension that has crystallized since Cuff's study positions architectural education as primarily a mode of professional reproduction at odds with architectural education as a process of experimentation, speculation, and innovation. Germane to the underlying aims of this study then is the question: if the cultural health of architecture depends on maintaining its pluralistic character in productive tension, how should this inform academic and professional development practices? As this study shows, a holistic understanding of education can incorporate these dualisms, and narrative practices are one way to actively reflect on their implications while we attempt to keep them in productive tension.

One dualism that is not in productive tension is the mythical narrative of architecture and architectural education versus the realities. As Dana Cuff penned 25 years ago:

After years of standing with one foot inside architecture and one foot out, scrutinizing how the world looks from both perspectives, certain dilemmas have become apparent to me. They seem to grow from a fundamental discrepancy between the stated beliefs of the profession and the everyday work world of architectural practice. Architects themselves live with this discrepancy; their tacit coping produces what I have called the culture of practice (Cuff, 1991: p. 262).

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<sup>171</sup> Indeed, architectural culture also retains local variation. From participant narratives, it was clear that adapting to the culture of architecture school and professional practice also meant adapting to the *particular* cultures of *their* school and *their* office.

This issue and the “tacit coping” that Cuff referred to remains an apt description for much of architectural culture. This begs the question of whether or not this is an acceptable state of affairs. If architecture’s stated beliefs and realities do not align (whether this is in terms of pedagogical, social, or professional terms), can we reasonably and ethically expect aspiring architects to sustain their wellbeing and investment in the career path by simply “tacitly coping” with this discrepancy? If educators truly believe that the future of the profession rests upon today’s students embodiment of new modes of architectural practice, then the health and survival of both students and the profession depends on ensuring that aspiring architects remain dedicated to this goal.

Several of the participants in this study expressed not simply “tacit coping” but a deeper level of engagement with architecture’s dualistic nature. Those who entered the field hoping to contribute to causes of social and environmental justice (of which there are many, according to recent national surveys) were particularly compelled to construct and recalibrate their architectural identity to accommodate the discrepancies between myth and reality. More importantly, they felt free to chart their own course toward a role that they believed would be fulfilling. In this case, even the most “maverick” types that I interviewed—those who had a healthy amount of cynicism towards the profession—were able to construct productive identities and still feel like they were making a difference in the world. This is a good sign for the future of the profession, since it will need to retain its idealistic population or risk losing most of its reproductive pool.

Finally, the narratives presented in this study emphasize the multidimensional and interrelated quality of architectural education. The framework of occupational engagement

provides a way of structuring such an understanding by directing our attention to the ways that, for instance, *doing* informs *becoming* and vice versa. It is my hope that, taking this view towards the subject, we can avoid seeing or designing architectural education as simply a series or set of constituent parts. The most powerful passages of participant narratives express the ways that *doing*, *being*, *becoming*, and *belonging* operate as an interwoven matrix in crafting occupational identities. How this knowledge can be used to inform architectural education and help it to accomplish its task of remaining relevant and responsive to the needs of the profession and society remains a compelling question.

## 7.2 Possible Directions for Future Research

In many ways, this study is premised on the claim that the architecture community is “lagging behind” other disciplines when it comes to research-based and student-centered teaching and learning practices.<sup>172</sup> And while this is true, as discussed in Chapter 2, having reviewed recent discourse on architectural education—everything from research studies to blog posts to popular media—I have detected a widespread *desire* to foreground the voices of aspiring architects and position their experience as central to our understanding of architectural education.<sup>173</sup> The issue is that the desire evidenced in this discourse has yet to be directed toward

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<sup>172</sup> Relative to other disciplines and its own past, architecture is currently in a period characterized by a general lack of empirical studies on its educational practices. The journal and conference that one would expect to encourage and disseminate such work in the North America context—the *Journal of Architectural Education* and the Association for the Collegiate Schools of Architecture Annual Meeting—are almost entirely oriented towards architectural theory, products, and practice, rather than the cultural dimensions of architecture—and certainly not toward student perspectives. Research on topics like pedagogy are often marginalized to tangential conferences, rather than considered squarely within the interests of the discipline. The recently formed, UK-based Association of Architectural Educators (aae) is now starting to incorporate these concerns, which is a welcomed shift. Values toward architectural research in the North America context, however, remain significantly directed away from empirical studies on teaching and learning.

<sup>173</sup> For instance, following a nationwide survey, a recent ACSA communications campaign concluded by recommending that architecture education position itself “using messages that are authentic and timeless” and

empirical research on the topic, anything that might ground architectural education in theories and methods based upon a holistic understanding of education that integrates aspects of *doing*, *being*, *becoming*, and *belonging*. Building on the field's long tradition of storytelling and self-criticism, this project is the first attempt to accomplish this—but the hope is that it inspires other studies on architectural education that explore its sociocultural properties and the navigational strategies used by those seeking to enter the profession.

The following are suggestions for ways to extend this research study's trajectory to future descriptive studies, based on what may be the most fruitful lines of inquiry. First, this study could be revised or expanded in various ways. A longitudinal study, for instance, would require interviewing the same participants at later timepoints in their development. By following interview protocols typical of such studies, the content of their two narratives could be compared against one another to reveal how values, perceptions, and identities change over time. For example: how and when does specialization occur within the profession? And are these specialized identities predictable in any way? Alternatively, the study could be redesigned to form cross-sectional cohorts at wider timepoints or additional participant groups. This could include: participants who have yet to enter a professional program, those who decided upon architecture at an earlier age, those who are closer to obtaining or recently obtained licensure, and those individuals who entered but ultimately abandoned the architectural career pathway (either for careers considered more attractive or because architectural education proved not to be worth the emotional or financial investment). Particularly for studies that extend farther into

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"resonate emotionally with the audience" (Edwards Co., 2015). Soon thereafter, the ACSA launched its [studyarchitecture.com](http://studyarchitecture.com) website as a forum for sharing these navigational stories.

the realm of professional practice, the voices of participants' professional supervisors and mentors should also be incorporated into the study for deeper contextualization.

At this early stage in exploring this line of inquiry, there is much to gain from developing a suite of studies based on this core set of research questions. This could be used for comparative purposes and ultimately lead to meta-studies that analyze narratives across cultural (and even historical) contexts by comparing their content and structure. While I have conjectured throughout this dissertation as to potential ways that these narratives represent our contemporary moment or the particularities of its cultural context, such claims demand and deserve a more thorough inquiry. It is hoped that this study will inspire projects across a range of educational contexts that, together, helps reveal the broader contours of architectural education today.

Additionally, follow-up or parallel studies could experiment with other data collection methods and representational modes. There remains considerable territory to explore potentially more effective ways of eliciting and representing architectural education, either by using narrative or not. Whereas one-on-one interviews provide rich narrative material, they certainly felt unnatural or foreign to this researcher who has become most comfortable in the casual environment of the architecture studio. Other studies might therefore consider capturing and interpreting identity performances using, for instance, ethnographic methods in the studio. The discipline would also benefit from more creative ways of presenting this kind of research, even in visual modes. Studies could perhaps take the form of graphic novels or illustrated journal entries. This issue has as much to do with the dissemination of research as its content. Again, the depth of this study is one of its strengths. But there may be more compelling and approachable

ways of presenting the “data” that do not require convincing those in the architectural community to digest pages and pages of text. Empirical studies could certainly exploit the continued popularity of web-based platforms for sharing authentic personal stories.

Lastly, there has emerged a critical mass of research on various alternative architectural pedagogies as of late. Namely, several studies have examined “live projects” (or “design-build” programs, in North American parlance) as these become a central component within many UK-based curricula. I believe that this scale of work, focused on the pedagogical characteristics and advantages of particular teaching and learning approaches, has much to gain from incorporating a holistic and multi-dimensional perspective of architectural education. Conversely, the perspective of architectural education presented in the present study should be fleshed out by “zooming in” on particular pedagogies and course sequences. Given the recent spread of “integrated” curricula, there is much to consider in terms of how workplace learning impacts the narrative identities of aspiring architects.<sup>174</sup> Designing studies specifically to focus on aspects of identity and meaning-making would allow researchers and educators to consider the impact of these experiences within the broader arc of architectural education and then adjust their efforts accordingly.

Beyond the descriptive kinds of studies proposed above, the findings from this study also imply future “action research” studies designed to implement and evaluate certain teaching, learning, and mentorship strategies based on the perspective towards education I have proposed. The bottom line is that architectural education requires substantially more empirical

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<sup>174</sup> It remains a possibility that professional experience may someday eclipse design studio as the “signature pedagogy” of architecture. For reference, fieldwork is considered the signature pedagogy in the field of social work.

research, in general, to reach a level where such work can inform teaching practices, improve retention, and so forth. However, applying the holistic understanding of architectural education proposed in this study suggests that whatever scholarly attention gets paid to pedagogical and curricular concerns should, at a fundamental level, attend to the role of meaning-making in education and occupational identity development, as well as the multidimensional nature of occupational engagement.

### 7.3 Lessons and Applications for Architectural Education

Having absorbed the narrative output of this study, it would be fair to ask: *So is there anything wrong with architectural education?* Obviously, this depends on whatever metric one uses to define “success” or “quality.” But this question may be somewhat misguided insofar as it is premised on the notion that architectural education is a static entity. There is already a consensus among educators that architectural education must adapt in order for the profession to remain relevant and responsive to the needs and demands of society. Recent curricular and pedagogical innovations, not to mention the ongoing hand-wringing and internal debates, are evidence of these adaptations. So whatever one thinks in terms of whether or how architectural education needs to improve its delivery models, content, or philosophical foundation, my point—and what I have hoped to assert through this study—is that such modifications take into account the holistic experience of aspiring architects. Indeed, this perspective ought to be foregrounded in our fundamental understanding of architectural education—not simply an afterthought or a side effect.

What does this mean in terms of informing educational practice? The most obvious recommendation is to increase the number and frequency of opportunities to speak on, share,

and listen to topics related to architectural education as a personal transformation. And while “coping” and reflection are significant elements of the meaning-making process, forward-looking opportunities are necessary, too. Career design requires a certain degree of structure that can support the iterative process as much as any other form of design. Here is where narrative can play a significant role as a meaning-making activity, to reflect on personal experiences and relate them to the trajectory of one’s professional development.<sup>175</sup> As this study suggests, the ultimate aim of such opportunities and exercises ought to be encouraging aspiring architects to relate *doing, being, becoming, and belonging* into a meaningful whole—with narrative evidently providing an effective method to do so. The tradition and ubiquity of the design portfolio offers a model that could be expanded and adapted to include more explicit references to *being, becoming, and belonging*. Likewise, role-playing and storytelling hold a significant place in the pedagogical traditions of architecture and its allied fields. It should not, however, become a facsimile of professional practice, the relatively “safe” nature of the academic environment is able to support professional scenarios (i.e., activities that allow students to engage in “if-then” deliberations). These offer low-risk opportunities for students to “try on” professional identities, imagine their possible future selves, and thereby begin constructing occupational identity horizons.

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<sup>175</sup> I would conjecture that most architecture schools are lacking in terms of career planning, support, and guidance—at least relative to the other professions. Students are so focused on meeting the onslaught of short-term demands, coping with their daily struggles, and then recovering from them, that they put off or are unable to focus on long-term considerations. But career design becomes a central aspect to professional autonomy: “Learning to think like an architect can be learning to design your own future on your own terms” (David Zach, quoted in Waldrep, 2014: p. 300).

As discussed throughout this study, architecture schools have been called upon to recruit and retain those who seek entry into the profession to “make an impact.” Indeed, there are obvious benefits to the profession if educators can support aligned *and* misaligned identities, as I have defined them, within yet another productive dualism.<sup>176</sup> Likewise, those with disconnected identities may simply have not had the opportunity to position themselves within this dualism. Presumably then, supporting students who fall into each of these “types” requires different strategies. For instance, those who display characteristics of harboring misaligned identities may need to be given opportunities to sustain their marginalized spirit without being assimilated into conventional architectural culture. On the other hand, students who display characteristics of aligned identities would presumably seek out role models earlier in their development, being less concerned with self-discovery. Of course, there is a danger to this whole line of thinking, whereby educators begin attaching labels to students, misidentifying them and potentially pigeon-holing them. But I would argue that it already occurs, just in a tacit and/or subconscious manner. Therefore, I would concur with McClean’s (2009) recommendation for faculty development programs that offer strategies for accommodating and embracing diverse learner types, increasing pedagogical transparency, and providing greater opportunities for student reflection. I think it is a reasonable expectation for educators to encourage an environment of open

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<sup>176</sup> Again, these terms can be understood as running parallel to Gutman’s notion of “simulators” and “purifiers.” Referring back to reports from the 1970s, Farrelly and Samuel (2016) call upon schools and the profession to value both students interested in architectural *products* and those interested in architectural *processes*, the latter they argue having been regularly marginalized. I would agree that educators and the profession could do a better job of acknowledging the value of different approaches and perspectives toward design and the profession through their awards and other ways of attaching relative value to the work of their members.

dialogue, which would presumably help guard against the dangers that already exist surrounding architecture's diverse identities when they operate at an unspoken level.

Based on the participant narratives in this study, certain studios held a disproportionate significance in terms of spurring personal and professional development through self-exploration and self-reflection. Thesis studio, research studios, and non-traditional studios (like shop-based, collaborative, or overseas programs) gave students a chance to develop a sense of self-authorship and autonomy. Participants consistently foregrounded these holistic qualities as opposed to a more piecemeal set of design skills, professional competencies, or architectural knowledge. This calls into question the trend of discontinuing Thesis Studio as a curricular requirement in M.Arch programs. The present study reveals the significant value of this experience for aspiring architects—significant in ways that are not captured in the list of NAAB Student Performance Criteria, for instance.

Presumably, within integrated curricula, opportunities like internships and collaborative studios are increasingly exposing students to the fact that “real architecture” is practiced and realized through teamwork. Therefore, 25 years later, the myth of sole authorship that motivated Dana Cuff's study no longer wields quite as much significance.<sup>177</sup> And yet, this does not negate the importance of cultivating a sense of autonomy within individual designers. On the contrary, as demonstrated by this study, autonomy appears to be the mechanism that allows aspiring architects to translate their idealism into architectural practice and ultimately an architectural identity by giving them confidence and conviction. In other words, autonomy is one of the key

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<sup>177</sup> While critics have pointed to the ways that conventional studio pedagogy remains oriented toward the “hero architect,” presumably as more unconventional studios populate the curricula, this figure becomes only one of several architectural identities at play.

ways that aspiring architects relate *doing* to *being* and *becoming*. What form this autonomy takes remains a pertinent question going forward.

Moreover, the experience of the emerging practitioners interviewed for this study suggests that the more immediate challenge is to conceive of ways to extend possibilities for self-authorship into the professional realm. If aspiring architects need to “reinvent” themselves to some degree in order to transform from a student to a practitioner identity, mentors and supervisors should acknowledge and act upon their important role in this process—providing sufficient opportunities for young designers to meaningfully engage in *doing*, *being*, *becoming*, and *belonging*. Conceptualizing “education” as a process that extends into the professional realm requires that the architectural community not only takes seriously the workplace as a pedagogical environment but remains vigilant in making the tacit aspects of this perspective more explicit. This is increasingly essential the more that workplace learning gets folded into academic curricula. Likewise, as various pressures continue to dictate decreasing the length of formal curricula and the path to professional licensure, we need to be sure that what is getting pared from existing structures is not fundamental to how aspiring architects currently construct their occupational identities.<sup>178</sup>

Mechanisms meant to ensure quality and accountability across architecture’s various institutional contexts offer an existing structure that could integrate an understanding of architectural education as a holistic experience of personal transformation and thereby foreground many of the issues revealed through this study. Namely, NAAB accreditation

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<sup>178</sup> Whereas making architectural degrees and paths to licensure more accessible is a worthy goal, the lasting effects of such programs on individuals or the profession are yet unknown. But it begs the question: “How long does it take to become a professional?” (Farrelly & Samuel, 2016).

requirements, IDP licensure requirements, and AIA continuing education requirements are frameworks that already represent cross-sections along the student-intern-architect timeline. And indeed, it is possible to interpret aspects of each of these structures as acknowledging or expressing concern for the wellbeing of those in the architectural community. However, to really serve as “scaffolding” for professional development and lifelong learning, these requirements should explicitly incorporate meaning-making strategies. In general, they could also be redesigned to take into account the holistic and interrelated nature of architectural identity. This perspective is marginalized when such structures are understood and followed as merely piecemeal checklists.

From the results of this study, two particular concerns should raise alarms for architectural educators. The first is the extreme level of anxiety and discomfort that continues to be associated with architectural education, as expressed in so many of the participant narratives. Certainly, personal transformation always comes with a certain level of uncertainty, uneasiness, and anxiety—just as does studio pedagogy’s tenet of “learning-by-doing” as theorized by Schön. Yet, there seems to be little interest these days among educators in actually determining what parts of architectural education are *needlessly* stressful versus those that are *inherently* stressful. This is reflected in the lack of empirical scholarship on the subject, as well as the “cool response” to recent studies that uphold the “blatantly bleak picture of the architecture student experience” (Whelan, 2014).<sup>179</sup> If students believe that faculty are not doing enough to address mental health issues among students, this should not be dismissed or overlooked. On the other hand, if

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<sup>179</sup> Whelan is referencing a 2014 survey conducted at the University of Toronto on student health, which asked students to reflect on their experience in the school of architecture, landscape, and design. The findings can be found here: [https://issuu.com/joelleon1/docs/galdsu\\_mentalhealth\\_report2014](https://issuu.com/joelleon1/docs/galdsu_mentalhealth_report2014)

students continue believing that architectural education is so mysterious and emotionally challenging because it needs to be, educators ought to be more self-critical and honest with themselves.<sup>180</sup> It is my hope that the architectural community treat this topic with more gravity. By illuminating the meaning-making and navigational strategies used by participants in this study, we at least have something on which to build more concerted efforts.

The second topic is one that is evidently already on the minds of educators and the profession given recent marketing campaigns. It is the potential for students on the more idealistic end of spectrum to select other career paths or succumb to cynicism at some point in their architectural education.<sup>181</sup> Again, participant narratives in my study offer a note of caution for educators but suggest strategies for assisting aspiring architects in developing resilient occupational identities and locating their futures selves within professional practice (even if that means challenging conventional practices somehow). At least at the time they were interviewed, none of the participants in this study had abandoned an architectural career track. However, for the emerging practitioners, remaining invested required substantial effort. What may come across as “psychological gymnastics” was in fact meaning-making achieved through narrative.

Navigating architectural education is challenging in part because there are constantly new battles appearing on the horizon. Just as aspiring architects are tasked with developing traits of lifelong learning within their design practice, the results from this study suggest that developing

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<sup>180</sup> In her study of design students who manage mental health issues, Ings (2016) concludes: “Although supervision is not therapy, supportive and strategic help from [educators] can move such students’ educational experiences to a state of personal and scholarly transformation...Such an undertaking warrants wider discussion both within the design profession and beyond” (p. 497).

<sup>181</sup> This overlaps with, but is potentially distinct from, alumni who ultimately and artfully translate their architectural education into alternative career paths. These cases are often lauded as success stories (see a review of Douglass’ study in Pressman, 2008), but they can also illustrate ongoing concerns within the field that the profession is less appealing than it once was.

strategies for continually revising one's occupational identity may be essential to finding or retaining a sense of fulfillment, belonging, and investment in architecture—even surviving as a human in the sense of sustaining a coherent identity. Whereas participants were all successful in “finding their voice” as students, once graduated, they consciously directed their attention and resources toward feeling like a complete human again, to not have architecture be the *only* part of their identity. For as life-changing an experience as an architectural education can be, we owe it to the next generation of aspiring architects (not to mention the society they seek to serve) to direct more of our efforts towards education in thoughtful, considerate, and holistic ways.

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## **APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT/INVITATION MATERIALS**

### **A1: Cohorts 1-3**

Dear [Name],

I am a PhD student in the College of Built Environments, and I am conducting a series of interviews for my dissertation on architectural education. [Referral source] thought you might be a good candidate for the study and recommended that I contact you to tell you more about my project and invite you to participate.

I am interested in learning more about how student identities develop and transform over the course of a professional, graduate program in architecture. After collecting reflections of experiences from students and aspiring architects, I will construct narratives that start to describe this process.

Participants are being asked to commit to three, 60-90 minute interview sessions over a one-week period, based on availability [plus one follow-up interview following the summer internship, for Group 3 only]. If you are interested in hearing more about the project, I would like to schedule a time to explain the full details of the study, give you the opportunity to ask questions, and provide a formal consent form. Thank you for considering this opportunity.

Sincerely,  
James Thompson  
PhD Candidate  
College of Built Environments  
University of Washington

## **A2: Faculty**

Dear [Name],

I am a PhD student in the College of Built Environments, and I am conducting a series of interviews for my dissertation on architectural education. [Referral source] thought you might be a good candidate for the study and recommended that I contact you to tell you more about my project and invite you to participate.

I am interested in learning more about how student identities develop and transform over the course of a professional, graduate program in architecture. After collecting reflections of experiences from students and aspiring architects, I will construct narratives that start to describe this process. As part of the study, I will also be conducting interviews with [instructors/ graduate students], such as yourself, to discuss your perspective on the program more generally. The time commitment would be one interview lasting 60-90 minutes.

If you are interested in hearing more about the project, I would like to schedule a time to explain the full details of the study, give you the opportunity to ask questions, and provide a formal consent form. Thank you for considering this opportunity.

Sincerely,  
James Thompson  
PhD Candidate  
College of Built Environments  
University of Washington

## **APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORMS**

### **B1: Cohorts 1-3**

#### *Transformative Learning and Student Agency in Architectural Education*

Investigator: James Thompson  
PhD Candidate | College of Built Environments  
University of Washington  
jamest27@uw.edu | 206-851-6031

Faculty Advisors: Dr. Alex Anderson  
Dept. of Architecture  
UW College of Built Environments  
ata@uw.edu

Dr. Mark Purcell  
Dept. of Urban Design & Planning  
UW College of Built Environments  
mpurcell@uw.edu

### **Researchers' statement**

We are asking you to be in a research study. The purpose of this consent form is to give you the information you will need to help you decide whether to be in the study or not. Please read the form carefully. You may ask questions about the purpose of the research, what we would ask you to do, the possible risks and benefits, your rights as a volunteer, and anything else about the research or this form that is not clear. When we have answered all your questions, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. This process is called “informed consent.” We will give you a copy of this form for your records.

### **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study is to better understand the student experience in a professional, graduate architecture program. The study seeks to learn more about the processes by which students develop convictions about the profession and how their identities transform over the course of the program.

### **STUDY PROCEDURES**

If you choose to be in this study, I would like to interview you three [four, for Group 3] times about your experience as a Master of Architecture student, your life history leading up to it, and any professional experience you have in architecture. For example, I will be asking you to tell me about experiences that impacted your decision to pursue architecture, or reflect on particularly transformative moments you experienced as a student. I will also be asking you to express your perspective on the profession and discipline of architecture. You may refuse to answer any question in any interview.

Each of these interviews will last no more than 90 minutes, for a total of 4.5 [or 6, for Group 3] hours. Interviews will take place through Summer 2015, and I intend to complete the project by Spring 2016.

With your permission, I would like to audio-record your interviews so that I can have an accurate record of our conversation. I will then transcribe the interviews and use the transcripts to construct a profile of each participant using only pseudonyms. After providing you with a copy of your profile, I will ask you to confirm that it reflects your recollection of the interviews. At this time, you are also welcome to offer additional thoughts in written form.

### **RISKS, STRESS, OR DISCOMFORT**

Some people feel that providing information for research is an invasion of privacy. I have addressed concerns for your privacy in the section below. Some people feel self-conscious when notes are taken or when interviews are recorded. I will keep all of your information confidential, but there is a small chance that someone might recognize you from your statements.

### **BENEFITS OF THE STUDY**

You may not directly benefit from taking part of this research study. One benefit of this study is the opportunity to reflect upon and discuss your educational experiences. I may use data from this study for my doctoral dissertation, scholarly publications, or conference presentations.

### **CONFIDENTIALITY OF RESEARCH INFORMATION**

All interview recordings and notes will be kept confidential. I will create a written transcript of the interviews. Upon completion of the study, in Spring 2016, I will destroy the original recordings, leaving only the transcripts of the interviews. I will assign you a pseudonym, and I will keep the link between your name and the pseudonym in a separate, secured location until June 30, 2017. Then I will destroy the information linking your information to the pseudonym. If the results of this study are published or presented, I will not use your name, or any other identifying information.

All of the information you provide will be confidential. Government or university staff sometimes review studies such as this one to make sure they are being done safely and legally. If a review of this study takes place, your records may be examined. The reviewers will protect your privacy. The study records will not be used to put you at legal risk of harm.

### **OTHER INFORMATION**

You may refuse to participate and you are free to withdraw from this study at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

---

Printed name of study staff obtaining consent	Signature	Date
---	-----------	------

#### Subject's statement

This study has been explained to me. I volunteer to take part in this research. I have had a chance to ask questions. If I have questions later about the research, or if I have been harmed by participating in this study, I can contact one of the researchers listed on the first page of this consent form. If I have questions about my rights as a research subject, I can call the Human Subjects Division at (206) 543-0098. I will receive a copy of this consent form.

---

Printed name of subject	Signature of subject	Date
-------------------------	----------------------	------

Copies to:    Researcher  
                  Subject

## **APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORMS**

### **B2: Faculty**

#### *Transformative Learning and Student Agency in Architectural Education*

Investigator: James Thompson  
PhD Candidate | College of Built Environments  
University of Washington  
jamest27@uw.edu | 206-851-6031

Faculty Advisors: Dr. Alex Anderson  
Dept. of Architecture  
UW College of Built Environments  
ata@uw.edu

Dr. Mark Purcell  
Dept. of Urban Design & Planning  
UW College of Built Environments  
mpurcell@uw.edu

### **Researchers' statement**

We are asking you to be in a research study. The purpose of this consent form is to give you the information you will need to help you decide whether to be in the study or not. Please read the form carefully. You may ask questions about the purpose of the research, what we would ask you to do, the possible risks and benefits, your rights as a volunteer, and anything else about the research or this form that is not clear. When we have answered all your questions, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. This process is called “informed consent.” We will give you a copy of this form for your records.

### **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study is to better understand the student experience in a professional, graduate architecture program. The study seeks to learn more about the processes by which students develop convictions about the profession and how their identities transform over the course of the program.

### **STUDY PROCEDURES**

If you choose to be in this study, I would like to interview you once about your perspective on the Master of Architecture program at the University of Washington. For example, I will be asking you to describe the curriculum, the character of the student body, and the character of the instructors. I will also be asking you to express your perspective on the profession and discipline of architecture. You may refuse to answer any question in any interview.

The interview will last no more than 90 minutes. Interviews for this project will take place through Summer 2015, and I intend to complete the project by Spring 2016.

With your permission, I would like to audio-record your interviews so that I can have an accurate record of our conversation.

### **RISKS, STRESS, OR DISCOMFORT**

Some people feel that providing information for research is an invasion of privacy. I have addressed concerns for your privacy in the section below. Some people feel self-conscious when

notes are taken or when interviews are recorded. I will keep all of your information confidential, but there is a small chance that someone might recognize you from your statements.

### **BENEFITS OF THE STUDY**

You may not directly benefit from taking part of this research study. I may use data from this study for my doctoral dissertation, scholarly publications, or conference presentations.

### **CONFIDENTIALITY OF RESEARCH INFORMATION**

All interview recordings and notes will be kept confidential. I will create a written transcript of the interviews. Upon completion of the study, by June 30, 2016, I will destroy the original recordings, leaving only the transcripts of the interviews. I will assign you a pseudonym, and I will keep the link between your name and the pseudonym in a separate, secured location until June 30, 2017. Then I will destroy the information linking your information to the pseudonym. If the results of this study are published or presented, I will not use your name, or any other identifying information.

All of the information you provide will be confidential. Government or university staff sometimes review studies such as this one to make sure they are being done safely and legally. If a review of this study takes place, your records may be examined. The reviewers will protect your privacy. The study records will not be used to put you at legal risk of harm.

### **OTHER INFORMATION**

You may refuse to participate and you are free to withdraw from this study at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

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Printed name of study staff obtaining consent	Signature	Date
---	-----------	------

#### Subject's statement

This study has been explained to me. I volunteer to take part in this research. I have had a chance to ask questions. If I have questions later about the research, or if I have been harmed by participating in this study, I can contact one of the researchers listed on the first page of this consent form. If I have questions about my rights as a research subject, I can call the Human Subjects Division at (206) 543-0098. I will receive a copy of this consent form.

---

Printed name of subject	Signature of subject	Date
-------------------------	----------------------	------

Copies to:    Researcher  
                  Subject

## APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

### C1: INTERVIEW 1

#### Cohorts 1 and 2

##### *Topics for pre-interview:*

- Consent form (discuss and sign two copies)
- Content of each interview (context, details, reflection)
- Nature of interviews: semi-structured, with a few general topics on my agenda (not yes/no q's, no right/wrong answers)
- Aim of interviews: reflection, putting words to memories and experiences (ok to pause to think, struggle with phrasing, return to topics later)

##### *Context of architecture within your life history*

1. Starting from as early as you can remember, what factors and experiences contributed to your **initial decision to pursue architecture**? (i.e., your high school and/or undergraduate academic experience)
  - Did particular family/friends/mentors contribute to your decision? How so?
  - What made you believe you could succeed in architecture?
  - In what ways would you describe your path to architecture as typical? As atypical?
  - What led you to the M.Arch program at UW?
  - What other graduate schools or careers were you considering?
  - Describe the point in time when you realized you had become invested in becoming an architect.
2. How would you describe **the MArch program at UW** relative to other programs you know of (including your undergraduate program)?
  - In what ways do you think it is typical or atypical? (in terms of culture, curriculum, expectations)
  - What were some initial experiences of your time at UW that led you to identify yourself in a particular way relative to your peers?
  - In what ways did you begin to identify yourself as a typical architecture student? As atypical?

3. Describe some moments when you had **second thoughts** about a career in architecture. What caused you to... (doubt yourself/ become jaded/ consider other options/ etc?)
  - Were there particular experiences or individuals who impacted your decision to continue pursuing architecture?
4. At what periods in your life were you able to obtain **professional architectural experience**?
  - What kinds of firms have you worked for? Where were they located?
  - Did you hold other jobs while enrolled as a graduate student (TA, etc.)?
  - (Where) do you work now?
  - In what ways would you describe your position as typical for an M.Arch graduate? atypical?
  - How do you see the next few years of your career playing out?
5. Thinking back to when you first considered a career in architecture, describe your **perception of the architectural profession**. What did you think architects did, both in terms of their day-to-day activity and their role in society?
  - Where do you think this perception came from?
  - What is your perception of the architectural profession now?
  - What do you think are the major challenges currently facing the profession? How would you like to see the profession change?

*IF TIME:*

6. Describe your **perception of architectural education** before you entered any program. What did you think being an architecture student would be like?
  - Where do you think this perception came from?

## **C2: INTERVIEW 2**

### **Cohorts 1 and 2**

#### ***Reconstructing Details of Experience***

1. Returning to when you entered the UW M.Arch program...
  - How would you describe your skillset? (What did other students come to you for?)
  - How would you describe your intellectual interests? (What got you out of bed in the morning or kept you up at night?)
  - How would you describe your personal learning objectives? (What did you hope to learn?)
  - Upon reaching thesis prep, how had each of these changed?
  - Upon completing your thesis, how had each of these changed?
  
2. Tell me about the classes and studios (in graduate school) that most shaped how you see yourself today (as a design professional).
  - How were they structured (and how did this have an impact)?
  - What sorts of projects or assignments were most impactful?
  - What was given vs. what did you have control over? (brief, content, site, process...)
  - What about non-curricular activities? (i.e. lectures, jobs, student groups, etc.)
  - Describe which (and how) particular individuals from your graduate school experience most shaped how you see yourself today (as a design professional).
  
3. Now, I'd like you to imagine a point in time during your program when you were fully immersed, but not looking beyond it, yet. Describe your daily routine at that point in time.
  - Describe your design process for a typical studio project at that time.
  - What sorts of design issues attracted most of your attention/care/passion?
  - What kinds of non-design topics tended to attract most of your thoughts/emotions? (i.e., the studio itself, etc.)

4. Tell me about your experience working in an architecture firm.
  - What is a typical day in the office like in terms of your activities?
  - What is your design process like?
  - Where do you consider yourself on the spectrum of novice to independent designer?
  - What sorts of design issues attract most of your attention/care/passion?
  - What sorts of non-design issues attract most of your thoughts/emotions?
  - How often, in what instances, and in what ways do you think about your school experience while you're at work?
5. In what ways do you consider yourself a member of a design community?
  - Describe what being a member of this community entails. What makes *you* feel like you've gained membership? Around when did this occur?
  - What other ways do you participate in this community outside the office?
6. Now, I'd like to discuss your perception of 'architecture' in its many meanings (it might help if we'll go through one at a time). What are some ways that interactions with instructors, jury members, administrators, and fellow students impacted your perception of "architecture"? (People making truth claims) For instance:
  - 1-- In terms of what characterizes (good) professional practice, the (proper) role of architects, what counts as an 'architectural problem'
  - 2-- In terms of what characterizes the (good) built environment
  - 3-- In terms of what characterizes the academic discipline (what is worthy of study)

### **C3: FOCUS GROUP 1**

#### **Cohort 3**

1. Would each of you briefly state your academic and professional background?
  - What led you to pursue architecture?
  - What led you to UW in particular?
2. How would you describe your first year of this program?
  - What were the highs and lows?
  - Did it meet your perceptions? Your expectations?
  - What would say are your major skills? Major interests? How did these develop?
  - How would you describe your cohort?
3. What do you hope to get out of your summer internship?
  - What particular work experience or skills do you have that you think you'll draw upon this summer?
  - What about academic experience? What do you think will apply from school (particularly the past year) to what you'll be doing in the office?
  - What impact do you think your experience will have on your approach to school in general? What about design projects and your design process?
4. What's your perception of professional architecture?
  - Where does this perception come from?
  - What do you think a typical day is like for an architect? An intern?
  - What do you think are the major challenges facing the profession?

## **C4: FOCUS GROUP 2**

### **Cohort 3**

1. Last time, you each discussed your perceptions of the role and responsibility of architects. Did this change as a result of your summer internship? If so, how?
2. Did your interests or career goals change over the summer? In what ways?
3. Tell me about an experience this summer where you felt closer to being an architect.
4. Tell me about an experience where you felt out of place in the office. How did you feel out of place?
5. Were there times when the office culture felt like studio? How so?
6. What particular skills or knowledge did you gain through your internship that you think might apply to how you approach studio from now on?
7. Do you expect the character of your 3+ cohort to change following the summer internships?

#### *IF TIME:*

8. Did you feel like you were able to challenge the firm's standard ways of practice? How so?
9. Overall, did your internship experience meet your expectations?

## C5: INTERVIEW

### Faculty

We'll begin by covering **your background**.

1. What was the program like where you got your architecture degree(s)?
2. What sort of professional experience do you have?
3. Describe your path into academia and what led you to UW.
4. What other professional arch programs are you familiar with? In what capacity/context?

Next, we'll focus specifically on **UW's M.Arch Program**.

1. How would you describe the program's general orientation compared to other M.Arch programs, in terms of culture and curriculum?
  - To what extent does the program reflect faculty interests, student interests, historic inertia, other factors?
  - Of the current architectural discussions and debates, which do you think the UW community currently contributes to?
2. Relative to comparable programs, how would you describe the program's major strengths?
  - What skills can students expect to gain here?
  - What can the faculty claim to offer? Facilities?
  - What about the school's location?
  - How about its major shortcomings?
3. Consider a typical student in the program, or one who tends to succeed:
  - What do you think are their interests, goals, and expectations when they enter the program?
  - How do these typically change by the time they graduate?
4. How would you describe your general interaction with graduate students?
  - What do you consider to be your primary role(s) in terms of shaping the curriculum and program culture here?
  - In general, what role do the faculty play in graduate studio culture?
  - What do think are the program's responsibilities towards its students? Do they uphold these?

We'll end with **your general views on the discipline and profession**

1. What responsibilities does a professional program have toward the profession?
  - Does this differ based on a particular program's cultural context?
2. What do you think are the major challenges currently facing the profession?
  - What are the challenges facing architectural education?
  - How do you think the profession and schools need to adapt to meet these?
  - What skills and dispositions do today's graduates need?

*'Chipping away': the long path to architecture*

My family has never, ever pushed me in any direction, in any field. And I think that's one reason why it was a long path to get where I am today. I went down a bunch of different career trajectories. And have had a bunch of different interests. But my family...there's never been a push...Whatever I was interested in they were always behind me and interested in that, too. And they would get excited about me wanting to do something else. But as soon as I changed my mind, they were onboard with that, too...

**When I was in undergrad, I studied history...** I really latched onto history...When I first started undergrad, I had real bad anxiety...I had really bad panic attacks that came out of nowhere! And I almost didn't even finish the first year of school. So it was a really, really rough year!...I got it all sorted out. [But] actually during that first year when I was having all these problems, I took an architecture [drawing course]. And *completely* dropped out within the first week...And so, I just never really even considered it as something that I could even go back to do...I just had such a bad experience that...I had to completely shift my thought about where I wanted to go...But then I turned everything around the second year, and started studying history and really found that I loved that...

After college...I was just excited about graduating with a degree...**[I got a job in the field of law,] but I was always interested in design...** But it was always just a hobby. It was just stuff that I was looking into on my own, but I never really actually thought about that as a career. It was just kind of something that I do for fun. **And then, when my girlfriend at the time...moved out to Seattle...I had to make a decision,** 'Well, do I go out there? What do I do now? Kind of at this crossroads. I want to stay with her'...**And I figured at that point, I had seen enough of this legal profession. And I knew that's absolutely what I did not want to spend my life doing. Because I just knew that there was something else that I needed to be doing. It just wasn't engaging me—engaging all of me. I would go to work and never really want to deal with it after that. So I kind of figured that, maybe if I moved away from that, I would have this period of self-discovery where I could explore something else.** And...because this was Seattle, I figured there were a lot of jobs in digital or multimedia production...**I actually found a job with an advertising firm...** At the time that I joined, they were doing all these really creative projects...And I thought, 'This would be a great opportunity for me. No matter what I'm doing for this advertising firm, I'll be able to get exposure to graphic design, multimedia design...' So that was kind of a foot in the door...I was looking through magazines, print books, and stuff like that. **And I built this understanding of graphic design...Mostly, I was just self-trained...** And so I realized that, 'I could actually do this on my own.' So...I started my own business at that point...I did this for about a year, where...I made my main income from this job with this advertising firm...But then, whenever I had free time, I would take on these other projects...**And I loved that! I finally felt like, 'Ok, I think I'm getting close to something that's really engaging. I kind of lose myself when I'm in these projects.'...All of a sudden, it was engaging all of my different faculties...And that was the first time that I felt like that was happening in what I was doing.** I was always looking forward to whatever the next project was. And it never really felt like work when I was doing this. I thought, 'Ok, great! This is awesome! This is, I think, finally something that I could see myself doing as a profession.' **But...one of the problems I had with it was that everything that I was designing was basically just media, just this instantaneous media that didn't really exist anywhere...There just felt like there wasn't enough substance in what I was designing. I had fun doing it, but**

in the larger scheme of things, what I was doing, I felt like didn't really matter at all. Y'know, it didn't have any bearing...It felt virtual. It felt removed from everything else...

So...I always try to think about this particular moment in time 'cause **this is where I decided. I knew that I'd found something with design...It was kind of this chipping away, starting with the most broad range of stuff that I could possibly do, and then really chipping away.** And so I thought, 'Ok, what is it that I want to do now?' And now that I actually look back on it, one of the influencing factors around that time was [a guy I met] who was...not technically an architect. He didn't have a college degree. But he was a builder [and designer] for a small design-build firm...[And] we always had awesome conversations about design...I started talking to him about architectural design, seeing the stuff that he did. And thought, 'Wow, there's a lot of overlap. Knowing what I know about graphic design and visual principles and composition and stuff...He's out there building this stuff, he's designing. And then they're actually building it! And it has a physical, tangible presence.' And I thought that was pretty cool...So he was a big influence on me, in terms of figuring out that maybe architectural design was something that I really wanted to pursue...

I was getting a little sick of [my job] or burnt out on it or something...I just didn't want to do that. So I started doing research to start looking into architecture to see... 'How do I do that?' ...I started to find a network of people that were affiliated with the architectural community here...I started to make friends with these other people that were either in school or working as architects. And started to see what they were doing. And really got interested! And I thought, 'This is awesome! I think this is exactly what I want to be doing!'...

I had this early appreciation for classical architecture. And these grand public spaces and monuments around the world, just from my study of history...And I always loved the...physical connection with something. When I traveled as a kid with my family and I went to these places, I always felt being in some place that others regarded as having some special quality of place, whether it was a ruin or a major landmark in a city or something like that...there was something really kind of sacred or *different* than any other place...There was something else there that made it feel special...or different than any other space that you've ever been in. And I always wondered about that. Like, 'What is it that makes these spaces stand out?' In my mind, there's the fact that somebody's said they're special. But there's also this other quality. Whether it was ancient architecture or some modern building...**I thought maybe there was some way I could apply my interest in design and creation...funneling that energy into creating these types of places in the physical world. Rather than something that's just a website that is up for a day and gone, or stuff that is ephemeral. So something that in a way is lasting, or has some impact over people—more people—in a physical setting...I think it was a combination of this kind of feeling [that], 'I always wanted to contribute to these special places, these special *things* that exist in the world. But how do I do that? How can I do that and in a way that suits my personal talents or my interests?' So, at root, that's kind of where I think that I found that fusion...**It was also revisiting, thinking, 'Is there anything in my past that stands out to me that I could apply to this new-found interest in design?' And so I felt like it was kind of a perfect blend. I started to pull out my old textbooks that I had saved from my days of studying history...

I worked construction for awhile in college...I loved that! I really, really loved that experience of just going out and building...So I actually had experience with just the really basic putting stuff together. And seeing

something come out of nothing...And I hadn't really thought about that, but then, as I was starting to think, 'Oh yea. Maybe architectural design—' I started to think back about those [experiences], and [think], 'Y'know, I really did enjoy building. And that kind of active...physical creation.'

I applied to U-Dub [and a few other schools]...I really wanted to stay in Seattle. I think that was a huge part of it, was that I loved Seattle. We have a friend network here. So it was more of a social thing...And I didn't want to move...And, especially at that point, I really liked the emphasis on craft at U-Dub...That was something I hadn't seen in the other programs...The sense that I got at U-Dub is that they were gonna provide a great program if you found what you wanted to do and kind of took it upon yourself. [And] I like that. I thought it was cool. And I can't remember what exactly gave me that sense, but I think talking to some of the students, they said, 'Yea, there's all these opportunities, and you can kind of explore. And you make the experience what you want it to be.'...But I was really interested in the craft aspect that this school had. Physical model-building. Just a really basic understanding of how stuff is put together and made. And...my understanding was that that was critical to having a well-rounded architectural education...

I didn't really know if I was going to [be able to succeed in architecture] until I started to actually build a portfolio of my own work [for the application process]. I was [always] creative-minded in whatever I've been doing. But in terms of architecture, I hadn't *done* any of that. And I think it's been a constant—that's been the biggest thing for me, is building my own self-confidence and believing in myself that I *could* actually succeed in what I was doing. And I *still* am not sure I...believe it...There was never a point where [I said to myself], 'Yea, I can totally do this! A hundred percent!'

**After...doing portfolio stuff, I put in enough time, and I was enjoying myself so much that that was it...I jumped right into it. And I never looked back *until* I started.** Until I actually got into it, and then I had to take stock of everything. But I was full speed ahead...And **there were a couple times I had turning points through school, too, where I could have stopped.** Y'know, I could have been like, 'OK, this isn't it.' **But I kept going.** And this is one of the cool things about [where I am] now, is that I feel like, if for some reason I decided I wanted to go in a different direction, I think I could transition laterally across [to a related field]...I feel like I found the realm of what I want to be doing. And...I don't feel like I have this huge investment in *only* becoming a project architect or something like that. Like, there's a whole bunch of different ways I could go. [But] I'm gonna go along that route for *awhile* and see...

*The grad school experience: personal investment and development in studio*

[The first quarter of grad school], I *loved* the studio the second we started. It was so intense in terms of [being] conceptually-driven...attaching the idea of generating a design concept and then turning that abstract concept into a three-dimensional ideation, basically. And just that whole process, I loved it from the get-go! It was a huge struggle. But...it kind of just took over. And I realized, 'Ok, this is kind of what it's all about. And I need to learn this before I can then apply that to other stuff.'...And I really got into it. I really shut everything else *out* and really just sort of focused on what we were doing...I **mean, studio kind of took over everything at that point...**

I think a lot of times I just set myself up a little bit too much to just be so into it that I would just put blinders on to everything else...I think the issue is that I [knew I would] get drawn into whatever else it was...I would get motivated towards doing something else and start putting energy that I knew I needed for studio into something else...And I didn't want to lose my motivation about my work...So it wasn't that I was averse to other things. It's just that my priority was [studio]. And I knew that if I got into something else, I would start turning my attention towards that...**Once I started architecture school, that just took over. So I really denied a lot of [other interests and hobbies]. And...my goal now is to try to figure how to reconcile that.** And after seeing how it is working so intensely in one area and not branching out and doing something different [I'm] trying to work that back in.

Once things really got intense with school, I was just giving everything I had!...And **I had a couple moments where I was like, 'Is this something I really want to do?'** I could see myself expending so much energy and effort. And at that point, I was still struggling with it...There were times...where it was almost too much...[But] looking back and seeing how far I had come—or how much I had developed and thinking, 'I could stick it out for this much longer, or just give it a little bit more time. This'll pass. This is just one episode of it.'...I think, there would have been a point, if I wasn't getting something, if I wasn't making any progress, and I was putting in all this energy and effort and emotional investment, I would've stopped. **But I felt like I was developing. I could see myself developing...I always felt that I was moving forward...**There's a balance, and if the balance had tipped a little bit more in one direction, I might have gone the other way...If I wasn't getting enough out of it, then I would have to move away. **But I think I was learning so much and having so much fun doing it...**

I was *always* comparing myself to the other [students and] I was *totally* paranoid...'Cause when you all start out kind of at square one in that first studio, everybody's wondering how they're doing. At least that's how I was. Digitally, my skills were, I think, some of the top in the class, for sure...I had a base in that. So I used that to my advantage on all these projects that required that stuff. I could set myself apart by doing really well with that stuff. But I still didn't have the core foundation of architectural design. That's what I was there to learn...

**I was definitely older than a lot of the people. And...I had had all this experience before and I had sort of fought my way to figure out what exactly [I] wanted to do. And I knew a lot more about myself.** *For sure,* that helped me. 'Cause I was into it from Day One. And there was never a point where I would say, 'Oh, I'd rather be doing something else.'...**I was a really hard worker from the get-go, because I kinda felt like this was it...**I was really kind of like, 'I really want this to be what I'm gonna do from here on out.' So that's what kind of gave me an extra push. And I think, for sure, that helped me out. And there were a few other people like that in my year [who] were at that stage [in their life]. And I thought it was a perfect stage to start a grad program at. 'Cause that's where you wanna be...You wanna be *totally* invested...[And] I think having worked a bunch of different jobs and having some more real world experience also helped me. Especially in these early design studios where you're learning about developing concepts and doing site research and stuff like that. I think it really helped me think more broadly about design problems than some other people who maybe just didn't have that experience...I had convictions about what I thought [about] how things worked, I guess...I *did* have a little bit [of] a lack of self-confidence. Definitely, that was

there...Partly because I was older than a lot of the students. And so, I had all this invested in it, but I wanted to perform like how I thought I should be performing. If I wasn't for some reason, then I thought, 'Oh, man. I hope I can do this.' So that was definitely there. There was this self-consciousness about being where I was at [in life], and really wanting it to work out...

I feel like I got the most out of studios that I was most excited about, and did the most work outside or on my own, and pushed myself in some direction about learning something that I was really interested in. So *definitely* [those were] the experiences that stood out as the best. And...I've had not as great studio projects, but I still had a really informative experience...But that's a learning process...I think that [in my first year] every time I had a studio, I always [felt immediately afterwards] like, 'Oh man, that was the best studio! I loved it!' Like, no matter what! And then I started to have a little more critical view of the studios starting in the second year, I think. Y'know, what worked, what was more frustrating about it. I think, as I pushed myself in the earlier studios, I still got a lot out of it 'cause [I] was just me pushing myself...I couldn't really sense when things weren't going right in a studio. But I started to get a better idea of that later on...

The program was always something that came up in every studio. Like, 'Ok, what is this project?'...[And] I do realize that you're supposed to question program. Any type of thing that's given to you by a professor, at least in architecture school, should be taken with a critical stance. And you should really consider and think about adding *more* or subtracting or changing it in some way to best fit whatever the design situation is. And as I experienced more studios, I felt like, when professors would create programs, it was really a formality. Like, 'Ok, we *have* to do something. We have to put this together. So here's something, and it's all gonna change.'...

Usually, when I was in studio, that was really *all* I did! I was always thinking about studio, and it would be really hard for me to pull myself away from that. **I loved working in long stretches of time, where I had like six hours to just totally immerse myself in something and not pull myself away.** The way I work best is—if I have to bounce from thing to thing to thing, I find that really hard! I have a hard time multi-tasking and going back and forth. So, when I had fewer extra classes or supplementary classes to take and could really focus on one project, those were kind of always the best studios for me. Or I thought I got a lot out of that...So, the way it usually worked out is...I'd have a break [between a morning class and studio]. And usually that wasn't a very productive time because it was when everybody else was in studio. And I always had a hard time working around other people. I think...the tension was always higher when you're in studio with other people. Sometimes I could get around it...But looking back on it, I was never as productive during those stretches when everybody's in studio. Y'know, you're kind of looking over at other people, and you're seeing people in front of you. And I can never just block it all out...I'm pretty sensitive to when other people are around. I love to work in groups, but when I'm trying to focus on my own thing, it's sort of an oversensitivity to a social situation or something like that...So that's another reason why I really like staying [late]. **Throughout every studio, I was always in studio late by myself.** [My] friends used to always joke around how I was always the last one in studio. I was in there when they left...And so, I always got to know the people that stayed late and worked by themselves...And I always like working in studio...[But] during actual studio hours, I felt like I never got anything done. I probably did,

but it was always kind of a scramble to produce. Or I was always rushed to try to do something...So I couldn't really *relax* and just kind of let ideas come. So most of the studio hours was just a rush. I'd produce stuff, but it generally wasn't...helpful towards continuing on with a design. A lot of times, it wasn't very productive for me...

I think the times when it was the worst—and **there were definitely times when I came pretty close to just stopping altogether—I think the issue was that, I felt like the grad school experience was so much what you put into it.** And there was *no* reason why anybody should be in grad school and *not* be pushing themselves. To me, that was kind of it. So, to work as hard as I possibly could seemed like the only logical option. **And I think, because of that freedom, and feeling like it was up to me to succeed, rather than being pushed by professors to learn or something like that—**[and] because I [was over thirty] years old when I [started] grad school—it's like, 'This is something that I chose to do. This is what I want to do.' **So [I put] it all on my shoulders to gain as much as I could.** I think that the times when it was *too* hard were: Definitely, during the first year. Kind of getting my bearings, trying to figure out how to manage the design process...And this is because it was the beginning of everything, where I wasn't really sure. It was the uncertainty of it all...And I think this was intentional on the professors to push you and make you have those feelings of insecurity during the design process. And actually get criticism. And feel bad about what you're designing, because that's the only way some people can push forward. I think saying something is 'OK' is the worst thing that could be done. So learning how to take the negative feedback...I never was really *defensive* or pushed back whenever I got negative criticism in studio. But I *did* get negative criticism, because the design was *bad*. And I *had* to *learn*...It was just something you had to learn, just how to get negative feedback. And move on. And realize that that's just part of the process...It's a totally necessary thing. So that was the first time that I had to face that, and **I kinda questioned my whole [reason] why I was doing this.** But I think that was a crossroads...I remember *crying*. It was embarrassing, but that's just what happened. It just hurt, to have to put in so much time and effort and then basically say it was for nothing. So that [was] the first studio. And...I think through that experience, I learned how to design. That's how I became a better designer, was learning and going through that. Kind of learning my own process...And...this is the first time **I also realized where the amount of time and effort that you put in doesn't always equal a great end result...**I realized that, 'Ok, I might put in all this time, but I could still come up with something that's not gonna work.' ...

I think the most important thing [we learned in the first year] was thinking critically about design. It didn't have to look a certain way, and every project didn't have to function a certain way. But coming to it with a certain critical mindset that, at the beginning of a project...it was important that something was grounded in a strong concept...I think there were certain core design principles [from the first year], for sure, that definitely stuck with me. Enough to where, later on, I could sort of go back and question those for myself...I think the strongest thing was linking this idea of a strong concept to design...

After the second year, it was pretty smooth sailing...until I got to Thesis—**that first quarter of Thesis was really rough because that was revisiting all these early fears of not being confident about where I was going. So it kind of felt the most like the first year. It kind of came full circle. But then I was able to push past that...**

**[Thesis] is something that I really got into...**It was another time where I actually was like, 'Man, I don't even know if I can do this.' [I] was figuring out what the scope of my project was, what I was actually interested in...I pulled it together, but it was really, really tough! I had like *no* idea where I was going, or what

direction I wanted to go. And it took a long time to sort that out...[It] was such a personal thing. **That was probably like the [ultimate] project in terms of personal investment into something.** But...that was the first time where I really felt *sure* about where I was going in a project. *Even* in earlier projects, in earlier classes when I was doing well in studio, I still was never quite sure. But **this was the first time just being on my own, I had to have that confidence to be able to move forward**—and not rely on outside feedback or...somebody telling me, ‘Yea, you’re on the right track.’...It was more like it was a requirement. And this is the idea of Thesis, is that you, as a designer or as a critical thinker, have to develop your own ideas, push ‘em forward without anybody helping you along. And I felt like, finally, **I had enough confidence to do that on my own. And once I found that, then it wasn’t an issue.** And I never compared it to anybody else’s project. And that was probably the easiest studio for me because of that!...I mean, it was hard. But in terms of the amount of *stress* during Thesis...**I had more fun in Thesis studio than I had probably in any other studio. Just pure fun...** ‘Cause there was no comparison...no worry about like, ‘Oh, I’m falling behind’...**[At a certain point] I knew where I was going, and I just went there!...**

### *Study abroad experience: learning how to live as an architect*

**International studios...were *such* a thrill!** It’s an awesome thing to be able to design in a different context...[And] I thought that it was always interesting that there was really no distinction between when you were in studio and when you were out of studio...**Once you study architecture, you can never walk vacantly down a street and look at buildings or streetscape or something and just not think about it...It’s one of the things I love and I hate about architecture, too, is that it’s always there. And you can’t really ever separate it.** But it’s one of the most thrilling things about it...It’s something you’re always processing and taking in...Y’know, you’re *always* thinking about it. Like, even when you were out at bars and stuff with friends, you’re still talking architecture, and you’re drawing sections of apartment buildings on napkins...or something like that...**So that was a big lesson for me, was seeing that you’re not really ever off the clock. You’re always kind of engaged on some level, thinking about it...**It’s that cross-disciplinary interest that is a critical part of becoming a good professional...You need to constantly be aware and observant of things and situations...There might be certain things you’re more interested in looking at or doing, but everything is somehow connected to what you’re doing in your projects or in studio. **And so that was a major lesson of [studying abroad was] learning how to live as an architect or designer, and how to *think* as one, I guess, outside of a studio setting...**So engraining that mentality and being open...It’s kind of the more you take in, the more that you’ve internalized, then it’s there when you start designing. But you have to take it in, I guess...I didn’t really know to what extent that was part of the culture [of architecture.] **It’s a cultural shift. And I think that’s when maybe my overall *personality* [changed]...You’re fully involved in it. And you can’t really separate it from the way you thought earlier or who you were. And so that’s how I started to think of myself. And it’s because of that immersion in what you’re doing...**

I know, talking to [the instructors I had while I was abroad] afterwards, they always thought I was *super* enthusiastic. I was always *really*, really excited to be doing whatever we were doing. And so I brought a level of enthusiasm...And that’s part of who I am, just as a person, is I’m always super enthusiastic about what I get into. [I] go full force in whatever I think is interesting or fun. I’ll put everything I have into it. So taking that aspect of my personality but then applying it to the architecture studio, or to this learning process, **I had this enthusiasm and energy about whatever we were doing...I think I was kind of setup to have that. Just my own personality is such that, I felt like I *could* do that. That thinking like that suited who I was as a person. So there was this kind of personality overlap, where being so enthusiastic about**

experiences and learning...really helped me when I realized that, 'Oh yea! That's actually perfectly in-line with what is good training for an architect, to be engrossed in the world. And to try to gain as much and *learn* from everyday experiences.' So that was a good fit, I guess, for my own personality. And it felt natural to be that involved and excited about what I was doing *outside of work*...

In some way, every professor left their mark on me. Because anytime that I had a profound experience in a studio, I partly attributed it to the professor, kind of opening my eyes to certain things that I hadn't really considered before. And I never really felt like I didn't gain something important from working with a particular professor. I always felt like they were insightful in a way. But...the smaller studios, for sure, where I actually got to work more closely and for longer periods of time with a professor, I think that definitely had more of an impact. And for sure **the [study abroad studios]**...'Cause those types of experiences, you're kind of *on* all the time, so **you're learning how to live as an architect, or observe and record and think like an architect or a designer**. And a lot of that is almost like a personality thing. Being around somebody who's constantly doing that, I think, was a pretty cool experience **to see how you have to think and see the world in a certain way...I think that was maybe one of the most influential experiences for me**...It was pretty awesome to actually talk design with [my instructor] and get his feedback on work in a really one-on-one setting. And also *travel* and see how he observed things and how that influenced design ideas and that kinda stuff...It was more of a life mentor sort of situation when you're traveling with somebody and having these experiences with somebody else...It's a great training...And...I feel like it's important for me to keep remembering that experience. That's how I should approach any situation outside of the office or something, even if other people aren't doing the same thing...

### *Transitioning from the studio to the office*

I always thought about the similarities in the design process [between studio projects and professional ones]. **I was always comparing how my supervisors and design professionals in the field worked in relation to how we worked in studio**. And I was *constantly* trying to see the differences and take cues from that. Like how they sketched, how they critiqued each other, how individual critiques would happen, what type of modeling was done at what stage—sort of the whole process. **Seeing how the two aligned and where they were different, I think, was really, really fascinating to see**. And I was always excited to see when some of the same things we would be doing in school [came up]. I'd be like, 'Oh wow! OK, they actually *are* preparing us to do what [firms do]. This is what they actually do in the field. They're sketching, they're developing ideas on trace [paper], and they're bouncing ideas off each other and that kind of thing.' So when they aligned, it was pretty fascinating to see...

I got into the work projects just as much as I got into a studio project. Like, last year, when I was working as part of a team and feeling like I was generating things that were gonna be used for presentations or that my stuff mattered to the project, I love that! And [I] put the same amount of intensity [as studio]. I couldn't...stay up all night working on something. But I definitely was excited to come and start working, and put that focus back into something again the same way [as] with my studio projects. And...I think as long as I felt involved in a project and not just on the sidelines, I could really be doing anything. And I would be involved and engaged. I mean, not anything. Obviously, like, entering unit totals into a

spreadsheet for eight hours or something wouldn't be the most fun. But I could see how it was related to the design. I could see how it was critical to moving the project forward...

**I think one thing about professional work is, working on a larger project with a larger team of people...you're not in charge of the whole [project],** at this stage, at least. It's not like just my own project...And **collaboration helps sort of break this idea that it's all on my shoulder...**And that's why I like that collaborative process a little bit more because it's not just up to *me* to do everything from square one. So it's not just me questioning myself, I guess, throughout the process, but rather, working on bits and pieces and helping out with a larger scale of something. I mean, within that, there's still individual tasks that are kind of up to me to sort out. But knowing that it's one piece in a larger process, rather than I'm having control of this whole [project], [that] this is like my child that I'm growing from Day One...**I think that's what excites me about the professional world over design studio, where it is kind of up to you...[where] whatever you put in is what you get out.** That's kind of the big difference, for me at least...I think knowing that my role in a certain project isn't like the end-all thing. It's easier to kind of stop and say, 'OK. This isn't critical to the rest of the rest of the project,' or something like that. 'It's just one piece in a larger puzzle,' I guess. When you kind of have the freedom to control all aspects of a project, I think that's when you sort of throw everything that you have into it. But when you can't control everything about a project, you come out with a little different attitude...It's kind of that personal investment. Knowing that you have put something into a project, but it's not *everything*. That you're not this project. Like, **you have more of a separation between yourself and the work...**

### *Challenges currently facing the profession*

[Before working, the profession] was a mystery! Like [for] everybody else, I think. Nobody really knows what the hell architects do. I certainly didn't know!...One of the issues [currently facing the profession] is this public perception of architects. It's one thing I've been thinking about a lot is just how little I knew about what the profession actually did. And that's kind of a stronghold that the profession has, is this sort of mystery about what actually happens. And that, if all of a sudden the public were to know what happened...I don't know! I don't know if that would be detrimental or if it could be kind of a reinvigorating thing for architecture. There is this kind of closed-door of design—but maybe that's changing. I think one of the issues is...the rate at which the tools are changing. Not just from hand to digital but within digital design. Like, the different types of software that we're expected to be fluent [in] upon graduation. At least the interviews that I've done, people that I've talked to, there's kind of this expectation that when they bring on youth in the office, it's just like [they're hiring a] computer whiz, y'know? Which is not necessarily a good thing. I think that if I got hired just for my ability to produce a beautiful rendering, I think that's misleading, in a way. And I *hope* that doesn't happen. I hope firms aren't just hiring on that. And then...when these people...get more and more experience, they're given more projects, what's the design quality gonna be?...What I've noticed is that it's really easy to *wow* these people with beautiful graphics. [But] there might not be enough scrutiny as to what actually is making good design or good architecture...And I hope it doesn't just go down that road...

And I think, also, the return on investment in terms of salary, that type of thing—what's it gonna take before people just give up and do something else? I think if it gets to be too bad, it's gonna start to really affect the talent pool, for sure. There's a tipping point where...only a certain number of people are really

gonna *love* to do it for nothing, right? And if that happens then they're just gonna lose—there's gonna be too much gone. And at that point, what I'm worried [about] is that...there's so many ways to design now that aren't critical. That it could just be like, 'Well, we don't even need these designers! We could just use the software. Or we'll put in all these environmental systems and the building will be efficient...' So that's another thing is: I'm actually really happy to see the focus move away from some of this *green* design. 'Cause when I got into school, that was all that anybody was talking about was environmental systems. And to me, that is not architecture at all. That's a technical thing. And in projects, when that's given too much of an emphasis, I feel like that's distracting. And...I think it should be part of every project. But for firms that are starting to use that more as a criteria of success for the projects, I don't think it's good...

To me, [a] critical approach is questioning. You have ideas, 'cause the ideas come from somewhere, but then you have to question that, and filter those thoughts. You have maybe a base idea, 'cause it just is generated. [You] can't explain *where* it comes from or something. But then it goes through the process of figuring out *why*. And why that is important. What that has to do with everything else. And sort of breaking it down...bringing logic to this illogical process. Doing that in a rational way...So in one sense of that word, I think that's what I think of as taking this critical approach to design. But to me, this logic can't really just be something like, 'Oh, well it makes sense economically,' or something like that. 'It makes sense environmentally.' It's more than that...Finding a time to have that reasoned thought in a project in the professional world is *so hard*! And that's the thing. The best firms have to *fight* for that to really put that time in. 'Cause it's *so easy* just to be like, 'The developer wants this. We got the tools. We can bill 'em for this. And hell. Why not? Let's just do that! And we're all gonna be fine!' But then what's the outcome of that?...

I think the design process is inherently critical, and that portions of the process are skipped over with certain ways of practice—professionally, now, I guess. That it becomes too easy to kind of jump to these finalized forms or something without going through that earlier stage...And that's sort of the unifying theme in everything that I define as *good* design...It's like, if a design is reached through a certain process in a certain way of thinking, than it can't be *denied*...It's still *valid*, I think...And I think that's only what will keep architecture as a profession alive. Because if it departs from that at *all*, then it just goes into the realm of engineering or these technical processes that can be eventually automated or something like that. And I also think that's why architects kind of have to, as architects, almost have to have this general focus. And that's why I'm starting to question my thinking [about job searching]...Rather than focusing on a specific project type, that maybe going to some firm that has an approach where, 'We bring the same *thought* to any project type. That it doesn't really matter.' There might be some [firms where] you might like designing a library over medical laboratories or something like that, just because of the technicalities or something. But it doesn't *really* matter, that it can be interesting no matter what. And I think staying at that general level—I think maybe the specialization of architecture is one of the problems...

I think I want to try to go for licensure relatively soon. And just try to build as broad of a range of experience and hone in on what I want to focus on. Or not. Maybe I want to stay general. But I want to try to do everything I can to avoid just doing one thing...in terms of project types...

### *The path to architecture: family expectations and a lack of self-confidence*

I never thought that I wanted to become an architect until later...I don't know if it's cultural, [but] I knew I had to go to university...My dad was an engineer. My mom was in the medical field. And I felt like I had to either choose one or the other [field]...But then also it's a more patriarchal culture where girls usually do certain kinds of things...and engineering is not a very girly thing to do. So I actually did three years of medical [school in my home country]...I kinda liked it, too!...[With the political situation in my home country], my parents just kinda said that I should go. And I came here by myself. And I had to do what I had to do to stay. Then, my family was able to come three years later. So, I knew I wanted to do more schooling. It just wasn't possible at the time...Still wasn't thinking about architecture...I actually was doing art, and selling art, too. But that was another thing that my parents said: 'You cannot go into art school because that's not a profession.'...[So] then, when I actually had an opportunity to go back to school, [architecture] was sort of a logical choice. Art, science, together. Architecture...I mean...you have to do right by your family. And I had to pick something. So architecture sounded good...

By that point, I didn't have enough self-confidence that I *could* go back to school...I...went to...community college....That was just a transfer degree...And when I came *here* [to UW], I spent the first year just taking the pre-requisites for architecture...And then I applied. And then I got in. And then, I just went straight through the rest, four years [including the MArch program]...That was pretty much a straight path through. I kind of felt like, 'This is what I'm doing now.'...At some point, you can't change [professions] anymore, y'know?...Sometimes, I think I could have actually done OK with medicine. I kinda used to like it. But it was, again, a confidence thing. It's a big deal with me...This is a profession where I have to be *really* confident!...

Because [of where of grew up, buildings [are] a very big part of that...You kind of grow up with it. So I think it was a pretty natural thing. I mean, I've always been interested in it, I guess. There were a lot of just confidence issues. I never thought I could ever do it...To me, it was *such* a thing that I could never do!...I never thought I could do it until probably five years ago!...Just suddenly kinda happened at some point...[I applied to] just here [for grad school]. Nowhere else...[it was] kind of [a] utilitarian [decision]. Just, I've been here...and at some point, it's just too difficult to go somewhere [else]. And...I had a partner...And I knew this was a very good school to begin with. And...y'know, you kinda get tied down to things. It's convenient to be in Seattle!...

### *Impressions of the UW culture*

When I was in the undergrad, I was more of a non-traditional student than I was in graduate school. I mean, there were a few students who were kinda in my position. But I kind of felt outside of the group...in undergrad. [Most of my classmates were] still kids...[so] I really felt the difference as far as *commitment*. I kinda *knew* what I was doing and where I was going with that. Most of the people didn't even go to the graduate school after that...And then, in graduate school, you kinda get in with the same people who *also* know where they're going with it, and are competitive and have the level of commitment that it requires. So it kind of feels different...

Honestly, I only started to really look at what other programs do when...I was already in the graduate program, just talking to people who've gone to other schools. And knowing that now, I'm glad that I'm here...Now, though, I wonder if I have developed a certain outlook on architecture just because I'm *here*, and it speaks to me *now*. Or if that's what I would have thought about architecture *anyway* and this program speaks to what I think about architecture. It's really difficult to say, y'know, what's the cause and what's the consequence?...I feel the biggest thing about the U-Dub program is the focus on the making process, the utilitarian and realistic approach...I mean, not every faculty member, but **a lot of faculty members really focus on what really is happening in the social sphere. And, to me, it's really important, the social aspect and kind of realistically looking at what's happening in society and the architect's role in society.** As opposed to some programs that look, y'know, in a more abstract way at [things]...To me, I feel that it's very, very important how architecture applies to society. And I think U-Dub is good at focusing on that. Not always, but—...The undergraduate program is more kinda utilitarian. You have to learn these things...learn the software, take your structure classes—And of course there are a couple faculty members that I can think of that *were* trying to bring the spirit of U-Dub even into the undergraduate program [and] were very inspiring...

### *The grad school experience: losing and regaining confidence*

In the beginning of the program...still at that point, I was just seeing the whole thing as a series of tasks that I have to complete in order to get a degree. And that's really not a good way probably to do that...I feel like I was just going with the flow. Which is probably bad! I wish I had somebody who could've talked to me, pointed me in that direction 'cause I probably would've had a goal.

I think **the very first quarter is the craziest quarter of all!**...That first quarter is absolutely insane! And I'm glad it's first. 'Cause you just live through it, I guess...**You're kind of in survival mode!** And, I guess, just everything kind of hits you at once. Just the amount of *work*. And, to me, [the group project in studio] felt almost like a *fight*...**It feels like a fight from the beginning.** Just like, everybody trying to get their *idea* through. And everybody's from different *schools*, so they have different *backgrounds*. And they feel also that they know exactly what needs to be *done*. I have changed as a person throughout these couple years, but in the beginning I was still very easily affected by things like that. Maybe I'm exaggerating what I felt, but to me, **it was a real blow to my confidence.** Which wasn't very strong yet...I was actually thinking about it after the first quarter and maybe second quarter—**to me, it felt like boot camp...I understand that the clients are not going to coddle you once you start working. And maybe it just prepares you for that...**

[Certain classes] made you feel more like an architect...The class...[on] materials. That was exciting, kinda made you feel more like a professional in this profession...Instead of approaching design as a very abstract thing, as it is in undergraduate classes, you actually design something, maybe even based on how certain materials perform...'What is a steel structure? What is a concrete structure?' So you feel more like a professional. And if you wanna be an architect, that's exciting...I know it's still...role-play. I mean, it's still not real. But maybe more real. A little bit more real...

I think my mind has always been clearer when I'm just by myself. I know people do it differently, but when I have to make a really big step in design, sometimes I just have to not do anything, just close my

eyes. And I see things...Oh, I remember what I did! I went down into the [basement]. If there was nobody there, I could close the doors and just lay there...occasionally. But studio's not very good for that process...I mean, those big steps, they don't happen that often...Actually, I think that was one of the problems. I would do something...but then I would have to discard it because it was done *here* [in studio] and there are distractions...just too much stuff is happening around in the world. So I guess I'm just a solitary sort of person that way...And I remember, actually, if you [made] some big change or big move, you'd have to go home and discard it. 'Cause it's just not right...Or you'd do it because you just have to show something [to your instructors]...

When I think about just **as far as personal development, in the undergrad it was always up...** a steady climb. **But graduate school...was a steady decline**, I felt, just in my work!...Just not even knowing what I'm doing anymore...That was a very big change from undergrad to graduate. I felt like I was very firmly on top of things in undergraduate. It was easy. **Graduate school is very different. It felt *extremely* competitive. So much that it was really messing with my ability to do well.** And it got worse, actually...I think it might be something that's my own personal issues, but **I felt like some people were extremely confident in what they were doing. And that is more important than skill level...**And it just kind of got me into a very bad spot, eventually, towards the middle of my second year...**[In moments of weakness] I would just be thinking I will never be able to do it, and that I'll just end up being a CAD monkey for the rest of my life...That I'm just not good at it.** That it's the wrong choice...I knew I could get through the program. It's not impossible. That was not the problem...**[But] I couldn't [quit]. [I would] just [be] letting too many people down, I guess. That wasn't possible...**

I keep thinking about just one studio...**One studio was just horrendous!...**That [project] I actually liked! But [my instructors] didn't!...I just feel that there was some big misunderstanding...I kind of made some decisions that—I **didn't go with the flow in the beginning and that kind of got me in the end...**You had a choice to design two different things. And *everyone* except for me decided to design this one thing. And I was the only person designing that other thing. Yea, so that was not a good thing to do...But I felt it was almost like a political statement...for me to [not design what everyone else was]...**And then I just got myself into just a horrible mental place...**I don't know if other people did, but **in the studio, you always compare what you're doing to other people.** And you always think, 'Oh, this project is better.'...And it becomes really, really competitive. But because I was doing a *completely* different thing, I thought that everybody else was better...That studio was a very low point. I did go see a counselor, [but] it wasn't very helpful. And then I kinda reassessed what really was my problem. **I decided that working in the studio wasn't working for me very much! Y'know, if I can't stop myself from comparing myself to other people and it keeps bringing me down, I need to change it.**

**Furniture Studio [the next quarter]...really brought me back up! And then I did my thesis as an independent project. And that really reestablished my confidence.** It turned out to be a good project. Had a good review, and feel better now!...Furniture Studio was just amazing! It was like euphoric after [the previous studio]...Everybody's doing something completely different! Just your own skill level...The [fabrication classes had a] positive impact. Very much. **I can't explain why but I felt very, very good. Very confident there,** always...There are lots of things that you don't necessarily know what you're doing, but...it just, I

guess, worked for me somehow. **And it's just very empowering to make something and use the machines...**I don't know if it's only because it was physical objects. Or because it's something I like to do...And maybe especially for me because of my cultural background. Where I come from, girls don't do stuff like that. So it was just really good to do that...like welding. I can weld! And I'm a girl! Yea. So that was just good. And I guess it might have extended a little bit into other classes. I don't know how necessarily. I don't know how things affect each other...

You're kind of able to relate to some instructors better than others. And some you can actually tell them that, y'know, 'I have this problem, a confidence problem.' And they probably hear it from everybody. But I did have several instructors that were very, very good for me. [One of my studio instructors], we had a good connection, I guess. And she kinda understood the troubles that I was going through...She was supportive....Some instructors try to understand each individual student, how they work. And you kinda see when they do desk crits, they'll like try to figure [that] out...And that's why...that [one] studio was not as good because [the instructor] was there maybe three times out of the quarter. I'm exaggerating, but—he just arranged different people [to] come in and do desk crits. And I don't know who they are, y'know, every time...I wish I could do it all over again. But at that time, if I hear a comment on my project, I feel like I have to respond to *this* comment. But then you have a totally different person coming in, and so—that's really bad!...**I know that one of the biggest mistakes was looking at what others are doing**—doing, thinking about...It [was] kinda just, responding to every comment that you get during desk crit...**You, as a student, have to know what you want...**[And being able to respond by saying] 'Ok. Well, he thinks that, but I know what *I'm* doing.' **It took me all these years to figure this out, but I guess that's what school is about...**

**My mantra when I first came back after that bad studio was, 'I'm doin' it for myself, and I don't care what other people think.'** So I was constantly trying to remove myself from the studio setting, at least in my head. So I guess it's just that general idea, going back to what the project needs, not what other people think...[In other studios,] I felt like I was doing it *for* somebody, not for *me*...And I shouldn't have...But I guess it's takes five years to realize it! Maybe that's what school is all about? I don't know...

I feel super good about [my thesis]!...I started looking for an idea...way before my thesis. And I started looking at history, and then I found this little-known period of history, and then started looking around. And the site kind of found *me*, you know, I didn't find it. I just stumbled upon it. So then I started looking more into it...This is really weird, [but] I felt that **[Thesis] was so much less stressful than all studios combined together!**...**'Cause I was just doing it on my own time maybe?** I was working at home a lot...I mean, I *knew* that other students were getting together and doing group reviews, too, but I just felt that same feeling I used to get during studios, like...crazy. I don't know, something changed!...

**[During Thesis], I was thinking about the process! 'Cause it was very solitary!...That's why Thesis was so much less stressful.** I actually got more done because I didn't have something to show on a regular basis. And I could take a whole week to make one thing, but then I wouldn't have to redo so much, I guess...**[The freedom in Thesis also gave me] an honest way to think about design without trying to...please a certain group of people. Without thinking, 'How is it gonna look in the review? What's my instructor's gonna say?'** It's honestly thinking about the project in itself. And I guess that's the biggest lesson...I'll [continue to] *think* about what it was I thought or how I was feeling when I was doing it. Because it was a way for me to get

**back to feeling good about myself. But it was actually the best time I had in school. I really, really enjoyed that time!...**

I mean, I don't know how realistic it is. But I feel like, first, you just have to use your best judgment about something and just honestly think about what this thing needs to be. And I mean, that sounds really utopian, but we are the ones who went to school to learn how to do it, and the clients didn't. So we can convince, educate—that's why I can do a whole presentation and turn somebody's mind around...You *can* convince people and turn their minds around...

*Changing throughout school: 'I'm not now who I was'*

I used to get deer in the headlights...all the fear and panic of all the reviews and mid-reviews and all that. And it's distracting!...I think that's the most distracting and destructive force in all my studios. And I so wish that I could get over it somehow. I *know* I could have done better projects...[but] I don't know how to get rid of it...and that's kinda my biggest regret and biggest distraction...**If I'm working on my entire project just thinking, not what it's going to do in my project**—like, a certain step, what it's going to do in my project—**but I'm thinking about what is my instructor going to say about this when I show it to her in two hours? That's not how it should be done**...I mean, I think I do understand it now. And I think I was able to go through my thesis without this being a distraction...And my big, horrible studio...I understand also why it was so bad because we didn't have the same instructor all the time. And so, you're trying to please all these people who you will never see again...**So you have to be very strong about what you want to do in your project**. And some people are!...I feel like I know at least one or two people who are really good at that...[They] keep in mind what it is that they want to do, and they discard...comments that don't feed it...[And] by the design stage [of Thesis], especially when I had one instructor say something and another say something else...I had this one moment when I got a comment and I was like, 'Y'know, she just doesn't get what I'm trying to do here.' And that was a very good moment for me!...

**I know that I have changed a lot throughout the last couple, three years...I mean, I'm not now who I was...** I just know that I've changed...I mean, people I haven't seen for two years—I just went to see my friend, and they just [remarked], 'You're different.'...[It] was kind of a compliment, I guess. She said, 'You're stronger now all around.'...

Coming out of *school*, we don't really know what working in an office is about. So I guess the first several years is all about learning. Y'know, all the different software that we had to learn, at first it's daunting. And then it's like, 'Oh, another thing I can learn, and it's not that scary.' And so, I guess that whole **removing the fear aspect from learning a new thing is very, very important**. I think it's one of the biggest things in school...Actually, that's another thing that maybe changed in grad school. Because I was too concerned about my grades before...in undergrad and before that. And when you take a new class, especially if you learn, I don't know, a new software or something, or some new skill in a class—I had been terrified! Y'know, 'Am I gonna be able to do it?' But by grad school, you just take all these different classes. [And you say,] 'I can do it! I can learn it!'...Just not having that fear of failure when you learn something new. That's, at least for *me*...very, very important. **Being more excited rather than scared about learning new things...**

### *Professional experience and goals: apprehension, cynicism, and confidence*

I did my first internship when I was still in community college. Just to see what a firm was like...They're good. But...I don't want to work there [anymore]...I want to do something a little more exciting...The plan [now is that] I'm gonna start looking for a job in Seattle. I feel like I've only internshipped at that one firm because it was a matter of convenience. And I've put all this money and years into this education. I feel like I just at *least* need to see what's out here in Seattle. There are more choices...And that's another thing. I want to find a firm that...does something exciting for social reasons or ecological reasons. Or maybe a more diverse place, not so traditional...more interesting stuff going on...

**Now, I'm at the point that I'm ready to get a job...and work! I do really understand how different the school experience is from what is about to come a couple months from now. So I guess, this feeling that school maybe has not really prepared me to what's coming, aside from certain skills that I have...Maybe it's a little bit of apprehension and hence cynicism...But [school] did make me more confident. And there is nothing wrong with a little cynicism!...**

I need to earn my license, of course. I do want to get a license...At this point, when I think about getting a license and all that, it just seems like, 'Oh gosh. Another hurdle to cross.' But because all this has already been done, it's kinda, 'Why waste it?'...

Right now, I feel like I know less [in terms of practical application] than a person who's been working in as a contractor or builder. I know less than that person who has no architectural education at all. I feel like I know nothing right now. I can't build a house. I mean, maybe I could make a drawing for a simple house, and have everything in it. But probably a professional who *builds* houses will look at it and say it's ridiculous. So I feel I know very little...I feel like I have a *sense* or what it's like, [but] I don't think I can manage a project. But there is one important thing that is something you learn in school is how to think about design as something that's not plopped on a site from space but fits in. And you have to go to school to understand how to research these things. And I mean, maybe I still have an idyllic view of it and how important it is. I know that it doesn't work like that in real life. People don't have time. But I think it should be important...

### *Challenge facing architecture: being an elite profession*

The profession is still kind of segregated. It's still very unattainable for some people. It's still very elite as far as who gets there. And I think, as opposed to medicine, where it doesn't really matter that much, this is really matters...As far as, people who really are able to receive this type of education really belong to certain elite...[The profession] is really disconnected from the reality of living. And I don't know with other professions...But architecture is *for* the people. We're creating this realm where people live, and—something I read, there's some institutionalized racism, which we don't like to talk about. Women are still extremely rare as principals, y'know?...That's really serious...How many black people do we have in our program? One?...What's with that? I don't understand, really...[Architecture is] a little disconnected from reality...So I think that may be a challenge...I just see what I see, that there are only students of certain class and background [in architecture]. I don't know why it is so, necessarily. I mean, I can generalize,

'cause we know reasons why kids of certain groups don't end up in college in general. But why architecture? I don't know...I have read articles about it being one of the most segregated professions...

### *Becoming a "professional"*

**School...always links people together, I've noticed...**When you start talking about school... I've done the rites of passage. That's important...I kind of feel that I belong a little more. **Just talking to architects who've been working, you feel that they kinda take you in.** But I don't know why, necessarily...I think when you meet architects out in a social setting, we share some knowledge that other people don't or we're all snobs or something...[School] seems to be *one* of the things. But I think it's something *more*. It's perhaps, **we know that we share a certain set of beliefs and even, I don't know, tastes. Or, on a different level, maybe political beliefs or educational level.** There's different things, I guess...**But there is some kinda camaraderie, suddenly [when you graduate]...You become *professional*...**

I feel like [the term] professional is almost an outside thing that other people use, sometimes in odd ways...It's like, you're placed into a niche right away...where you have some sort of power, I guess, to make decisions...It has a connotation of power...that is afforded by education...My dad used to say: 'You never call yourself an artist. Only other people can call you that.' So...maybe it's one of those things? I don't know. I mean, I probably wouldn't go and say, 'Oh, I'm a professional!'...[But] I guess you kind of place yourself somewhere in society...And especially when I think about the future, maybe I won't use that word [professional, but]...I want to be in that group. That's why I'm doing it....It's almost like a reward...

### *Route to grad school: from interior design to architecture*

In high school, I considered [architecture]. I took art [classes, but] it was kind of like, 'Well how the hell are you gonna make money in art?' So then it kind of led to architecture. I went to a really competitive high school, and [my advisors] told me my grades were not high enough and my SAT scores weren't high enough to apply [to architecture schools]. So that kind of deterred me...And back then I had no idea what architecture entailed, so I just believed them. **I went into interior design instead...and I hated it!**...During [undergrad], my teachers were more architects. So then they kind of taught us architecturally more than interior design....And when we *did* do interior design stuff, it just was not interesting...**I didn't really fit in...They're just different kind of people that do interior design and other people that do architecture...They're just different, I guess...**

And [after I graduated] I couldn't find a job. My [family] actually pushed me to apply to architecture school... and I was like, 'I don't know! 'Cause I'm not smart enough!'...[But] then I took the [summer] class [at UW] and then decided to apply [to the M.Arch program]...I was still kind of wishy-washy in applying...[but] I decided to apply anyways because I couldn't find work and [I figured] I might as well just go back to school. And then it wasn't really til [the summer program] til like the final. I presented and then [a UW faculty] actually looked at my work. And he was like, 'Whose is this?' And I was like, 'Uh, it's mine.' And he was like, 'Yea, you'll get in.' I was like, 'Thanks.'...That was kind of the 'OK! Someone likes my work!'...

### *General impressions of the UW program*

I think this program's very practical. Every design *kinda* needs to be practical and theoretically stand up—structure needs to be in it. From what I've seen from other schools [that are] very concept-oriented... some of the buildings they design are *crazy*, and I have *no* idea how they're gonna stand up! But that's not on their radar. Which is interesting. And...I kind of wish there was a little more of that here. Just 'cause I feel like my mind gets very trapped [thinking], 'Oh god! How is it gonna stand up? Well, now I'm gonna have to do ninety-degree angles or something like that.' Which isn't *bad!* I mean, I think I enjoyed it here. And I do like how practical it is...I don't know about other schools, but [here] you test in building things—like, the one-to-one [mock-ups]...I would say, as a school, they expect [that you design an actual building that can stand up]. There is some leeway probably between professors, depending on which one you get. But I think that's why I design the way I do, I guess. And I wonder what would've happened if I went to another school. Like, would I be designing differently? Even with [a recent] competition that I was doing [after graduation], I was like, 'Well, I could do anything! Nobody friggin' cares!' But I still had a friggin' structural grid! And I was like, 'I don't think they care if there's columns or anything!' But that's just how this school has taught me to design...

Being in the three-plus year program, everybody is pretty much different... But we felt like we were all in the same boat...The work was just piling on, so we had no time to think [about feeling different]...You're all in this first quarter where you're drowning, basically. And I had [drafting] skills...I already had preset skills [from undergrad] that helped me. I imagine it's a lot more difficult for people who didn't...

I thought I was [a] typical architecture student. Well, I think we *all* did. And then, [a faculty member] said to us, 'You know you're not technically [graduate] students, yet.' And we were like, 'What?'...And they were like, 'Yea. It's not til your second year [that you're] a grad student.' It's like, 'Are you kidding me?!'...

### *Thesis experience as a personal project and peer support in studio*

Thesis, of course, influences you 'cause it's such a different process [from other studios]...For me, the project was very impactful because it was something that I actually cared about...Which I didn't think I'd be as impacted by it. I think the project actually sets what I want to do for the rest of my life in architecture. Whether I get there or not, I'm not sure. But the process itself was influential, too, 'cause it was *so* different. It was basically what you want, and you have to decide, rather than people telling you what to do or what program needs to go in there...It was just an interesting process. And I wonder when I get into the real world...I highly doubt it's gonna be like that, 'cause you have a client who's telling you what they want...

And it's just nice 'cause you can go in [to studio] and people are like, 'How ya doin'?' And you're like, 'Terrible. I can't figure out this part.' And depending on if they're busy or not, they'll usually drop everything and come over and be like, 'Well, could you do this? And this?' So it's kinda like an impromptu desk crit but more relaxed with other students. And sometimes, there's one classmate that knows your project *way* better than anybody else, even the professors. So it's easy to just pop your head up and be like, 'Hey, what do you think about this?' And they'll just be like, 'No,' or 'Yea, that's fine. That sounds cool.'...And **it wasn't 'til Thesis that I actually understood what it meant to be in studio.** To have your peers...I'm sure other people did it way earlier. But...I did it more towards Thesis...I guess the reason why I hung around more in studio for Thesis was just I got to *know* people better. And so I kinda wanted to just hang out with them. So I stayed in studio...

The students [here] are different than [at] other schools. From what I've heard from other schools, students...are kind of all in competition with each other. But here...everyone's willing to help other people 'cause you kinda feel like you're in it together...And I think that's probably a big factor on what got me through grad school...

### *Fighting through moments of struggle, learning how to engage criticism*

The first [time I really struggled] was...first quarter [studio]. It was just so much work!...We had a lot of classes! And [the studio instructor] expected a *lot* out of us! And...I'm a person who doesn't like to work past like nine o'clock—'cause I can't *think* past nine! And that quarter, I remember just always working...I was worried I couldn't make it through grad school, basically. [And] I wonder if they do that to scare the shit out of people and weed out the weak people or something. 'Cause we lost like three people! But I made it through...Most of the times that [I struggled] came up was because I was struggling with my design and just wondering if I was actually going to be a good designer...It always comes about because it gets to be a little too much. And I keep feeling defeated because I can't come up with a good enough design, basically...

**There were a couple times when I questioned architecture, and if I really wanted to go into it.** And I don't exactly remember those times. I wanna say it probably followed those ones where I didn't know if I was going to make it through the program. 'Cause I think, **to me, I equated making it through the program to being an architect...I think it's just [that] I didn't want to disappoint people and not make it through. Plus myself.** I don't want to not finish things...I think it was that, but then it was also **proving to myself that I could do it.** Kinda like, push through negative comments or bad feedback or something. And you're just like, 'Well, I have to just keep doing this.' ...In undergrad, I showed up with a design, and my teacher was like, 'This is terrible! I can't even look at it!...And I don't know what to say to you.' And I was like, 'What the *frick*?!' So that *really* devastated me...Of course, I went home and cried. And then the next day, I was like, 'Well, fine. I'm going to do it again!' And the design always comes out better. So...I kinda get deterred, and then the next day it's kinda like, 'Well—alright fine! Let's start over again. Let's do it!'

I think I took [criticism] too personally a lot of times...And I can't help it! I'm sure other students wouldn't have experienced those failures as I did...Every critique, I know you're not supposed to take personal[ly]...I just always see them as—if there's something wrong, that's a jab to me, that I did bad or something. Which could be just my personality and the way I think...I mean, if everybody's struggling, then it's like, 'Oh, it's not just me! There's not something wrong with me or I'm not [in]capable of doing this.' But if it is just me struggling, then I feel like I'm incapable. And I'm falling behind or something and I'm not on par with my classmates...[I turn to classmates for support], but ultimately, it comes down to me to reverse it, obviously...I need to convince myself, 'Ok, fine. I did a shitty job. But let's keep going and do a better job, or work harder.'

In a desk crit...whenever someone would comment—I probably shouldn't have taken it this way, but it was like, 'Positive, positive, negative, negative, negative.' ...I've tried throughout school to just *not* take it as positive-negative—just take it as what it is and comments. I would say it's gotten a little better, but it's still heavily based on that...I noticed **when I actually did a studio group project.** It was just with another partner. And I noticed that **I was more influenced by the professor than my partner was. She was very strong-minded. Like, she knew what she wanted, she knew what was good, regardless of whether people hated it or not!** So every time we had a desk crit, we would come outta there, and...we were kinda like, 'Did [the professor] like it?' 'I don't know.' 'What the hell's going on?' And our design was *totally* different from everybody else's. And I would come outta there, and I'd be like, 'Shouldn't we change it? Should we do what he says? Should we not make this angle?' And she would be like, 'No! We're makin' the angle! We're stickin' with it!' And I'd be like, 'OK! Are you sure?' And she'd be like, 'Yes! It's *fine*! We're going to stick with it.' **So that's when I noticed, 'Oh! You can actually just say, 'No, I don't really want to listen to you. I'm gonna do it my way.'** And I don't think I was brought up that way...I was brought up just doing whatever anyone told me to do. And then when I worked with her, it was an interesting experience 'cause I was like, 'Oh! Ok!' I could *not* have gone against the professor's advice if she wasn't there telling me, 'No, it's fine. Just leave it.' **So...that's when I started to try and do it myself. I don't do as good [of a] job as her...[But] not blindly taking someone else's advice and...thinking for myself, I think is a good thing to learn...**

It was easier once I figured what I wanted 'cause I feel like, 'Yea, I'm not gonna listen to you.' But in the beginning [of the design process], I think I need [my instructor's] help a lot more. Whether they helped or

not, I'm not sure...[For the recent competition,] I didn't really have people to depend on but myself...So...maybe the competition taught me [that] I don't need somebody to influence me in the beginning. Maybe it's just me having to get things out and deciding what seems right. I don't know...

### *Daily routine and design process: bus ride as more effective for design than studio*

I usually tried to get here by eight-thirty...If it was the beginning of the project...in the morning...on the bus, if I wasn't reading and listening to the radio, I would be thinking of a concept. And...if I *had* a concept, I'd be thinking about the building, 3-D in my mind. And what it would look like. Usually, it was the concept and how to explain it, 'cause I'm not very good with words!...And then, whatever I thought of on the bus that morning, I would come in and test it before class. If it was a model, I'd quickly make a model. If it was a drawing, I'd draw it...Usually, my design process revolves around a concept that I need. And it's always constantly trying to refine it and make it more solid and to actually have it make sense. And have drawings to explain it to other people. But after the desk crit, if it didn't go the way that I thought it would go or things aren't clear, I would work on other things to get my mind off of it, to just stop thinking about it for a bit. And then, on the bus ride, I usually thought about it again. And thought about the concept and how to refine it. And...then when I got home, I would test that again. That's kind of my design process, I guess. I think a lot, and then I test it...It was easier for me to think of things first and then just *do* 'em. And it was *way* harder for me to think in studio. So if I had a plan that would help me. Then I would be productive. But if I didn't have a plan, it was like, 'Game over.' I wouldn't do anything....I think I did a lot of thinking on the bus!...Like, you're sitting on the bus, and you're just waiting. So then of course your mind wanders. And then when I get to studio, I have all these ideas. And then I just test 'em and do them...[But] I didn't realize that that was my process! I kind of just did it!...

The bus ride, nobody's gonna talk to you. Hopefully!...And it's quiet...So it's just time either to let my brain rest or to think about whatever I want to think about. In studio, I didn't feel like I had that quiet time. Like, there's always somebody doing something *loud* or someone's *talking*. You get *distracted*. On the bus, it wasn't a distracting atmosphere. I don't know why. And I like the movement of the bus goin' over the road. It's very soothing! And maybe I knew what to expect on the bus. So then that didn't bother me. And I just used to think about the design. In studio, it's more like, I have no idea what's gonna go on that day! 'Cause there's so many people in there. You have a lot of talking and someone could be drilling something. I mean, I couldn't think there...

### *Professional experience and current mindset*

**I guess I don't see myself invested in [architecture] right now...I don't know. I don't feel committed to it, yet.** Even though I went through the whole grad school...**I'm just trying to get a job...** I think I'm not fully committed, yet, because I don't even have a job!...So I've worked so hard, and even having the Master's degree...it's not a shoe-in for a job. There's so many other factors. And I guess I just don't know if I have what it takes to even get my foot in the door. And even if I do get in the door, can I work in the real world? **I don't even know if I'm gonna like it!** So it kinda sucks going to school, investing your *whole* three years into something that you don't even know you'll like. And then people are always like, 'Do a job that you like!'

## Irene Profile

This is just speculation: I'm not sure, but I think [I'd rather work for] a smaller [firm], maybe, so I can experience multiple different things. Rather than a large, corporate firm where I think you basically do one thing and that's it...I think for my first job, at least, I want it to be happy. I wanna be happy and be able to learn...Right now, I don't think I can influence anybody unless I get high enough. [And] in order to do that, I gotta get the skills...I don't have a whole lot of experience already. [So] I kinda want to be able to jump or be able to even *ask* to jump to different projects...**My first goal is to get a job!...To try get a broader base and try everything, and then figure out what I want.** And I haven't actually decided if I want to do the ARE [registration exam]. So probably decide that [soon]. I probably will do it.

### *Route to UW and the decision to pursue a dual-degree*

I definitely wasn't that young [when I decided I wanted to become an architect]. My dad is an architect, and that certainly is no small part of it. So I was always very much aware of the field and people in the field...But it was never like, 'This is what I'm doing,' at a certain age. In high school, I played [sports competitively], which I really enjoyed. And did well in school, and so I ended up looking for a good [college] where I could go play [sports]. And ended up having a couple of options. [The school I ended up choosing] *does* have an architecture program, and my dad encouraged me [to apply to it], 'cause I didn't know what I wanted to do otherwise. He thought very highly of that program, so he thought I might like it. **So I started off in it, and freshman and sophomore year couldn't stand it. I was having a really difficult time with it. I didn't totally get it. And then, junior year it really started clicking, where I found myself not just bogged down by the work but really being more interested and putting more effort and more time into the work. So that was really exciting for me...**Freshman year...certainly, other people were [struggling]. But I was also really impressed by my classmates. And that made me feel like I was in the wrong place...[But] I didn't have an answer for what I would do next. And I think I'm a bit stubborn in that way, too, where I didn't want to quit on it. So I kept going with it. And at some point, in the fall of junior year, I think I was working on a project on a Friday night or a Saturday night, and I was like, 'Oh wow! I could not have imagined myself doing this last year or two years ago. So this is cool. I like this!'

**What was jarring about [my] initial time [in undergrad] was just, I hadn't felt failure like that...That was sort of the hinge. If I were to have gone a different route, it would have been that [moment]...I haven't seriously considered leaving the general discipline since sophomore year of undergraduate. And that was because of a constant sense of failure. I had certainly experienced failure before, but I think not so consistently. Or in the past, when I had failed...there was some redemption. And this seemed like an impossible battle. And maybe even that that was the point...**At the end of sophomore year, I decided I'm going to quit [competitive sports] and focus on architecture. And I didn't necessarily become better at architecture. My classmates, many of them were still head and shoulders better than me. But I was able to feel good about it and excited about it, and I think get more out of it...It just hadn't really clicked as far as what you do to do good work....It was definitely a transition from how I was interested in spending my time. In high school and most of college, I was always a good student. But I had never been committed the way that I became that year.

**[After graduating]** I worked for two years in [the Midwest] at a design-build firm. It was a pretty bad time [economically], when I graduated...But the place I ended up at was OK. I was really excited to go back to school because...they weren't doing anything that made me excited about architecture...At that time it was really hard for me to find value in it...I wasn't totally prepared, I think, to appreciate [what they were doing]. So **I was looking for other ways of staying...engaged.** I ended up applying to and taking part in this...night program [that]...bills itself as a program for people of all disciplines...It's pretty cool. There are, each year, a number of architects and/or landscape architects, but there's also just a ton of diverse backgrounds that come to it. [And] that [program] is what ended up planting the seed for landscape architecture. [I worked on a project with] two facilitators [who] were landscape architects, and I really started to look up to them. I was really impressed...I sort of could imagine myself doing the types of

things they were doing. Which was just the way they *knew* the people and the places and the environment that they were dealing with, I thought was really cool and different from what I had gotten out of architecture school. The project was cool and fun to work on, but I also was just interested in how these people were involved in the city...[And] I was, for better or worse, able to really invest in [it] because this nine-to-five was sort of bumming me out. So maybe if I had had a better job or a job I was interested in, I would have never done [the program]. Who knows? But I *certainly* was looking for something like [it], and it ended up working out well.

While I was doing [the night program], I applied to graduate schools. And *only* architecture schools at that point. Was not thinking I would do landscape [architecture, too]...**I really liked school. And really wanted to go back to school. Because I was excited about architecture and...felt like—and I still feel like—I have a long way to go!**...I wanted to get out of the Midwest, so I applied to schools on the East Coast and schools on the West Coast...

So [I] applied to the [UW] architecture school, started the architecture program here. And maybe a month or two into the program, decided to apply to the landscape program, also...**I saw [pursuing landscape architecture] as a filling out, as opposed to a different direction**...I was definitely a little bit jarred by my expectations versus where I thought the [architecture] program was going. But it was not like, 'I'm gonna stop.' Or even, really, 'I'm gonna transfer.' It was more like, 'What can I do here to fill this out?'...What I was sensing, as far as the direction of where [the architecture] program would be going—I was missing some of the city engagement...urban design...city-scale thinking that I felt like [my undergraduate program] did a really good job of talking about. But the architecture program *here* wasn't. I think it's true, actually, this is very much a craft school. And [my undergraduate program] isn't craft. I mean, there's craft available there, but...to stereotype them, U-Dub would rather make something simple and beautifully constructed, and [my undergraduate program] would build a parametric thing that might collapse!...

I had two internships while I was in [undergrad]...both architecture firms. So I didn't have really much landscape experience. I spoke to [a mentor who was a landscape architect], and he was encouraging [of pursuing landscape architecture], not surprisingly...[I thought that mixing architecture and landscape architecture] was academically interesting. How that sorted itself out professionally, [I'd] get there later...I think my hope was that by doing things that I was interested in, I would be able to continue to do the things I was interested in. [In other words,] **I chose my academic paths based on interests I had at the time less than an idea of where those might lead after school. And it's worked out fairly well so far.** So rather than investing in career path-architecture or career path-landscape architecture, [I thought,] 'Try to do things from each of those that interest me. And then look for a place that is doing similar things or would allow me to do that.' It's not like what I was doing is *that* unique, where it would be all *that* difficult to find that match...**I was able to trust that it would go somewhere.** And maybe that is just because I knew about people's careers through my dad and including my dad...

### *Adjusting to a different school of thought*

I was really excited to come back to school. I knew U-Dub's strengths. And I was *really* excited to become more confident in building craft and how buildings get put together...learning about what can be beautiful at a detail scale. And learning about the sorts of designers that people at this school admire. Which aren't *only* admired here, but maybe especially admired here. And coming from [my undergrad], my own background was very much not built-oriented. I had really no confidence in that area. So I was excited to get a better and better handle [on that]...I think you still have to work professionally and build something to really have confidence in it. But I certainly learned a lot here... It took me a long time to appreciate the talent, skill, smarts of faculty and my classmates. Just because they were different than what I was used to... But when I did, I was pretty excited because I realized how much better they were than I was. So that's something that's exciting to me! I'd *much* rather be on *that* end than the other... 'cause then you can learn...**I think I just had an idea of architecture school that really evolved over my time here...I began to understand and probably side with a realm of architecture that focuses on quality and beautiful built environments. And I don't think [my undergraduate program] would really characterize itself that way...But that had shaped my idea of architecture school. And so it was definitely like a pivot here towards something else that took awhile to adjust to. But now it's something that I really admire and respect...It was also a struggle, for sure...**

When I first got here, I had a lot of trouble connecting with students and faculty. Mostly the students that had been here a year, three-year students...[But] I think I was...good at engaging people and bringing people together in design criticism. I partially attribute it to my undergraduate experience. Which was *really* rough, but the peer-to-peer collaboration was really enriching. And when I got here—probably in part just because of the two-year, three-year thing, whereas undergraduate you're just all together the whole time—I was sort of looking for that. And so I would find...or create structured ways to have peer-to-peer criticism...It didn't last very long, but [in my first year here] I organized [a group of students] after studio. And anyone who wanted to pin up their work could. And they didn't necessarily *have* to ask for feedback, you could just give feedback. Or they could look for specific feedback. And I liked those a lot! Because I learned a lot. And people were coming to them, so I assumed they liked it, also...

I was fairly quickly able to feel out who the best students in the class were just through their interactions with professors and other things. But I had to do it that way and not from the work. Because it was not clear to me who stood out or what stood out...I guess it wasn't totally clear to me how the faculty were evaluating the work to stand out...I think part of it was certainly just my own learning process and not any shortcoming of anyone. Because **I think [at my undergraduate program]...architecture as a profession was not necessarily pushed...I feel like they went out of their way to say, 'We're not training you to be an architect. We're training you to do a number of things that architects do'...So I think I had a lot of work to do coming into this school and a graduate program, professional program...I think there's some serious, Pacific Northwest pragmatism engrained in [this] school...[So] it was a big step from—I wouldn't call [my undergraduate program] an art program, but something more on that side of the spectrum...So I think that was a big leap for me that took a while to adjust to. And certainly part of the reason that I applied to the landscape school was to try to get back to, or engage in, thinking in a different way or a different scale...**

When I just started...my interpretation of my classmates and of U-Dub was more conservative than I anticipated. So that pushed me in the other direction to really challenge that...I always thought of school and the academic realm as a place to push and challenge and probably fail...I think failing is...the byproduct, however inevitable it is, of needing or wanting to challenge and push what's out there...And I didn't see that here. So I started thinking about ways to push—I'm thinking specifically of first year...The things that we were doing [in studio] were things that I'd seen before. And to me at the time, [that] was a red flag. It's like, 'You can't just copy things that have been done before.' That's how I felt at the time...[I was] looking for ways that architecture or landscape or urban design could be challenged or different than what's out there. And I didn't know what that really meant at all...[My undergraduate program was] trying to challenge and push a little bit more. And as a byproduct, "failing." And here, it's like, 'Failing has real ramifications that affect real people. So we can't do that!'... U-Dub is more respectful and responsible about what design can do...

I've really appreciated faculty here that have diverse backgrounds and have been skeptical—fairly or not—of the indoctrinated U-Dub people that are very Pacific Northwest. Because I think it's disappointing or misleading to be teaching in a sort of singular way like that. I thought it was interesting that, when we got our review from...NAAB that they wanted to see a greater diversity of program or sites. And I was like, 'Yea! We can't just keep doing [the same studio project] in [the same Seattle neighborhood]!' So there are certain things like that that really ring true to me...This isn't true across the board, but I feel like it's the general thrust of the school is to *do* those things...One studio that I did was exactly in that vein, and it was one of my favorite studios...So I'm not condemning it! But at the same time, when I look at the school as maybe more of an outsider, it seems pretty closed off...

When I got here, I was expecting one thing, which was an approach that I had learned at [my undergraduate program]. And that is *not* what I got here...That's only partially true. Because I understood that schools are different. And U-Dub, I understood very basically what distinguished it. It's very much associated with the Pacific Northwest. And there's a real regionalism and style to the Pacific Northwest. But that all said, my idea of architecture school was still very much one [in which] I expected studios or faculty or classes...to be more forward-looking. And there's a lot of risk and challenge and failure, I think, when you do that. And that's very much where [my undergraduate program] was...situate[d] much more in a sort of art environment than the school here, which I think is very much about architecture, in the sense of building and creating space...U-Dub, I think, learns from architecture and history and the past in a very different way—a very respectful, responsible way...And...I think it partially can be chalked up to undergraduate-graduate [distinction]. But I also think it's representative of the schools. I think precedent or precedent studies are a dirty word at [my undergraduate program]. Like, 'If it's been done, it's failed. Or it can be better. Anything that's been built, there are sacrifices and compromises made, just through the act of building it.' And here, I never heard anyone say that...Here, it's very much about being an architect...[The philosophy toward precedent at my undergrad program] impacts your process and the way you practice, for sure! What's great about it is that it really forces you to look outside of architecture to be influenced and inspired. And I think that's a really great thing. Because otherwise, we're just sort of replicating or re-appropriating things. So that's great! And that's where the precedent thing comes in. It's like, 'You have to look outside of architecture for the new, or the next architecture.' So that's great, I

think...That's what I got out of [it] is that, by essentially neglecting precedent studies, you're looking at different sources for inspiration to create something else, something new. And that's really challenging and rewarding, in a lot of ways. But you can't just be trying to create something *else*...And that's what I began to learn here, is that you don't have to just make something *else* to produce something that's successful or you're happy with or that's great architecture...I came to learn that architecture—really great architecture or great architects or great design—doesn't just have to be at this provocative end of the spectrum...I'm not sure where I stand [now], but [I'm] trying to figure that out...

### *The challenge of self-directed studio work: Time-on-task vs. quality*

The other thing that I was superficially disappointed in was...I was ready come to school and never leave school. And that was *not* the culture here....I mean, [UW is] a healthier environment, but it's a different culture...than [my undergraduate program] was and/or an East Coast school. It's *definitely* not [a 24-hour studio]! And I pushed back against that for as long as I did or could. And that was really challenging...to figure out. Like, 'I'm here forever! No one's here more than I am! But I'm *not* doing the best work. So that's the challenge! The challenge is doing good work. It's lazy to just be here *all* the time. You're pushing yourself in the wrong way.' Once I finally realized that that is actually the challenge...then I started to appreciate and understand students and people here better...It wouldn't be right to say I was the only one [staying in studio late]...There was a handful of others. And we were friends just 'cause we were there at weird hours. But the culture was *not* that!...And it's also a bit of a personality thing, too. It's like, any time I've been successful, it's because I've worked really hard at it, not because of anything else, really. So...rather than working backwards from wanting to be successful, it was like, 'Just work really hard.' It's not like, 'OK. Here's success. Now, get there,' (in the sense of success being just a matter of completing a discrete task or something)...That's something I struggled with a little bit, also. But I also recognized it as *bad*...That feeling of like, 'Oh, I need to be at the studio, panicking.' I definitely had that, not the first year, but the first chunk of time here...In that first quarter or so, I just began to take on more and more things...So that was a learning process. I definitely evolved from that first quarter...[I] began learning and appreciating just spending time better, whether that's at studio or elsewhere. And that's sort of an unending process...

I was really excited about the opportunity to come back to school, and knew that it was this finite thing. So [I] really tried to limit anything outside of it. I don't know if that was a good decision or not. But it's sort of like, 'As long as you don't burn out, maybe it's OK.'...My second year...I was still a bit of a madman, as far as my schedule...I was slightly nocturnal. And...I don't know that I [was] wrong, but I was convinced that I needed *big* chunks of consecutive hours to be really productive. Like, each hour becomes more productive...[Each night, I would] work for either as long as I could, or as much as I needed to. And I think that affected my process...It's sort of, I don't know, [the] chicken or the egg [dilemma]: Is that my design process because I just decided that, to be good at school, you have to stay up all night? Or is that my design process so I had to stay up all night?...It was a little bit isolating. Which is maybe why I, more than others, felt the need to structure ways to connect with other people in the design process. But I was also still very much trying to figure out this [issue]: The person who's there the longest doesn't necessarily have the best project. So I was still really challenging myself in that way, of saying like, 'You can't just be

here. If you're here for a really long time, it doesn't mean that you were successful. So you have to figure out what success is in your mind.' And that was really difficult. So on the one hand, I felt very much like I was in my element and confident...I felt like I was sort of in the zone at that point...But I was also sacrificing a lot of other things. Probably my other classes were suffering. In general, I didn't really excel in classes outside of studio. Because my attitude was such that, I just wanted to *be* in studio and *do* studio...I think that was at the cusp of the time where I was treating other classes as distractions. The goal with classes outside of studio was to be as efficient as possible...And in the fold there, I entered the landscape program...And I think the landscape program pushed me in a good direction in that people here, if they're taking four classes and one of them is studio, it's still 25%, 25%, 25%...[in terms of time and energy]. So that evolved as I became more immersed in the landscape program...

### *Challenge, confidence, and crises*

All of my studios...in some ways, they start to blend together. In a good way, I think, because...studio is just such an intensive collaboration that I think there's *always* something that is memorable about it. [But] I remember each one of them distinctly. And there aren't very many that I look back and think, 'That was a waste of time!'...I got along great with some professors and *certainly* not with others. [In the latter cases,] maybe that's where I started to lean on my peers a little bit more...I guess the classes that are [most memorable are] classes that had the steepest learning curve. Like, really challenging. Maybe didn't do as well as other classmates in the class. But felt like I got a *ton* out of [them]...That's why I came to school, I think...

I worked with [one particular instructor] more than anyone throughout my time here. And what I liked about her was that...what she brings to the school is unique because I think it's outside of the school's dogma...She was my thesis advisor. And I appreciate her...just pushing and challenging me... So she was great for me in that way...It's something that I think I respond to best, is being challenged. I need to be challenged...to push myself or to motivate myself...You have to keep challenging yourself. And in challenging yourself, I think you're shaking your confidence, in a sense. So the process of regaining that is the challenge...There's always more to learn, read, challenge yourself on. It's endless, and that's what's exciting!...

I question things. I question everything, often! So in order to proceed and thereby succeed, I need to either have an answer to those questions or have the confidence to know that those questions are relevant...It takes me, I think, a long time to accept that I really know something. Because I question for a really long time!...So this is a hypothetical that I think is true: I think one person could read or draw something and know it. And in many ways be better off. And I would read that thing and not think that I know it because I've read one thing. So gaining confidence is something I think takes awhile for me, and affects how I work...But I also know that I can't fake confidence...I think it takes me longer to be able to exude confidence...

A microcrisis in school would have been something that really shook my confidence and my ability or something. And that would have caused a microcrisis of like, 'What am I good at? And what should I be doing?'...[Following a bad review], thinking back now, I don't think I ever thought, 'Architecture just isn't

for me.' I would think, 'I can do better. I *know* I can do better. I *have* to do better.' I'd start thinking about the path towards that. Or what it means to be or do better, or what I *could* do to achieve that. I like to be challenged because it stimulates that response, I think. It's just sort of competitiveness, in a sense. So a bad review would more likely provoke a competitive response than a response of 'I'm outta here' or something...But *now*, a microcrisis at work would be like doing something or working on something that I see really *no* value in. Just like a mindless task or something that isn't stimulating or I don't find interesting or whatever...I think it's a broad enough field or discipline that I can have microcrises but look elsewhere in the field to remain interested...

*Professional experience: appreciating the back-and-forth of isolation-to-collaboration and finding 'not readily apparent' design opportunities*

[The firm I work for now] is a landscape architecture firm...A lot of people at the firm have a dual-degree background. Which is part of the reason why I was interested in them...

The times that I get excited at work are when I look at something and I think, 'I can do so much better than this!' And, at this point, that's largely graphics. But I think of school and what I did at school, what my classmates were doing at school, and what I learned at school. And when I see something, or I see a process that I question, or I *know* can be better, then I'm like, 'OK. This is exciting because I can contribute meaningfully here. 'Cause this is not as good as I know it can be.' And right now, that's limited more to just graphic communication, graphic style, etcetera. Well, that and also just a process of working and communicating. So like, how software's used, what's the best way of using it and communicating with it, and what are the opportunities of different softwares in the office...Then, when we're having a design conversation or something of that nature—the way [the firm] runs certain projects is very much like a studio environment. Which is *really* exciting to me...So I oftentimes compare what we're doing to studio...

At work, what I'm less comfortable with—which I wish I were more comfortable with—is standing at a table and designing with five people there. I think I need more time or I need to be able to process things in a different way than that really allows me to do. And that [scenario] doesn't really happen at work...But what does happen—which I work well with—is, 'Here's this thing. Come back to us with five options,' or something. Or someone else comes up with those options, and I am part of a group that talks about them. [And] that I appreciate. That's a sort isolation-to-collaboration, back-and-forth that I like, and I work well with. And I think in school, it's a fairly similar model. I think potentially there are much longer bouts of isolation. Like, if you have a week of just desk crits or something, you wouldn't *have* to really talk to anyone else other than your professor...The ratio of...isolation-to-collaboration that works for me, it's like five-to-one or ten-to-one or something. Like, *really* think about something, process something, *then* bring it to the group and *then* talk about it. Whether it's me being in the group or me presenting, that works well for me. As opposed to...I'm sure they're out there, the people that work really well in these, 'Let's all design this right now! All five of us!'

I think what is good for me at this stage I'm in is that I get pretty discrete tasks. And I look at people who are above me in the firm or years ahead of me, and I know it's inevitable that the distractions just

increase...I've been pretty good about limiting [distractions at work]. I think that will change as I become more comfortable at the office, for better or worse. But I still feel relatively new. And I'm getting more comfortable, but there's still an element of unknown and uncomfotability...

I'm undergoing this big adjustment of trying to turn into a morning person. Which I think can work! I think it can happen because working at six in the morning has the same sort of serenity, whether you're up at six or up 'til six...So while I'm not up late at night working alone, there is still an element of isolation that works well for me, that I still get. And I don't know how long I'll have that...In the office environment, the people I'm working for are *really* busy, and so, in some sense, don't have time for me. Which is isolating. But ultimately, what I'm doing is not for me, like in school. It needs to be judged and criticized by someone else. So I work on it, and then go to them for feedback as much as possible. And...that works really well for me because I'm able to seek them out and structure that criticism...Now I'm on a project that is *really* fast-paced. And I think I'm on it because they know I can work weird hours, if necessary...And I have had design tasks interspersed into [production], which is great! That doesn't have to be the case. But I think part of it is the office is busier than it can handle right now, so they need help wherever they can get it...And I could not be more appreciative of those opportunities...

**At work, it's become apparent that there are a lot of design opportunities. And...they're not hidden, but they're not readily apparent.** So I'll get a task that says, 'Hey, can you do this?' And it can sound like a very one-to-one thing. But I've found that anytime I've said, 'OK, I did this task that you asked me. But I also looked at these things,' or, 'I saw this and I wondered, can this be pushed another way?' or, 'Can we look at this another way?' or, 'You asked me to do this, and I understood it in three different ways.'...**There's a lot of opportunity there, I'm figuring out, because there's tons of ways to interpret what [the designers] drew!...Those are interesting design opportunities. And I feel like school prepared me for those...**You're given something to do, and I've found that it can be very helpful to everyone that you pull out of it what it is that the office or the project is trying to do. So that's one thing that I've talked about with people at the office, and done recently. And they have encouraged me and said, 'Yea, that's how we work,' or 'That's good. Whoever has drawings at a meeting, whoever can draw, whoever *did* draw, whoever *does* draw, *those* are the ideas we're going to talk about. So the more you draw, the better it is for the office.'...**Representation in the office is really challenging, coming from school, because everyone has to sort of sign onto the same way of representing...**So that has been a difficult process to try to figure out, is like, 'Oh, I would never do this this way!' or 'How and why are we doing this this way?' But I just have to do it, I guess...**And while maybe I've been encouraged to bring a design into a representative realm, at the same time, it's like, the way I bring that into a representative realm needs to be accessible to everyone.** So it can't exist in some software that no one knows! It makes sense, but it's been a learning process...**I think that's something that people talk about that has come true—just [that] in school, you're your own firm. And now you're quite the opposite!...So that shift has been challenging. But I think really good because it has sort of forced a collaboration that I think I didn't always get, or didn't always pursue well enough [in school], that I learn from [and] makes me better...**

I think I could come up with a design concept for a project for the office to use, for sure. Pushing beyond that is where I'm not at all autonomous. Like knowing how materials can and should work and any

number of things down the line. So I guess [that] changes depending on the phase of the project...There's a certain phase where I'm brimming with confidence...I like being in that concept role because I'm more comfortable speaking up or challenging. Whereas, as we get later and later, I don't know how to—or I'm not as able to challenge something that we're doing. Like, 'Here's a detail for this project.' Whereas in an earlier phase, I can say, 'Yea, that's good, that's interesting. I wonder, what if we look at these other two ways?' And even if they say 'No', at least it's a conversation. With a detail, it's like, 'That sounds good.'...At work, or professionally, I'm put in a place where not much is expected of me as far as the client relationship. So I think I just fulfill that expectation. I know and I've seen the way that people who have been there longer interact with clients, and am entirely confident that I could do what they do. Even if I'm wrong and missing some things, for some reason, I trust that. So that's interesting!...I am very confident in people skills. And just sitting in and seeing how we work with clients, I just naturally criticize the way we do it. Small things, I'll be like, 'I am *shocked* that we just said that! I would *never* say that! So either I'm missing something and I need to learn this or that was just a shocking thing to say!'...

I think if I worked at [the firm I first interned at right after undergrad] now, I would be more positive about it. Because I would be able to find opportunities for myself more than I was able to at that time. I would know how and where to challenge myself, at least a little bit better. That's something I'm very much still learning at this firm. But as far as being motivated, this firm and the people there and the work there, it's much easier for me to motivate myself. Or to be excited about it. Which is obviously huge. It just makes going to work a lot easier...There are certain things that I do where I have to very consciously focus and commit. But there are other days or tasks where I want to work extra time or weekend or late because I can't believe that I'm doing it. Like, 'This is so great!'...

I couldn't tell you what my goal is for five years from now...That's just maybe something in how I'm wired...I'm sort of like, 'Put my head down and work hard, and let everything else sort itself out.' Which is sort of how I was in undergraduate with architecture school, maybe the same here. And I think that's something that, as I get older, I need to be better at or think more about. But I couldn't tell you my five- or ten-year plan...Right now, my plan is to get licensed in both [architecture and landscape architecture]...I have to think about this and figure it out, but I may start taking tests before the year's over...

### *Emerging interests and identities*

I was easily able to connect with the field or see its value in pursuing it because I think maybe just the way that it was initially taught to me [in undergrad]. My memory of how we learned it was more *primal*...sensory, spatial, not having to do with an experience in a building. Like, we would have class under this *really* old tree that basically created a room. And just talk about how that's architecture. So I think that set a really broad understanding or broad opportunity for how you can think about it...In a lot of ways, it's something that still comes up. Whether it was in school or in work, creating a moment or creating intimacy...that is somehow memorable. That still comes up a lot because it's a really powerful thing that, I think, a lot of people can connect with...

But I would say that what I'm excited about in architecture *now* [is], I think, much more, for better or worse, couched in architecture lingo...Now, I get really excited about, like, a beautiful diagram!...A beautiful diagram or a beautiful building, beautiful space. And 'beautiful' is a tough word because who knows what that means? But that's also exciting to me! Is just beauty. And knowing that it's this fickle word. But also creating my own understanding of beauty. For a purpose of creating something that ultimately will be used by other people...I guess architecture and your appreciation or interest in architecture is a very learned thing...I think, for a lot of people, it does have pretty primal roots. But it then turns into a very learned thing...

**I think I'm more interested in the academic version of architecture...I think right now, at least, I'm able to treat work pretty academically. There's enough that I don't know that it's like going to class in some way. So that's great! That motivates me and makes me feel like I'm not just putting in time or something...[I was] definitely shaped by my dad and his sphere of architecture, which was very academic...So I guess that makes sense, in how and why my expectations from architecture were not necessarily to do this at that firm, or something like that—but more just engage the field.** People will say like, 'Oh, did you feel pressure from your dad?' And...the way I interpret it is, '—to get a job in architecture.' I *definitely* didn't feel pressure that way. But there *was* pressure. Not that he would ever *say* it that way—but there was a pressure, as far as an unspoken pressure, of *how* you think about—or what architecture is...I know I'm similar to him in a lot of ways. His brand of architecture is more focused on *thought* than construction...That's *his* strength, and I would say my strength...

**[Being in the landscape architecture program] made me realize that I'm more of an architect—or more interested in the field.** Which is interesting because I'm *not* working at an architecture firm. But that said, I think the landscape architecture firm that I *am* working at is the only one in Seattle that I would be able to work with. Because they're very architectural. There are a lot of architects there! Or at least dual-degree...Also, **[the two disciplines are] culturally so different—in school and even professionally...I really like the landscape culture, but I don't identify with it as much...They don't identify with me, either...I don't know. It's...this contextual thing.** Like, in the landscape architecture school, I'm very much architectural. **And I don't know if I'm very *landscape* in the architecture school, but certainly more so...** I think part of the reason I am now working in a landscape architecture firm is because of a suspicion that, 'If I didn't do it now, I would never do it.' And I've never worked at a landscape architecture firm. So I would just have this degree that...seemed like it needed more. So that was the theory there. I don't know if it was necessarily the right one. **But I'm really enjoying working at this landscape architecture firm, which in some ways is a surprise...a really great surprise!...**

### *Early perceptions of architecture 'as a medium'*

In early elementary school I was really into art and was always sort of thinking that 'I would be an artist.' And I think that my dad probably first put the idea in my head of, 'Oh, well, if you wanna do something creative, but you also want to have a more secure job, you could do something like architecture'. And at that point, **I didn't think that I would become an architect—but I saw architecture as something that I could study and apply to other things...**And actually went into college with that intention, that I would *study* architecture but not *be* an architect...**I guess I was always more interested in where architecture overlapped with other disciplines, sort of at the edge of the central identity of the discipline...**I always appreciated it as a field of study [in undergrad] but was still pretty adamant that I didn't want to, like, go get a job in an architecture firm after school...

In undergrad, my conception of what architecture is was *so* wide open. **I understood architecture as a discipline as an undergrad, where it was this really wide area of study, and you can do all these different things within it.** Which is why I liked it. You could *write* about it, you could make things that *were* it, you could make things that *talked* about architecture but weren't themselves architecture. And I wasn't planning on being an architect, so **I was really just exploring architecture as a medium,** I think. Which is how I still think of it in a lot of ways, even though I'm applying that medium towards architecture proper. But coming to grad school and knowing that the curriculum is structured with a very particular goal in mind—which is getting you an accredited degree so you can get a license—and knowing that I was signing up for that particular path...I feel like I spent a lot of time trying to find space for both architecture, the practical practice and production of it, and finding a way to let that coexist with my other understanding of architecture, as this really rich medium to work in...

### *Being 'pushed back' to grad school with a research agenda*

At the end of undergrad, I was *really* burnt out on architecture proper. And...when I graduated, the job market was really crappy, and I wasn't really sure what I was looking for. But I ended up finding something at a kitchen design firm—which was not specifically something I was after, but it was a good *job*. I actually got to make decisions and manage *projects* and do actual design. So that was good. But then we moved...At that point I *was* looking for an architecture job but couldn't find anything [because] the job market was *terrible*. [So I] ended up working [various freelance and odd jobs]. And through all of those years, my academic interest in architecture was stable. A lot of what I was reading was about what I eventually wanted to research. **I just had a lot of unanswered questions about the disconnect between architects and the rest of the world, the general public.** And that was highlighted for me because I was working in areas outside of architecture. And so I just found myself hearing people say things about the built environment that made no sense to *me*, as someone with a training in architecture and a background in that. And it really fascinated me! It's like, you're in school, and you're in this very insular environment where *everyone* thinks pretty much the same way that you do about these things. And you start to think that there is one right answer for everything, and one right perspective on these things. And then you get out in the world and you find out people hate the things that you think are great. And they don't understand why things look the way they do, when you would never even think to question it. And

so, **that central issue...is what started to push me back towards school and wanting to deconstruct that and find out what that was about...**

It would have been nice to have a better-paying job in those interim years because I was underemployed for a lot of them. And so, in a lot of ways, I felt hamstrung by that. Like, if I ever wanted to get whatever my career was gonna be back on track, I would *have* to go back to school and sort of reset the timeline. But I have such a different perception of the profession and a different perception of what I *want* out of my career *now* than I did even when I was applying to grad school. I had these really vague ideas—and they became a lot more specific as I went through grad school. So, as frustrating as parts of that experience were, I'm really *glad* that I went back [to school]. And I think it was probably the right decision. Because I don't think I would have gotten to this point just by having architecture jobs at various firms...[Part of the reason I decided to go to grad school was the thought that], if I *do* want to do anything practical or career-like then I was going to need another degree of some kind. And I'd actually intended to go to grad school eventually when I was finishing undergrad. But I had always sworn that it *wouldn't* be for architecture. Like, I'd go back for art or graphic design or industrial design or something like that. And I *did* consider that for awhile...But the research interests that I had outweighed the other, fun or practical considerations of where might be *freer* to study...

One of the reasons I came here was that I was well-aware that my undergrad education was on the theoretical end of the spectrum. That I graduated from there *knowing* that I didn't really know [how] to do a lot of practical things in an architecture office. So I was consciously trying to supplement that. As much as I *love* theory and ended up back over there anyways after coming here, I did want to be somewhere where I would sort of be *forced* to address the things that I had not cared to spend much time on as an undergrad. And this program seemed like a good balance of those things...But...I *really quickly* ended up being frustrated about the same things that frustrated me in undergrad. And *really quickly* was back *staunchly* in the theory camp not wanting to do anything practical. Even though I objectively understood the value and the necessity of those things, it just wasn't what got me out of bed in the morning...

### *Constructing an alternative identity 'within the confines of the profession'*

[There were] probably...two different points in time, where I [started to feel invested in architecture]...**undergrad, when I took a class in cultural landscapes that gave me all this information that I felt like I was missing from my regular architecture classes. And gave me this vocabulary to talk about the different parts of the built environment that didn't necessarily make sense in the context of each other—like, the official, architectural built environment and the everyday populace built environment. And so, taking that class I was like, 'Oh! These things *do* relate, and you *can* talk about them in relationship to each other!' I just hadn't known *how* up until that point. And the things that I became exposed to in that class really stayed with me and were a large part of what brought me back to grad school. So that class sort of made me realize that I *could be* an architect and think about architecture in this *other* way and make it something that was more interesting than what I thought it had to be. And then here,** I started to have a much clearer understanding of what that meant for ways of practicing and types of practice probably after one studio. And then **after taking the Professional Practice class** and the research that I ended up doing for the project

in there on public interest design. And it was like I was able to connect all these things that were previously really disparate. And these ideas and ways of doing things that I hadn't made connections between, yet. Like, using cultural landscapes as an analysis method, and using public interest design as a professional framework for how that analysis can make its way into your practice. And what types of projects that might entail. And then, the studio experience that I had...where [the instructor] really gave us free-reign to come up with our own project, and I came up with a project that made sense in this vague world that I had created with all these different ways of doing things...She let students drive the project. And in doing so, you learn that your instincts and your way of doing things *can* result in architecture, if you're given the time and the space to figure that out...So yea, **I started to connect all these different things and figure out what that might mean for the type of work that I could do within the confines of the profession...**

### *Early studio experience: a 'bad match' of design philosophies*

In grad school, pretty much the entire first quarter I thought I'd made a huge mistake coming back. But I think that's pretty common from what other people have said. **I came back with a fairly clear idea of what I wanted to study, and it really didn't change that much over the two years. I gained the tools that I needed to actually study it, but the basic idea behind what I was interested in didn't change.** And so, I was immediately looking for those tools and for those ideas that I needed to get that research out. And I wasn't finding a lot of them the first quarter, so I was *incredibly* frustrated and worried that they weren't going to be there...It wasn't until spring quarter [studio] the first year that...I was like, 'This studio was reason enough to come back to grad school.' That made it worth it...because it gave me so much of what I needed to understand what my research ideas would mean for my design ideas...

[Quitting] never felt like an option because of all the turmoil in getting here. We moved *really far!* And I really needed to be back in school and get my degree so I could get a decent job! So my unhappiness with some of the academic aspects of the program was always being balanced by these practical imperatives. Which is probably good! Because if I bolted after the first quarter, that wouldn't have gotten me very far...

First quarter, I had an instructor for studio, and it was just a miserable studio...The project was...a mess because the studio was being directed in a way that I really didn't understand. And I didn't get the point of the *way* she wanted us to do things. I didn't. And I was *trying*, 'cause I was like, 'Ok, I haven't been doing this for awhile. Maybe I need to shift my perspective and try things in new ways!' And so, I *did*. And I just ended up with a project that lacked any sort of cohesion and didn't make sense to me. And getting up to defend something that doesn't make sense to you is *really impossible!* It's like, 'I don't know why I did that. Because somebody told me I had to do it at some point.' And I disagreed, but I didn't say anything about it...It was a bad match...We just had really different views on what was good design or worth exploring. And in that sense, a lot of the other students were unhappy, too. And so, knowing that I wasn't the only one, and having people [who] were in the three-year track who had been here for a year saying, 'This is not what most studio experiences are like,' and reassuring me that this was an outlier of some sort helped a little bit. But it was still really unpleasant for the ten weeks. The other classes that I was taking those quarters were good and were enough to distract me from the stuff that was really bad, I

think...Being able to find other things outside of studio here that *were* interesting and were helpful in teaching me what I needed to know, to *do* what I wanted to *do*, made it more bearable...

I think, in those early studios, coming in with a certain degree of insecurity about like, 'Ok, I've been out of school for a long time. Things are being done differently here than I'm used to doing them,' I was trying to sort of *push down* my strengths in favor of learning new skills. And sort of saying, 'Ok, I know how to do things this way. That's fine. That's one way to do it.' **But I came *here* partly because I wanted to supplement my existing skillset with more practical, applicable knowledge. So I did really make an effort to sort of force myself to do things that felt like not a good fit those first few quarters—things that I wouldn't have done normally.** And tried to approach things in the way that it seemed like I was being told to approach them for the sake of open-mindedness. And...that changed [over the two years because] I got more comfortable with saying, 'Nope, that just doesn't work for me!' After trying it for a couple quarters and having really not very fulfilling results, I sort of took a step back, and I'm like, 'Ok, there's a reason that I'm better at doing things a certain way than this way. And my projects are better when I work the way that makes sense to *me*. And I should focus on really honing that process and understanding how to improve that process rather than fighting my natural inclinations.' I saw people working within that framework who were doing really good work, and the end results were interesting. They were just very different from what I would have come up with. But I didn't have a problem with that. It was just like, 'Ok, this doesn't work for me. And this is a really different way of doing things. And it's just not the way that I excel at this particular thing.'...**I think I knew the *how* of how I worked well, but I didn't understand *why* necessarily. And that is what I began to figure out as I went through school.** I had a better understanding of why these different, seemingly disparate ways of working worked for me and what they had to do with each other. **So at the end of school here, I'd say I had a better understanding of my philosophy on design and process and how that differed from other philosophies...**

*Open-ended studios: exploring process and 'ideas worthy of discussion'*

[There were] two studios that I got the most out of...And in both cases, it had a lot to do with the instructor and their approach to interacting with students. They were the only two studio instructors I had who actually took the time to ask *everybody* how they worked best: how they liked to work, what they were interested in, and what drove them to explore things in design. And they were the only ones who *cared!* No one else even bothered to ask. **And it opened up this whole avenue for process discussion instead of just focusing on your drawing output.** And *everyone's* projects were better across the board. And they were incredibly diverse and a lot more interesting, I thought, than the typical crop of things that end up looking exactly the same. [The instructors] just left so much room for discussing ideas rather than drilling down on, 'You need to produce this drawing,' and 'I haven't seen this, yet,' and 'You're not figuring this out, yet.' They were so much more comfortable with various processes taking place in the same studio and with people exploring at their own pace. And they were all confident that you were gonna end up somewhere, eventually, but they didn't care how you got there...

The projects were really diverse, and the ways that people rendered what they were working on were really all over the place...And there was just process talk the *whole* way through: 'Ok, so tell me about why you're doing what you're doing right now. What are you thinking?' And so many studios don't even

care! That never enters the conversation...The one comment that sticks out as being really spot-on was—when talking to [one of the instructors] at some point in studio—he’s trying to figure out, ‘What motivates you? Why are you doing this? Why aren’t you saying this instead of this?’ And he’s like, ‘You don’t like architecture with a big A.’ I was like, ‘You know what? I really don’t!’ He was like, ‘You like small-a architecture. You like architecture that’s messy, where other people can have a hand in it.’ And I was like, ‘That’s *exactly right!* You’re spot-on! And that really actually helps hearing that out loud!’ And that was the last studio I took! It was like, ‘Somebody couldn’t have pointed that out earlier!? Or I couldn’t have realized that earlier!?’ I had sort of been dancing around that in a lot of different projects and research. And finally, it was just like, ‘Oh. Ok, yea!’ And then, I got to my interview for the job that I currently have, and my now-boss had said, ‘Y’know, I’m not a big-A architect.’ I was like, ‘That’s perfect! Turns out I’m not either!’...

To me, [small-a architecture] means that **I am interested in changes in the built environment that come about from something more complex than just a professional ‘bringing down changes from upon high.’... It’s...a particular way of seeing the built environment. And that perspective isn’t the perspective of an architect. But more importantly, architects don’t even recognize that as a perspective [or] as a *valid* perspective that should maybe be engaged with critically and responded to.** I think a lot of my sense of, ‘I am kind of disdainful of big-A architecture’ came from Professional Practice and the evolving realization that professionalism means that you are telling other people how they should be doing things. And that that is good sometimes. Like with respect to public health and safety, that’s important. That not everyone can know the best practices for something like that. But that it does come with a certain—or it *should* come with a certain imperative for self-awareness and self-reflection. And an ability to take a step back and say, ‘Ok, am I recommending this because this is really what’s best for the people that are going to be using this? Or is it because it’s my preference? Or because [it’s] what I’ve been told repeatedly is the *right* way to do something?’...**There are so many processes that shape the built environment that architects don’t think are worth their attention. Or don’t require engagement, I guess, in the lack of a process discussion, the lack of really valuable discussion about *why* we do things in studio and *why* we do things as architects. Not having that discussion means we’re not talking about those dominant epistemologies. We do things a certain way because we’ve been taught to do them, because someone at some point, way back in the day, thought that that was the right way to go about doing it. And those perspectives become really engrained and really difficult to change. And then, if you speak up and say that something should change about that, you’re in this very difficult position. And as a student, it’s really hard to know if that’s a good place to be or a bad place to be. And if you’re doing something right or if you’re doing something wrong and missing the point because people are disagreeing with you—passionately...**

In school, I just always felt more engaged and more inspired, I guess, by things that were more open-ended...The fewer the rules about what you have to do the better, for me...Maybe this is something that is just the way that I want school to be. Like, I want to have the freedom to think about this end product that I’m supposed to be producing, but also exploring my process at the same time. And learning about *how* I work and how I *don’t* like to work...And it’s really hard to do that when the project is really tightly controlled and when you don’t have choices about a lot of things—because your deliverables affect your process. And a lot of studios here have a really strict *list* of things that they think you should be making.

It's like reverse engineering an idea. It's like, 'Here are the final receptacles for whatever you're making, so now you have to make something that fits inside of them.'...

**The times that I've felt most secure in what I was working on, or what I was trying to do, were not necessarily times when I was getting perfect feedback or praise or anything like that. I think it was more a feeling that I was in an environment where it was OK to make a mistake. And where the line of questioning or exploration was valid and worth exploring, even if the results I got weren't perfect. That the ideas behind what I was trying to do were good ideas that were worthy of discussion and exploration.** 'Cause it was never really about like, 'Oh! I feel like I'm a good designer 'cause I had a good review!' It was more like, 'I feel like I communicated something and people were engaging with an idea. And that even if I still haven't figured out how to perfectly address whatever problem it was, or design for this, or design for that, that my *view* on the situation, my perspective, was engaging and worthy of discussion.' And so **the studios that I got the most out of were studios where the instructors, I think, very consciously cultivated an environment where students were made to feel like their ideas and explorations were worthy and interesting even if they were different than other things that were going on. It was just a more open participatory environment,** I guess...I know when I'm working on something that's *valid*. And I know when I'm working on something that I think is crap, and I'm just doing it because somebody else is telling me to. So there is that sort of internal check, where you feel like something's good and exciting and engaging. And when you feel like that, you're better able to make it so, when you're producing whatever it is you're producing. But I'd say the social component of that—the discussion environment that's created in a class or studio—is what drives that forward. You can only get so far with that on your own, feeling like that—or at least I can. After a certain point, you *need* feedback. And you need somebody to respond to what you're putting out there so you can take that response into consideration and produce another iteration of something or take something in another direction...

### *Thesis project as an enactment of 'slow architecture'*

Robin and I met in...studio. We were both very discontented with what was happening in there. And actually started talking about Thesis stuff sort of randomly. We both had the same book checked out and on our desks...So we got started talking about that and talking about Thesis, and it turned out that we had similar interests...And we were like, 'Wow! We should just work together!' And at that point it, we weren't really sure if it was a possibility. But we had mentioned it to [another student] from [the] landscape [architecture program], who was also in the studio, also discontented. And she was like, 'Oh! Y'know, collaborative theses are really common in landscape! Lots of people do them.' And I had heard of *one* in architecture at that point but knew that it wasn't the default model. But hearing that it had happened elsewhere, I was like, 'Well, I'd much rather do this with another person than on my own!' Especially because our interests seemed related. And at that point, we didn't have a particular *topic* or anything in mind. We were just like, 'Well, let's keep talking about it and see if it makes sense, and see if we both wanna go down a similar path.' And then we did! And then it just kept going and going. And we even kept it open to the point where we were like, 'Ok, well maybe we'll just do [Thesis] Prep together and then diverge and sort of tackle one site from two different perspectives or something like that.' We weren't locked into anything throughout the prep phase. But as the project developed, we really liked

working together, and we wanted to keep working together. And what we ended up doing was only doable because the two of us were doing it. I think either one of us doing it on our own, it wouldn't have happened...

[Compared to other students in Thesis] I think we were having more fun, honestly! I mean, sharing the burden of something like that goes a long way, I think, psychologically to making it feel like it's something that you're actually gonna finish or get to a point where you're happy with it. It's great having another perspective looking at the same topic. I mean, even though our interests are similar, our backgrounds are different and our finer-scale interests in the subject were different. And so that *really* gave the project a lot more layers than I think it would have had otherwise. And we each brought different strengths to the project. The prep work and research work that we were doing was really different in format [from other students] because there were two of us...It was a much looser process than I think I would have engaged in on my own. Which was good because the project, I think, took on a very different shape than if I would have sat down and had a really specific research agenda and just gone through that, and then done a design. We were doing a lot of things simultaneously that you can't do when it's just you...

I would have liked more collaborative design opportunities [in grad school]. A lot of times, the token site analysis portion of the studio is somewhat collaborative. But you're not really working together towards a common design goal—or...working together to explore something. You're producing something *really* quickly. And everybody is sort of chomping at the bit to be left alone and do their own thing. And I think really productive collaboration in design requires that you have a pretty firm understanding of your strengths and weaknesses, and your preferred way of doing things and ways that are less comfortable for you to do things—and being really open about that. And open to challenging yourself on those fronts, as well. [Thesis] was the only time [I did a collaborative design project in grad school]...It was the first project that I had actually tried to work with someone to develop the project and then to execute the project on that sort of timescale. There wasn't really anything I'd done that was like that before...

**I wish that the typical format of studio got shaken up a little bit more...**Because our studio's the closest simulation we have to real-world design situations, and it's so far off from anything—I think it gives students a false sense of how *long* things are supposed to take. And there's this unavoidable hierarchy in the different phases of the design. That like, the analysis is not worth as much as your execution of whatever your architecture is. Which I think really does a disservice to the broader purpose of architecture...One thing that really frustrates me about studio that influenced the way that we structured our Thesis project in the end, I think, is that, in this ridiculous ten-week timeline, you are supposed to come up with something that looks like a building at the end. And that's a really short amount of time for someone that's still learning what it means to design a building to end up with something that actually looks like a building and has the semblance of a possible function. And to *do* that, **you skip over these really important parts of architecture**—for me, anyways. **Like site analysis.** And I don't just mean like measuring the site, and finding out how many trees are on the site. I mean understanding the context in a really deep way, so that you know *who* you're designing for, and *how* this project is going to be received, and how it's going to fit into the fabric of the surrounding neighborhood and all that! **That gets treated in such a token way in most studios...**It's all such a surface treatment of something that should really be a

deep exploration of social and economic and environmental context. **And that, I think, is as much a part of architecture as the final built form**, and as the logistics of making a structure that will stand up, and making sure you can move air through the building, and all those really nitty-gritty practical things that are important. But in a lot of studios, those supersede the other stuff, probably because of accreditation requirements...And I get that, **but it does a disservice to the discipline and the profession to treat it so narrowly**—to have students coming up through programs where they think that is *the* way to do it, and that's the way to go about architecture. What we ended up doing with a lot of our Thesis project, we started calling slow architecture, where you spend a *lot* more time on the initial information gathering to the point where you have a much better understanding of the place that doesn't match your initial interpretation. You change your own mind through your analysis, and you learn something about the place that you didn't know before. And that in turn gives you a different end product. That end of the discipline and that end of architectural exploration gets lost in a lot of studio curriculum, I think...

There are realities of working in an office and working with clients on a real time-scale that are impossible to simulate in studio—or in any class. Because school, even when it's not ideal, it's an idealized environment. And the workplace is a lot different! We don't deal with budgets here [in school]. And in the workplace, so many design decisions are made already just by monetary constraints. I mean, you just don't have the choices that you have when you're designing something in school. And so, I do think that school should be about something other than professional prep. I mean, it is a preparation for being a professional. But you're not gonna be able to take each class and apply it directly in some really clear way to your job. And that's OK. But I guess I kind of wish there was a more open discussion about that. That students were made more aware of *what* you're learning, what the point of it is. Like, I think a lot of being in school is learning how to think flexibly, and learning how to adapt to different approaches to design. And learning how to learn. Which sounds really contrite...**I think in school, you formulate ideas about what you want it to mean to be an architect. And you start to get a clear picture of what you want your professional life to look like. And maybe the types of projects that you want to work on, or the types of things that you want to try and do with architecture.** But you don't know how to do it! You have an image, but you don't have a list of tasks that will get you that final product. And I think that's largely what you learn in an office. And there just isn't enough time in school to learn how to do that. You can't learn all the different ways around different parts of the code or different ways to value engineer a project and still get what you want. Or even how to produce work that attracts the kind of clients that you eventually want to work with. That seems largely like a trial and error process that has to happen with real people on real projects...

I guess my hope, or my intent for challenging or critiquing dominant approaches to architecture is that: Our training is great! And it enables us to do powerful things. But it sometimes gives us a false reading on problems, on people, on places. And if we're constantly looking to our professional training for an understanding of what's wrong and what needs to change, than we're gonna be missing a *lot*...in terms of understanding place, and understanding what people in those places want and need...It's like, you can't operate on this completely different plane of reality than the people that you're designing for. And you have to find a way to talk to them about their wants and needs and understand their wants and needs. Because there may be a different, creative solution that hasn't come up, yet, for whatever those

problems are. And maybe they *don't* like the things that you don't like, and you just haven't taken the time to talk to them about it!...There's just all these dimensions to the discussion that don't happen because we make a lot of assumptions based on professional training. And so, I guess I just want people to slow down with the assumptions! And talk to people that aren't architects...

*Current professional position: becoming a 'counterexample' to 'the dominant approach to design', finding community with other dissonant voices*

**I was attracted to [the job I have now] for process reasons rather than product reasons...**The way that my boss goes about producing architecture is what interested me. And she was doing it differently than other places, which was *enough* almost on its own to interest me. **You just find out how someone was carving out a mode of practice that was not the dominant way of doing things, and wanting to learn from that...** I liked that she had this really different perspective that I wasn't going to get elsewhere. And I thought that that would be really valuable to learn from...

I feel like I still have so much to learn about what it means to be a practicing architect, like in a day-to-day sense. And I'm trying to absorb as much of that as possible. And I'm just trying to pay attention to the projects that seem most engaging to me...[In the future] I would like to be doing a bigger variety of work. I actually didn't have a huge interest in residential before starting this job...But I think there's something to learn in any project...**There is an opportunity, a sort of small-scale outreach opportunity, with each project that you do, no matter what type of project it is. You're still talking to someone who is not an architect, and that's still an opportunity to change the perception of what your profession does, or what your profession cares about...**

I'm getting up to speed as fast as possible on how to actually put construction documents together, since that is the biggest gap in my knowledge at this point...I haven't got a big chance to design things, yet...I feel like I still don't have a good sense of the rhythm of a project...like how long things are supposed to take or when it's best to get someone else involved in something. I'm still trying to understand that, and it still feels very foreign to me. And what all the best practices are in terms of that process. That still feels like it's a long way off from making any sort of immediate sense...like two or three years, probably. But my boss was like, 'It's gonna be a year or two before you feel like you understand construction documents.' I was like, 'Oh! Ok, that makes me feel better! I'm not behind already!'

**I'm just constantly amazed at the things that just never get talked about in school**, even though I understand why they don't. I understand the curricular perspective, [that] there are things that you should learn in an office because it's most efficient. It doesn't make sense to teach you how to do a ventilation schedule in school. That's dumb. It's a waste of educational time...**You're learning how to think, you're not learning how to *be* an architect. You're learning how to *think* about architecture critically. And as an engaged practitioner. You're not learning how to make construction documents, which my boss is coming to terms with currently!...But at the same time—at least I found that when I got into this job, I felt like I was starting from scratch again. It was like, you get to the end of grad school, and you feel *really* secure in your knowledge, and you feel like you have a good handle on things. And then you go into a job and you know *nothing* again! You're at the bottom of the totem pole. Which is probably really healthy in**

the long run for intellectual and social development—but it's really challenging. It's good for humility. But it does sort of make you feel like it's going to be a theme in your life, where every five years or so I'm just gonna feel like I know nothing again. And that's ok! 'Cause eventually I will feel like I know more! And it'll probably keep work more interesting than it would be otherwise...

**At work, I feel so at the bottom and learning so many things. That makes me feel like I haven't earned my place in the community, yet.** There should be more examples of what it means to function as a member of that community than there are, necessarily. I mean, so many people that are really talented and have really interesting ideas and criticisms about the profession don't join the profession, and leave and do other things because you have more freedom to do so. Which I get. But **one reason I decided to come back to school was that I don't think there are enough people within the profession criticizing it from the inside in a productive, healthy way. Not just sabotaging things, not terrorizing people. But you can change things from the outside or you can change them from the inside by setting a different example and being a counterexample for things. I think that's just as important...**I feel like my boss has done that in some ways...And I think there are other people doing that. And I hope that I can learn from those examples and figure out if that's something that I could positively contribute to. **When I felt like I'd found like-minded people [in grad school], it was because we were all sort of dissatisfied with some component of something. And trying to say something about it, or reveal something about it. So that's another kind of community. But right now, I feel between communities, like I'm just sort of floating and waiting to attach to something!...**

Even once I get my license, I'm not sure I'm gonna feel like an architect...Like, I *could* just be a hundred percent 'Yay, architecture! Yay, architects! I am one!' But **it doesn't feel like a natural fit** to say that or quite buy into it to that degree, I guess. Maybe I just like making things hard for myself! But I don't know. I feel like I hit a wall with architecture at a certain point. And I get to that place and then I need to go elsewhere for creative inspiration...

### *Looking forward: expanding 'what it means to practice'*

I feel like I approach the discipline and the profession in a way that makes sense for *me*. And I hope that I encounter people that feel similarly or similarly different about it. **It's not that we even have to have the same approach. But just finding people out there who are doing something different than the party-line of how you do architecture.** And I did find people like that here [at UW]! Other students or faculty members who had a vein of dissonance in whatever they were doing. So I don't feel like I'm the only one or a trailblazer or anything like that. But it's something that you're doing, and you don't really know what you're doing. And you're just kind of trying to do it to do what feels right for you, and you hope it gets you somewhere productive and interesting. And if it's productive and interesting for other people, then that's even better! But I don't know. Maybe I should have a more conscious understanding of what I'm doing, but I feel like I don't really...And there are lots of days where I feel like it's not going well! And other days where I feel like, 'Yea, ok. I made the right choice and I am getting something out of it.' But it's a definite cycle...I keep wondering if I'm gonna have an epiphany moment where I'm like, 'I know exactly what I want to do, and how I want to do it!' And sometimes I think that would be really nice, but I don't know if it's gonna get to that point. I mean, even when I took this job, I had applied to so many places. I sent out

like thirty applications before I sent this one out. And none of them I was really excited about. They were all places that would be good to work...But this was the first one that felt like any match, that felt like something where I knew I could contribute something that wasn't being contributed. And I think I'll stay here as long as I feel that way. But if it stops feeling that way, then it'll be time to do something else. But I have no idea what that would be!...There are things about [architecture] that I probably still won't like. There are things about the job that I think kinda suck! And I know a *lot* of talented people that have a lot of great ideas that started off in architecture and have gone in completely different directions. And part of me wonders, 'Did they have the right idea? Why am I force-fitting myself into something that isn't a perfect fit?' But maybe they wouldn't have left if somebody that shared their perspective had stayed. So I **guess I do have this broad, vague, somewhere-in-the-future desire to expand what it means to practice in some way. In some very small-corner-of-the-world way...I don't wanna drink the Kool-Aid. I don't wanna wake up one day and be the entity that I was criticizing ten years ago. I do want a paycheck! I do wanna continue to be employed. But...I think it's just gonna be largely about finding avenues on which I can actively *be* that and challenge it at the same time...**

### *Entering architecture, differences between undergrad and grad school*

I went to high school in Seattle...[And] out of my core group of friends, 99% of them went to the U-Dub...It was sort of like the logical next step...And most of us didn't know what we were getting into...I didn't know what I wanted to do...

After I graduated from undergrad, I took a year off and worked. And I *knew* that I wanted to go back to grad school, purely because I knew I wanted a Master's degree. I knew it would make IDP at some point easier. And learning more wouldn't be a bad thing, anyway. And at that point, when I had graduated...it was right in the middle of the bad [economic] times at work...I sort of wanted to go to the East Coast... And I had talked to [a faculty member who] wrote one of my [letters of] recommendations just about grad school in general. And her point of view...is that it's *much* better to go to a school that's...different from your undergrad just because you have more potential to learn differently and learn more. Which I thought was a valid point...[But] I think, looking back at it—I didn't know going into it, but I can actually think of the undergrad and the grad programs as being different enough to justify coming back here...

I enjoyed the studio atmosphere [in grad school]...You sort of have to take these kind of core classes with the same group of people...I was really drawn to more of the environment and the atmosphere because we all have the same deadlines, we all have the same projects, roughly. We all take the same studios, we all have the same assignments...Which I think was the hard part in undergrad because you're still really fragmented...Everybody has different interests at that point. We all go to studio, but once studio is over, you kind of go your separate ways.

I think that's one thing I realized: as a grad program...our ages are typically a little older. We're not undergrads anymore, we're not before our twenties. We're usually mid-twenties, early thirties, and so we tend to have worked in a professional environment already. And so...we can take school seriously, as something that's more professional...In undergrad, I hardly ever went to any of the lectures. And then, in grad, I hardly ever missed any of them...As an undergrad student...I was definitely a driven student, and I definitely got very good grades. But at that point grades were, like, the thing that *really* mattered. And grades do not matter in grad school...Which is not to say that I just completely ignored them here as a grad student. But I don't know. It's interesting because, as an undergrad, especially the way the system is set up here, you're really *competing* against other students [to enter the major]...And it's not to say that...you don't have to compete to get into the grad program, too.

But I think that, as an undergraduate student—I mean, at that point, I had definitely not [had] a job in architecture, but had worked before, and so *knew* the professional environment. But looking back at that, if you're sixteen, seventeen, or eighteen, and you get your first job, it's very *young* to be put into a professional environment...I don't know. **I think, there definitely is a difference [between undergrad and grad students],** and it's a difference [that comes, I think, from working professionally. Because there is—I don't know—maybe not necessarily *decorum*—but definitely **a sort of professionalism that comes with having worked for awhile, and then coming back to school...You sort of know your p's and q's...** And also, because grad students are typically, again, *older* and have families...I think just by the sheer fact that there are other people that are older kind of makes the way that you operate a little more apparent, and

a little more like, 'Ok. Let's stand up a little straighter. Let's do things a little differently.'...I think there's also, for people that had potentially worked *many* years before school...the way they *operate* and the way that they do things are—not necessarily *efficient*—but [they] *know* how to do things in a way that is *potentially* more efficient...I think the people that had worked before coming back to grad school definitely knew of the way that they had learned to do something at work. Which is not to say that it was the right way or the fast way or the wrong way or *not*, but it was just *a* way. Like, I had worked.

And...**when I was in grad school...I was still searching for that kind of mode and the way to really work efficiently. And the way to work that really best fit—not necessarily a *firm's* way to do things—but really was *my* way to do things...**And I think people that have worked know—whether it's the way that they chose themselves or not—but just the nature of working at the same office for four years, this is just how you've been taught to do things. And so they do things in that regard...You're able to budget that time and have that mindset to budget the time more...in a way that suits how *you* feel you should be working...Definitely, as an undergrad, I was just like, 'I will spend as *much* time as I need to on this *one* little thing!' And I remember wondering, 'Why on earth did I spend this much time on this little thing that didn't even print correctly? It's like, seriously! That's so stupid! Such a waste of my time!' But as a grad student, you're more apt to say, 'This is where I draw the line!...'It's either going to be done or not, but I'm going to cut off at this time and move on to something else.' And I think that comes from being older, working, and really knowing what potentially matters, either in a good way or a bad way. I mean, it's obviously your own perspective. **And being more mindful of how you work...**

I think, because it was grad school, because we are typically a lot older, I think it's nice because it means that we as students have the ability to sort of learn from each other more. And be more open to learning from each other. Whereas in an undergrad setting, you don't have that sort of professional experience. And so, because we're in a graduate setting and a professional setting, I feel like we're more *apt* to ask each other questions and more apt to learn from one another. And I think it was also just best practices from other people that I was really interested in knowing...And it's something that I found interesting, just the ability to learn from others...

### *Formative experiences: setting personal goals and finding value*

I remember my first quarter in grad...It was a bad quarter. And it's also probably because most of us, if we had all worked before, school was *completely* different than working professionally. Like, we have so much luxury to work on things here [in school]. Which is not to say that you don't in professional environments. But projects have the tendency to move *very, very* slowly. And the time that you put into it is time that you want to...bill clients for, and you can't dawdle. And here [in school], you definitely have the ability to kind of take your time. And, especially because it was the first quarter, people are either coming back from a professional environment, or just taking some time off. And...I mean, it's fall quarter anyways. It's always just like getting your grounding back together... I think that first quarter, especially, most people are sort of getting their bearing. And [my friends] and I had sort of already had them. I had consciously also made a decision when I started grad school—because I had already gone here for undergrad—that I didn't want to take either a class or a studio again with the same [faculty as I had] in

undergrad...And that was just because, it was like, 'I'm just gonna branch out a little bit.' And that actually worked!...

The grad program is weird because the two- and the three-year students always mix in the beginning of the school year...and become the one cohort. And so, it's always weird because the new students—the new two-years *don't* know each other. The three-years already all know each other...[But] we all sort of mixed in and it worked out...And it's kind of interesting how you're all in the same group, but one set of people *knows* half of them...and one set just knows everybody as a new person...[But] I think it's hard because the first quarter especially is so segmented...you're all new, you're trying to get to know each other...

I think the *most* valuable studio *that* [first] year was [valuable]...*purely* because I was in a group with [two classmates]...It was a team project...[and] the groups were chosen by the professors. They weren't chosen by us...But I think the thing that was most *valuable* that quarter was just learning to work with other people. And that might seem sort of trite, but...there was one person...in my group that I absolutely just did not get along with! And we would butt heads every other day! And I mean, group dynamics...they're what they are, and they're pretty unavoidable for the most part because, usually, you have a say in your groups that you get put in. [Usually] in a three-person group, you can out-vote each other. Which is actually very helpful sometimes...And there's a third person in this group, so they're the tie-breaker! And in a professional environment, that's usually your boss! And you just go with it. But it's *hard* in an academic setting when you're all at the same level and you have to make decisions in that way. It was just *her* personality and my personality—we just *never* got along with each other...And...you can butt heads every day like we did. Or you can just swallow your lumps and just go with it. I mean, we had to kind of do that towards the end because we were just like, 'Ok. I don't wanna listen to you anymore! I'm just gonna *do* this work. And then I'm gonna hand it off to you, and you're gonna do the rest. And we'll never talk about it ever again!'...It was so tedious when it was happening! But I think it was valuable! I think out of that whole year, it was valuable...And I think it's also something that—especially group dynamics—it's definitely something that you learn professionally. I mean, and it takes *effort* and time to develop that—I wanna say stubbornness because I know I'm really stubborn, but—I think it's also just, you have to develop a thick skin. And you *really* have to develop a thick skin if ever you want to do anything regarding architecture!...We're *all* really stubborn and we all think our ideas are valuable. And I think that learning to put some things aside occasionally is beneficial. Professionally, especially, it's beneficial. I think that's definitely a valuable lesson learned. And...looking back at it, it was always just the most *minute* decisions...I mean, at the very beginning they had a big impact on things. But after awhile, they're just sort of like, 'Uh, we argued about hand railings for two hours! Why did we do that?' I mean, they have no bearing on the actual final product at all! And yet, we argued about it for a day on end...

I enjoyed the structures class...mostly just because the breadth of the class was really interesting, but the projects themselves were also really interesting. The first project was...there was a list of buildings, and you had to pick one and [go out and] illustrate by hand a piece of the structure and actually be able to illustrate how that piece of structure actually worked...And I think a lot of thought was put into developing a very similar representational style as to the original architects...I thought that was really cool

just because it was an interesting way to look at things in that regard. And it's something that we don't really do a whole lot of anyway...The second project was like a skit. It was funny because the whole class was really sort of a conversation with [the instructor]...sort of story time with [him]. It ended up being a lot of him recounting conversations that he had had with architects. And because [he] has a very distinct way of looking at things architecturally and structurally—because he has an architecture background and he got a structures degree—he sort of knows. And has a really soft way of asking what architects are going for, and using the structure to do that. And so, the second project was a skit where we were supposed to have a conversation. It was a group project, and there was two or three [students] in each group. And so, two of us were architects and the third one was a structural engineer. And we would present a building, and then the structural engineer would have to come up with a way to do it....And it was insightful...It was a really interesting way to actually think about how architects and structural engineers interact with each other. And one that we don't have a whole lot of experience if you don't work professionally. And because, for the most part, a lot of us that *have* worked professionally, we don't ever *need* to talk to the structural engineer because that's not our job! We're the one just pumping out the drawings, and the structural engineer kind of just does his own thing on the side or talks to the principal or talks to the person that's actually designing the whole building itself. And just myself, I mean, I looked at structural engineering drawings for a building I was working on, but I never actually had to interact with a structural engineer. And so, it was another facet on the practice of architecture that we never got anyway. And so I think that was a really insightful class...

I think [it] was the second year when I was really beginning to tailor the year to what I wanted to do...And I think that was the year, it was just like, one [studio] after another after another. Like, 'This is awesome! This is great! This is really cool experience!'...That was the kind of year where it was just like all the ducks in a row. And things were just lining up. It was a good year!...

I'm one of those people that enjoys being busy. And I think gets a little bit of a sadistic pleasure in that...I'm one of those people that just knows when things are coming. And it's *really* shitty getting up to that, but it's nice when things sort of fall into place. And I think I'm one of those people that just likes when you planned enough for things to fall into place.

I feel like I haven't had any moments where I wanted to leave the school. I definitely don't think it was ever stressful enough that it was just like, 'Ok, I'm gonna completely leave this damn place!' I think there were definitely moments where I was like, 'Why am I still here?' when [I] haven't left studio for very long...But that's definitely different than completely wanting to leave...And I'm one of those people, I like to think, that works early but also can work fairly late at night, if given the right kind of environmental factors...Like, I'm ok with four or five hours of sleep—[But then at some point] you realize that you've been going to bed at three in the morning continuously and waking up at seven for a good week or so, and you're just like, 'This is really stupid! What am I actually doing here?' So, **there was never a point that I really wanted to say that like, 'This is too difficult, I should leave' but more so just like, 'Why am I doing this? What are the ends?' I think I questioned that a lot more than anything else.** It's this, 'Why am I focusing on fixing these toilets in this bathroom in this basement of this building?' It's like, 'Why am I doing that?'...They're not gonna look at this! And **I think you have to be a little obsessive to do this! But I think**

that you have to realize—at least I think I realized—you have to know what you’re going [to school] for. And you have to know what you want to get out of it...And I think going into each studio with personal goals for the end of it is more helpful than just following the list of things that you have to have for your final review...If you know what you want to get out of it then I think it makes it a little more valuable...[Asking yourself] ‘What are the drawings that are really gonna show what you wanted to accomplish that quarter?’...gives you more personal motivation than [saying]...‘I *had* to do these drawings because...I had to do these drawings.’...And I think, especially at a grad school level, you’re OK with breaking the rules more. And that just comes with knowing what you want to do...[A studio instructor once told me], ‘You can break any of the rules you want, as long as you think you have a good reason...If you’re gonna change something, have a good enough reason to do it’. And I think that’s a way to look at [program] that *could* work in a professional environment...When you’re in a professional environment, you have a program given to you by an actual client...[But] because we’re in *school*, and this is a *fictitious* program, you’re able to take everything and could potentially change it with *no* impact at all. Not to say that you could do that in a professional environment. You definitely can’t. But there’s a lot of intricacies in designing spaces that you don’t get in school. And that’s just something that you learn over time...And something that you just learn from being around other people that know it...

I remember being a lot less invested in [being in] studio in undergrad. And partly that’s because, before you get into the [undergrad] program, you all share desks. You share everything. You don’t have your own space to drop your stuff. And so, you don’t have really an incentive to spend a lot of time there...And that’s not anything exclusive to undergrad because...even in Thesis, there are people that are much more comfortable working at home and *can* work at home. I was never one of those people that went home and could work...I don’t get work done at home. I’ve tried! It was just not very productive, for me...I tried writing my Thesis doc[ument] at home. Never worked!...I sleep at home, and I eat at home. I shower at home. I can do Illustrator work at home. I can probably do Photoshop work at home. But it’s also, I have a higher propensity to fall asleep if I do any work at home. And so I was one of those people [that told myself], ‘[If] I need to get work done, I’m either gonna be in a coffee shop—two percent of the time—or I will be in studio 98% of the time.’...One of my really good friends in undergrad was adamant, ‘I will not spend more time in studio than I need to.’ And there are a couple of my friends from grad that are exactly the same way. It was just like, ‘Five thirty. I’m out! See ya later. I have a life. I need to not be in this room any longer.’ But I was always one of those people, especially later on, it was just like, ‘I’m happy to stay later. I’m happy to work here.’...And that’s partly because how I worked, and partly because I just liked the camaraderie that you develop. And fun things happen when it’s dark in studio! People just get real weird when they haven’t had any sleep, and it’s kind of awesome! You miss things when people don’t have any sleep! When you’re not in studio, you miss things...Plus, you wanna ask your peers’ opinions...So I think that was one of the realizations: ‘OK. Spend time in studio. Not a bad thing to do.’...

### *Thesis: ‘It’s your baby’*

Thesis in and of itself is unique purely because it’s your own thing. Y’know, your own program, your own site. It’s your baby. It’s something that you’ve worked on for as long as you can possibly remember...By the time that you present...you’ve effectively worked on this project, or this studio, for ten months out of

your life...And if you're in the two-year program, about ten months out of a two-year program is a *lot!*...And so, it's a little startling...I think seeing other people present definitely is the biggest part of knowing your thesis. And it's not so much about knowing what you want to *do*. I mean, Thesis Prep is all about writing the document and knowing what your theoretical basis is for your idea...And [one of the faculty members] always was saying that it's better not to look at it as a problem but an architectural opportunity. It's not a problem that you're trying to solve...My thesis was a little strange at the very beginning—like most people, I didn't know where [it] would head, but my thesis was really about a *process* that I was trying to figure *out*. And so, I was happy to actually say it was just a research project at one point. And not even have a building! But of course I'm getting a Master's, and I *really wanted a building* at the end! I wanted something that could be a little more tangible in that respect...I knew at one point, there would be an architectural solution for *a building*, but I didn't know what that building would be, at that point...

Looking back at Thesis, I think it was a good process. I mean, it was fun because you just spend a *whole* lot of time with people that you wouldn't normally spend time with. And it was great!...Because we were all just *there!* We all had *goals*...You're in individual focus groups [of]...four to five people in each group...And the idea with the focus groups is that you have a smaller cohort of people that potentially share very similar interests in the projects. And share precedents and just are able to bounce ideas back and forth with a smaller group of people that don't necessarily *know* your project as well as you do, obviously, but know it more than somebody who hasn't seen it for a few weeks. And so that was fun...It was nice because you're able to *see* projects mature throughout the quarter. Even if you had *no* idea what the heck they were doing at the beginning. And I think that's the nice thing about Thesis because it's everybody's baby, and it's definitely something that we've all been working *at* and working *towards*...And because Thesis *is* the last thing that you have the opportunity to do, I think a lot of people look at it as a way to—at least I did!—I was looking at it as a way to really do a project that I potentially hadn't done before...Because it's Thesis! I mean, go *wild!* It's your thesis! It's something that you're going to remember *much* more than any other smaller studio that you had done before...the entire time that you were in school. And so I was looking at it as a way to really *end* my years *here*. But really, also as a way to do something completely *wild* and different. It is your thesis. And I think that's something that you should be doing. During my final presentation, the whole debate was *about* my project in broad terms. But really, it was a broader discussion about the ideas...It was more a philosophical debate...And I was like, 'This is awesome!'...It was...a more general discussion about larger issues. Which is what I think a thesis should provoke...

I know, in the past, I've talked to people about their thesis, and the hardest thing is programming the building. And you don't realize how hard that actually is until you have to do it for your own project. And it's not even just like the square footages, but it's like, 'Oh! What are the types of things that *should* be in this building? What are the types of rooms and those types of spaces that *should* be in it?' For the larger projects like...mine, it was unclear what the actual final building was going to be. And so, I didn't develop a program for the damn building until pretty much the very end. And it's also, especially for the projects that didn't have a precedent for it, it was really *hard* to figure out what the heck the program should be. And so a lot of us ended up *adapting* programs for buildings in a general sense. Like, there's a book that

came out in, like, the 80s or 90s that tells you, like, 'A motel. If you want this many units, this is the type of amenities that you'll need. You'll need, like, a conference room, a banquet room, a closet space, and janitorial supply, and back-of-house offices—.' And it actually gave you the rough square footages and dimensions for an actual building. But it was difficult if your building was something that didn't really have any sort of precedent!...And so, you actually underestimate how hard that actually is. And you wonder, 'Oh! Is that actually enough space?' And you have to try to figure that out on your own because nobody really knows. And the idea, again, is to make it *plausible*. I mean, it has to *function* in some regard, but I mean, as long as it *looks* like it functions, *that* for the most part is ok. But I think that was what Thesis was really about.

And a lot of it, too, was working by yourself, which is unusual...Obviously, it's a studio, and you do interact with your professors. But, more than any other quarter, it was always just like, 'Talk to each other!' And a lot of us would just walk up to each other and just have conversations about things. And you would *hear*, actually, parts and pieces of people's discussions because you were encouraged to go to and sit in on other groups. And we presented so often, and we only presented in each of our studios, so that you could see what people were presenting throughout the quarter. Which was really helpful because you really were like, 'I mean, I don't really know what your project [is], but I like *this* portion of it. And this portion has an influence on what *I'm* doing. Can we talk about this?' And so, I think that was the good part, too. Just really, the camaraderie that came around with knowing that everybody *has* the same goal, for sure...All of us were really generally interested in having everybody else both *finish* and have interesting projects. And throughout the quarter we were really encouraging of each other for that...We were all interested, invested in having everybody finish. And so, yea, it was a good quarter! I miss that...

It was funny because I remember sitting in one of my very first meetings with [one of thesis advisors], and we were talking about Thesis...I really still did not know what I was doing. And we were having these really great discussions about *a* project. Not necessarily my project, but just *a* project. And so, I remember...one of the very first meetings, and one of the very first questions he asked is like, 'What do you want to do five, ten years from now? Or even just after school?'...And it's funny because a lot of people will say Thesis sort of sets you up for whatever you really want to do after school. And I think there's sort of two ways to look at that. And it goes back to people wanting to design a building versus people trying to figure out a solution to a problem...And so, I remember when we were talking about *my* thesis, I was like, 'I don't know what I wanna do in five, ten years. I mean, maybe I should. But at this point I don't.'...And throughout the quarter, we're just like, 'OK. If you can *make* this set of drawings that is about your thesis and has a *really* fine graphic sensibility...you could potentially take this set of drawings and get a job in a really great graphic design sort of architecture firm...The firms that take an architectural idea about a building and diagram and dissect it really well and effectively.'...

### *On workflow and precedents: 'Why reinvent the wheel?'*

I know that some people kind of consciously, at the beginning of each quarter, especially with specific projects, say, 'By the end of this quarter, I want to learn how to do this, and I want to work this way'. And that's mostly because they want to really establish [a] workflow, I think...I think by the end of Thesis, it's really knowing, I suppose, how to do things in the most efficient way, for one. And...the most efficient way

that gets the outcome that *you* want, but also is less the easiest way to get to point B...And I think that's also the nature of how Thesis is structured...because one of the assignments one day is like, 'Bring in...a mockup of your boards...What is that look and feel of it?' And you're encouraged to also bring in renderings that have a particular style that you want to emulate. And just because the way that that's formatted, you know what you want something to look like. And that's true throughout most quarters, I think. As a student, you sort of know what your punch-list at the end of the quarter is and what you want things to look like. Whether you get there or not—it happens or it doesn't. But I think, especially with Thesis, you're sort of like, 'Ok. I want a rendering, and I want it from this perspective. And I want it to look like this. So how am I gonna do that?'...**And so, I think, by the end of Thesis, I sort of knew what I was trying to go for, and how I wanted to get there...And it's also just by the nature of how we're exposed to new and upcoming projects that happen throughout [grad school].** It's either, like, something popped up on [a blog], and I downloaded the photo, and I just like kept it on a folder on my desktop. Or I bought a new book that had really good drawings. Or I went to a lecture...where [the speaker talked] about how their process...And it's like, 'Oh! They came out with something really cool! I'm just gonna try this out! I like the way that they're doing this!...I have a project that's very similar. Let's see if we can do something very similar...something that's in that ballpark.' And I think that's actually fairly common. And a nice way to do things. **I mean, why reinvent the wheel? If somebody's done it already, you can try to do it in a very similar fashion. And if it worked for them, it could potentially work for you! And so I think that's a way that we all look at drawings and a way to work...**

### *Professional experience and goals: seeking out a non-linear path to licensure*

I worked the year that I took off between undergrad and grad. And I worked the summer before last at a firm, as well. And both of those firms were small...The first office...was no fun! It was no fun at all! It was just dead quiet in that office all the time! It was *really, really* sad! And the second office was...a little bigger...

I'm looking for jobs right now, and my target office is ten to twenty-something...I really don't wanna work in an office less than ten people...It's interesting because that's my kind of limiting factor right now in my job search...And...that's my own self-[imposed] thing because I really want an office where I know everybody that's working there and can have the ability to have some sort of personal relationship or just acknowledgment of each other. And so that's why I don't see myself *initially* working at some place that's a hundred and fifty people... I actually really want to know everybody that works in an office. And I want them to know me...I think that being able to *personally* know everybody else that works in an office is beneficial just because you're not walking by some stranger every single day that you have potentially worked at the office for, and have *never* actually interacted with. I think that seems a little strange to me...I really can't imagine coming into an office one day where there's a hundred and fifty people and not knowing the majority of them. That seems kind of odd to me...And it seems just sort of isolating to me...But I think in, like, an office of ten to twenty, especially, you really can know other people well. And I think that's something that I would look forward to. And would enjoy. And a definite *plus* to working in an office...

Especially in architecture, I feel like a lot of people...have a sort of linear projection through their careers. And I mean...that's ok, and I wouldn't mind doing that myself. But I personally don't think of myself in that regard. Like, as nice as it would be to either get licensed by the time I'm thirty, before then I would want to do something that's not architecture. And that's maybe a little naïve on my part, but I really just want to do something that's of my interests. Which is not to say architecture isn't, but it's not necessarily the be-all, end-all. And so if I were to get a job that *wasn't* in architecture, I would consider it, at this point. I would not mind...**Because I think architecture's not a linear sort of thing, and moving back and forth between other things and allied fields is not necessarily a bad thing to do.** I mean, obviously, if a goal is to get licensed as soon as possible, it would definitely impinge on that. But I mean, maybe that's not the goal...

I think I'm really good at...representation, graphics. I don't know. I've always liked graphics and doing graphics. Making drawings look better, even if they're not good drawings. Making drawings look *good*...I think graphics is always my strong point...I'd love to be a graphic designer! I think that'd be kind of awesome!...I think that—especially graphic design, installation design, exhibition design, typography—those things are hugely influential, especially to architecture. And a lot of architects begin their careers as architects by doing installations. And by doing art pieces...And I think being multidisciplinary in that regard is also really interesting. It's something that I'm drawn to...Studios especially, they teach you a way to design and a way to think about design. And I think that's applicable to other things that aren't architecture...So I think if I left architecture, it would definitely be for something that's tangential...and related. But it would not necessitate me needing a license...

I think the biggest [challenge facing the profession] and also one that's facing a lot of other fields like law is that it's ridiculously expensive to get degrees. Like, we're obviously not the medical field. We can't expect to make back that money that quickly...But I think that the cost-benefit question is really one of the big ones...And I think one of the things, as well, is that—especially architecture, probably more so than any other professional degree—is that you don't really know what the [economic] outlook is when you graduate. Like, you don't know if it's gonna be a good time to get hired or a bad time to get hired. And that's not something that you can really realistically predict and pinpoint with certainty...It's hard to project economic instabilities in the future. I mean, people would love to be able to do that, I'm sure. It's not possible! You just kind of roll with the punches. And I think that's always been the way that I've looked at things. You just...prepare as much as possible, and if there is the worst-case scenario, then you deal with it. I mean, it's obviously better not to have the worst-case scenario, but I mean, it happens. It's a matter of life. I mean, it just happens. It's something that you have to deal with...And I think that's probably one of the major things, is just you don't know what the outlook is...

[When the economy hits a downturn, it's important to consider] making use of your skills and being able to apply them in something that's not architecture. But also just being cognizant of the fact that things are sort of cyclical and that there are booms and there are busts. Being able to roll with the punches in that regard and...saying, 'Ok, well, I can't get a job in *this* field right now. But these are my other kind of applicable skills that can be applied to something tangential. Not necessarily what I want to do, but something that's closely related.' And I think that's valid, and valuable, too...I question the idea that immediately when you're done in school, you have to go and work. I question that highly...You have the

## Patrick Profile

rest of your life to work. And if you don't have a goal to get licensed or something *immediately* when you're done—and I don't. My goal is [to get licensed] by the time I hit thirty. So I have a few years!...I'm not in any rush to do that, I think. And I think that's fine...I mean, you obviously have to pay the bills. But you don't have to punch in right away! I don't wanna punch in right away...

### *The first architectural awakening*

Architecture as a field was pretty off my radar until I had done several other chunks of academic work as an undergrad. I was sort of dabbling and took a year off of school...and read the book *Cradle to Cradle* by McDonough and Braungart, and started to have this consciousness about sustainable design. And I was working at a public library that had just built two new green branches. So the synergy of reading that book and being in this environment of, 'These are different kinds of buildings than I've ever seen before-- or paid attention to, or been aware of!' really started to tickle my brain about, 'Oh, architecture! This is this thing that I've done a lot of [activity] surrounding it.' I did construction when I was younger, like residential construction...I had done a bunch of construction work and been...socialized by a grandfather [who was] a carpenter. And [had] all these helping hands that really helped me develop skills and ways of thinking about the field...But my interests hadn't really activated. That was a pretty different point. I guess contrary to that 'I've always known that I wanted to do architecture! Ever since I was two, I was drawing floor plans' sort of story, it just *happened*. I sort of woke up to that idea. And it was like, 'Oh, ok! I'm changing my direction, or defining a direction of where I'm gonna generally head.'...That was the first awakening. Like, my eyes opened to architecture...

I thought I was gonna do chemistry or biochemistry for many years, and started on that track. And I think [I was] anticipating that I wouldn't be happy doing that because [the] kind of creativity that exists in the sciences that I was seeing wasn't the right kind of creativity for what I needed. I really saw the pragmatic and analytical side of architecture complemented by the really free and creative and whimsical side as something that really clicked with me, having both. And I saw...that my happiness would be tied to having both of those in a career...I really don't think I was thinking that much about the professional end...I was like, 'I just want to pursue this path and see what happens.' I really didn't know what being an architect professionally was like at all at that point! I think I had that vague sense like, 'Yea, I want this to be my career. And I don't know exactly what it's gonna look like, but this is definitely something that engages me more than anything else had.'...

### *Grad school experience before transferring to UW: collaborative, diverse and critical*

**I went to [another graduate program] first...Started my Master's there... [and] I left...for completely personal reasons, completely not academic...**It was really collaborative. The two lowest cohorts really intermingled and there was this sense of, as you learned skills, then you pass them onto the year before...My experience the first two years there was that everyone who came in with bits of knowledge shared pretty much all that knowledge pretty quickly. And everybody rose to that level, more or less...My experiences in the construction industry gave me certain structures knowledge from that background...[and]...a lot of materials knowledge, sustainable design techniques that I learned before going to grad school. So those were interests that I feel like I already had skills in that I could share [with other students]...By the second year, if not the second semester...my focus shifted away from sustainable design as my primary interest...to more design theory. I was definitely influenced by faculty who focus on other matters...And so I think in that shift in focus, I started building those design skills...[And] the ethics

behind architecture--‘why build what we build?’--shifted from an ecological perspective to a social perspective within the first year, year-and-a-half of grad school...

There was a huge array of faculty interests and viewpoints, beliefs about architecture...So it was a *very* diverse place in terms of what faculty care about...[And] it felt *really* good. Because I’m a skeptical person. I saw the value of getting push-back...And an embrace of people saying contrary things and even espousing points of view that they may not be fully inhabiting. But just to say, ‘Well, what if we do that? What if I say the opposite? How’s that gonna stretch you?’ I feel like getting my ideas challenged really helped me understand my own points of view and decisions more...I didn’t know that I needed [that]. And along the way, it became clear that that is a really simple and valuable tool to have a real range of values and thoughts...For me, when I’m new, I’m learning, when I’m just picking stuff up for the first time, there’s a certain critical lens. But it’s taking most of my energy to just absorb that new thing, sort of inhabit it, and try it on. And then, I’ll get to a certain point where I feel like I get it, or I’ve had enough experience with an idea or subject and want the pushback...And so, I find it rewarding when external forces are like, ‘What about this idea that completely shakes the frame that you’re trying to construct? It’s trying to make the world simpler than it is.’...I feel uncomfortable when everyone in a room is saying the same thing! **And...just to...jump to U-Dub**, that is something about this place that felt memorable, was **I often got the sense that most people were in agreement about the style and the values and the things that should be investigated and done in studio and talked about**. That was just an immediate impression that strengthened over time. But also, I came to believe that there were just a couple of very strong voices in the program here that created that culture or influenced that culture...

### *Becoming disenchanted by UW’s pragmatism, but finding community in studio*

Throughout [grad school], studio was, like it is for most people, this hub around which everything circles. I **immediately started in a studio that was...the worst studio I had ever taken! It was so tightly controlled**. Like, what we were allowed to explore...How tightly the control was about what things needed to look like and be was really ridiculous...The level of hovering and hand-holding or twisting your arm behind your back to make stuff look a certain way was really high. **Which was very unappealing and foreign to me because it was so opposite from what I was used to**. I mean, what things *looked* like—literally, the aesthetics of things—seemed important when I got here in that studio. Which was just bizarre to me because the concepts were the things that were driving and valued at [the program I attended previously]. And that’s all that I wanted to think about and talk about...I was sort of caught off guard...[Entering the program,] I was very excited. And it felt like I got some of my excitement squashed [that quarter]...**I found two or three people who I shared values with and connected with and got closer to them**. I think there were a lot of negative dynamics in that studio. One of them was about keeping people disconnected. It wasn’t a studio about collaboration. I didn’t get to know people for a *long* time because it was so individualistic. It felt like being isolated from community! Even though we were in one big room together. Basically, by Week 8 or 9, the people who were not content with how things were going were starting to find each other. And themes about how limiting and superficial everything seemed to become were being talked about. And I found specifically two other people who I stayed close with and founded this whole other niche community in the program through them. Which had existed, [and] I sort of joined.

So that was good, to find people who share my values. And **I found people who were discontent with the program...**It was synonymous. That trigger of that studio was like, 'And you know what? There's problems with this whole damn program!' So really early on, **I fell into the crowd of bad kids, who had had been analyzing, critiquing the program for years already. And coming from this other perspective, I think I was able to add this other layer...**

**Starting in that studio, I started to feel that a lot of local firms were very tied to this program. There's this real tight, kind of messy set of relationships between the practice and the study of architecture in Seattle.** Which I think has a lot of benefits and some drawbacks to it, in general. And I started to really get a sense of what that meant. I think that the pragmatism with which that studio was identifying itself spoke of that relationship. **One of our faculty was a local practitioner and was basically like, 'You need to be practicing doing real architecture while you're in school.'** Which I had an opposite opinion: **'I'm in school! I wanna push the envelope. Like, work with *ideas* way more than I get the sense I'm going to most likely be able to out in the professional world.'** So it felt stifling in that way...Because of my personality, I didn't consider leaving the program at that point. I was like, 'You know what? At this point, this is my career path. And like anything you do for a long time, there's gonna be hard periods.' So I became disenchanted at that point and...really started questioning what the practice of architecture is and can be all about. I hadn't worked at an office at that point, so I didn't have any personal perspective about that. So it made me worried. Made me worried about how work was gonna be...

I was probably taught this by someone or by being somewhere [that] 'When you get out, you're gonna learn how to do the things you have to do. And if you've never practiced actually accessing something internal to express--or actually practiced some radical creativity, doing something different or risky, maybe playing with *bad* ideas, than if and when you get the chance to have professional experience, you're not gonna be as ready for it.' And I think I was explicitly taught that that's the point of school when I was [in my first graduate program]. It was like, 'This is like a laboratory.' Several professors were like, 'We are *not* vocational school. We're not teaching you how to design a certain way...You're supposed to explore *ideas*. You're supposed to develop your own design process, and seek some sort of internal source of creativity and really engage with whatever feels important to you.' And [the first studio at UW] was surprising to me, and rubbed me the wrong way because it felt very constraining...**I felt like we were just practicing to do the work we were gonna do when we got out of school...And I think it leaves out a lot of self-exploration and developing some self-knowing about what's important to you and what you really want to *do*. And I think that's part of the positive side of the individualism that I see is developing an internal compass, in a sense of what I want to be doing, what I value...**

[Nowadays, at work], sometimes I do just feel like, 'It's a job.' But a lot of times, I'm really thinking, 'What do I want to most enjoy my life and to get the most out of my professional experience?' And at least wondering about that and trying to *push* at it feels valuable. And I think it's funny because, in my professional life, when things have been turned over to me, I don't just throw crazy solutions out. I have pretty modest solutions to problems. And maybe that's part of why I wanted more encouragement to just be wild and explore things that are really out there. Because I *need* that personally to grow, to really pull myself out of the modesty...I feel like there's a porous barrier to get through. **And I want to increase my**

access to more radical creativity. That [first] studio was the example of where I became more aware of that whole dynamic and how I think it works well for me in school to not be too constrained to reality or to a certain agenda...But the next quarter I got to do what I wanted to do, and do something that didn't quite work! And play with ideas that didn't seem important to everyone.

### *A turning point: seeking work-life balance*

The last semester [of my first graduate program], we were designing a sustainable, *suburban* high-rise tower...My routine was to walk to school across [the city]. So literally forty-five minutes to an hour walk to class. And my design process happened a lot on the back-and-forth commute that year. And I think my design thinking revolved a lot more around movement and experience of being a human, a pedestrian on the ground. And thinking about what it means to inhabit the space more than I think I'd ever thought about before. Because it was the first time that...I felt I had a bit of a grasp on concepts. Urban design was starting to be accessible because program and structure and a lot of other factors were starting to feel under control...Most of my time was in studio, [but] a lot of the classes were relating, so I didn't get pulled in very many directions that semester...

So I walked to school. Sat in studio for hours. In our studio, there was a balcony, you can climb out a window onto a ledge. So there was a lot of indoor-outdoor confluence that was, I think, important at that time...sitting outside and designing more than I'd done before. I think I designed and thought about things more outside studio that quarter than I had before...That was also one of the first semesters that I really cultivated a more roughly nine-to-five...or a more steady work schedule. Before that, I was more typical, where I would just let things go in terms of my sanity and health. I only pulled all-nighters the first semester, and I was like, 'No! Never again!' But by that point, a year-and-a-half later, I'd gotten a pretty good routine to get me in and out of there for a reasonable amount of time...I really, really wanted to make dinners at home and have that routine. And it only really worked because I was cultivating this sense of thinking, of designing outside of studio. So mainly the commute, at home to some degree...out in the world, during the day, things were happening. **I wasn't compartmentalizing, that studio happened in studio only. And so I simply thought, 'I have this great work-life balance!' But in a way, I was just working all the time!** Just thinking and jotting things down and sketching. And I know a lot of people do that, just keep it on all the time. Everyone in the current office I work, I overheard them tell stories about how they wake up at 3 AM, like, 'Holy shit!' thinking about this problem that they're dealing with. And most of them do that every night! And I'm like, 'I gotta figure out how to not do that!' And I've had several times that that's been happening in the last year, and it scares me a little bit! To not mentally compartmentalize work enough to not wake up in the middle of the night worrying about [something]. But I was definitely doing that. I had pretty high anxiety that semester. It was actually more than when I would do all-nighters the first semester, which I thought was terribly unhealthy. I was really tired, but I think I had a better separation of work and play than when I was doing this project. **It was just way too all-consuming. It's definitely not where I needed to be...**

My health was failing at that point...I was trying to work in this way that was supportive of being physically healthy and just thinking about work-life balance...And it was such a failed experiment!...Didn't work the way I had hoped. So there were a lot of thoughts about health, about the culture of overwork that was

happening at school that I knew happened professionally and feeling scared about that. Because it really, at that point, was *not* working! I was draining my reserves even when I looked like I was doing way less work than everyone else around me. **And I was siphoning everything that I had at that point rather than staying balanced or actually recuperating...I realized either then or soon afterwards that I never wanted to work somewhere where sixty-hour weeks were standard.** That flexibility and my value of a balance and family-slash-home was ignored. So I was just thinking a lot about those ideas of life outside of architecture. And being confronted with illness and physical health and these things that I feel like are really easy to ignore, or even pleasurable to ignore, when you're so enmeshed in school. And a lot of people are young enough to feel immortal still and be pushing themselves so hard that their physical and emotional health was pretty compromised. I started going to a therapist that semester. And my therapist was like, 'Did you know that the architecture department is statistically the highest-ranked department of any that comes to psych services?' I was like, 'I didn't know that.' She was like, '*Many* of your peers come here!' Which is *really* disturbing to me. I mean, 'Well, that's great that a lot of my classmates are also coming here!' But we weren't talking about it when we were in school! So there's a lot of thoughts about mental health. At the same time like, 'Wow! A lot of other students who sit around me are also having a really hard emotional time with this lifestyle! And I didn't know about it until I went to a therapist!' That was kind of disturbing...

I feel like it was a structural mistake. Because I had set up my life such that I was living with five other architecture students in a house that was pretty far removed from school. So you couldn't quickly just bounce back and forth. And then, when I would go home, it didn't feel like a real viable option to head back in if I was lonely or wanted to do more work in the evening. **I wanted to unplug from school and I didn't have really any community outside of the department. So I ended up isolating myself and having emotional problems because of that.** I think if I did it again in that situation, I'd probably try to work harder to just form a separate community. But in that situation, I should have just gone back to school and hung out with people. Like, been at school with people I knew but just take breaks with people. And I was *notoriously* bad at relaxing at school. And I would see people just hanging out and spending an hour just socializing with people, and I thought that was just so crazy! And I realize now, if I had done that, I would have felt a lot more sane. **Once I started school here, I had this whole community outside of school.** And when I was in school, I did work. And I made a few important connections and relationships with people. **But I intentionally didn't invest socially in the department. So I pretty much swung the other way.** The value of that is questionable because I didn't make a lot of connections with other students. But when I unplugged, I just was in another world. **And I'm still experiencing that, to a large degree...Like, I don't go to many professional gatherings or events. I'm not friends with very many other designers.** Most of my community are people that do completely different things. And so if I'm talking about architecture, it's usually because I want to, not because it's happening around me. **My world feels a lot less insular in that way. And that all follows from that time in my life when that shift started and the experiment started. Like, 'How do I survive in this community, in this culture of architecture?'**

Not completely by accident, I'm sure, I've found myself in a community of professionals who are very interested in doing work during the day, and then doing their own thing. And they're all near the end of their career, actually, the people I work with. So they have long ago gotten tired of architecture being

their whole life, and they all do completely different things in their off-hours. So there's a real encouragement that like, 'I wanna talk about what you do when we're NOT here!' There's not that, 'Architecture's my life!' for anyone in there. So it really works for me!...I feel encouraged and accepted and nurtured in that away in that environment. It feels strange to say that I fit in with a bunch of pre-retirees! But I share my boss' values more than any other professional that I've ever met! Which maybe means my career is doomed to be much less productive than a lot of my peers, but I think that is an important value, to not be as productive as I feel expected to be...

It's interesting in Seattle because I feel like a lot of designers and architects know each other. It's a surprisingly tight community where a lot of people know each other. So I do feel a little bit on the outside when I go to events. Just 'cause it's *shocking* that so many people know everyone! But I know enough at least of the younger crowd from different places, enough people that I usually see people I know. I feel like I can play the game, I can integrate into the community. **And I expect at some point in the next few years I will reinvest some more personal time into a more design-centered community. But it isn't where I'm at now, like still decompressing and pulling back to balance the scales in terms of my other interests in life outside of design.**

### *Alternative practice models and professional identity*

The Professional Practice class at UW...was so controlled by guidelines, by NCARB and whatever, that [the instructor] didn't have much wiggle room. But there was a lot of talk about alternative practice models. And I think my interest in community design and ways of collaborating within and outside the architecture profession got really nurtured that quarter. Which feels really important because that was something that was a huge deficit the whole time I was in school until then, I think...not really understanding how architecture was practiced. And having never done it, never worked in an office at that point, it's funny to think back...[It] was *such* a mystery to me! Which just feels *crazy* that I was almost done with my degree and still wondering exactly what it was gonna look like out in the world. And that gave me a lot of hope about alternative models. And I still have to learn more, to figure out actually how to do it. But I think that was an inspirational class...I was in a group that case studied [an architecture firm], which showed me that you can break conventions and still get by...And it feel like there's such a boogie man: 'You have to do things exactly by the books, exactly how everyone else does it.' And then you just see people doing things in a different way and patching it together. And it totally works!...

For years, I would correct all my friends and people who would be like, 'Oh, yea. Robin's an architect!' I'm like, 'No, no. No, I'm not.' And now I'll say some clarifier of some kind around it. But I think it's the nitty-gritty of the language. Whether you're licensed or not, you do architectural work. The title means less to me, I think. And I think that the evidence of that is that I'm actually letting people know me as an architect. And I let them know that I'm not licensed, if it matters...If it doesn't matter to the situation—I get that they understand that label and the context of what that means. And that's what's important. It actually isn't about having these exact, AIA-specified, NCARB-specified, skill hours. It's kind of the pursuit that you're doing, what kind of work you're doing. And I'll say I'm a designer, too. Or I'll often try to do work, or think, or plan with people about projects and not talk about it at all! Not use *any* label. I never really find myself [saying], 'Well, I'm an architect, so I can help you!' Because of my values, and the way I

think about things is like, 'Actually, they have as many good ideas as I do.' And hopefully I have a little more training experience to help bring those out. But I think that the whole professionalism experience is usually sabotage to collaborating with non-professionals. Because when expertise comes into it, I think it disempowers people really easily. So that's important to me to not trigger. Or to trigger as little as possible...

### *Professional experience: working toward collaborative self-sufficiency*

The first architecture job I had was last summer. **I work with a solo practitioner, so it's just he and I working together...**And since it was my first job, I started knowing *nothing* about the production of architecture, the nitty-gritty of practice. So I've been building my skills through the last year-and-a-half. And I'm at the point where I'm managing a couple small projects...Even when I'm not participating directly, he's sitting right next to me and on the phone with clients or with consultants. So I'm picking up kind of, 'How *do* you talk on the phone to your general contractor or to the site foreman about issues?'...**[Working] with just one other person...by necessity, you get exposed to way more of the process...**I definitely feel like I'm learning *so* much practically...But it's *so* self-directed...

I was terrified to get my first professional job. I was *definitely* of the school of thought that I had to know everything before I started. It's the perfectionist mentality. 'God, I know I have to learn everything I need to learn, but I'd rather learn it all before it's tested.' I mean, it completely doesn't make sense!...I think that I value knowing everything I need to know, so that I don't have to work for a big firm that might not be doing what I want. I think I want more control over how and with whom I work and collaborate...I wanted to start in this place where I'm learning a really large breadth of skills rather than start at a firm of like forty and fall into a niche that maybe takes ten years to get out of. **My hope is that I'm going to get this broad perspective and then be able to do my own thing in a certain area, or more intelligently find a place in a bigger group to collaborate in a way that I think I really want...**

Work's been generally very self-defined and managed...I just balance whatever he's given me that's new with things that are on my plate already. And I'll structure my own time...to really weave those together in a way that's gonna keep me engaged and stimulated throughout the day. Sometimes, I save the design pieces or the creative pieces, whatever capacity they are, for the moments where I'm really tired of putting together design documents. 'Cause we don't have as much [design]. I guess probably no one ever does. Y'know, you do that and then you have a *huge* chunk of production to do. So I'll usually work for a few hours in the late morning. And then walk around downtown for awhile midday. And then work until early evening...There's *no* energy towards working at peak efficiency. And we're both doing our own thing...So there's a lot of freedom, self-guided time, which I really appreciate! And I go to him and say like, 'Let's talk! 'Let's collaborate! I need you to teach me this.' Or, 'I had these questions. I wanna do that.' Or, 'I'm bored. I wanna just pick your brain about something. I wanna hear stories.' 'Cause he's got a whole career of knowledge that if I don't ask, I'm not gonna [learn]...

The method of training has mainly been doing things the way that they're done around me, so far...I feel *mostly* like I'm practicing things that I've been learning. And injecting [my own] values...I take some of the most joy in finding little areas that I can care about that no one else is paying attention to...I feel like I'm

building up that knowledge and experience to the point where I'll be able to take that turn to push back again. So at this point, I don't feel like I'm putting much radical creativity out there in my professional life. It happens in the personal projects more...That's a place where I felt myself stretch and really be able to be fully creative, I guess...That's where I felt really good about, 'I'm gonna push the envelope and do something!'...And I hope that they will integrate so that that type of thinking, that type of project will be more of what I get to work on. But...I've had side project after side project that feels engaging and enriching to parallel the work. I see the rewards in terms of skill-building and experience, but I don't leave work usually feeling rewarded and overjoyed about what I've been doing that day. I have to think about it differently to see the value of it...

I feel like if I'm able to spend a couple more years with him, I'll probably get my license and start really trying to develop a client base and market and really start to detach and do my own thing. But it's more to me about the security that I won't have to work for a big firm that sort of enslaves you or expects you do to the whole nine-to-nine thing. **I think that having all the skills to be able to do my own work is way less about not wanting to work with other people...It feels more like job security that I won't have to take the jobs that I don't want if I can be self-sufficient...There's these two different parts of myself. The side of myself that just wants to be completely self-sufficient and do it alone. And then the part that's like, 'You have to need people, and you have to really depend on other people...'** I wanna learn a breadth of skills because I don't know what I don't need to know later, in a sense. But I don't feel like I'm preparing myself to be isolated and never collaborate. More so that I'll have more to bring to the table in a collaboration. And I think it's more an emotional job to work on remembering that. Like, I don't have to know everything in the end...

#### **Valuing the less tangible aspects of collaboration**

The collaboration that I've tried to engage in with my boss has mainly resulted in him handing me more things. Because I think he's interpreting it as--maybe he just doesn't know how to work together, essentially overlapping our time. And it's like, 'Oh, you want to work on this house together? Well, why don't you do this step or why don't you do that?' Which is fine... But during our thesis, Monica and I, I think we actually were working together at *least* half the time, if not more...[Which] I think maybe is inefficient collaboration in people's minds...Where...even in my own mind, I'd be like, 'Oh God, we're wasting time! We could be doing twice as much work if we were working separately and parallel, and then just bringing it together.' But it was a value of ours. Like, we had decided, 'We're going to actually just try and keep our brains open and...our thoughts going and trying to sort of synthesize the things we were thinking and process through things together in this really fluid way.' Which by the end I think we were doing pretty well. And it took a lot of time! So that's another thing that I think I've really learned about that process is that you have to become pretty close and get pretty comfortable to do that, and to not have much produced sometimes over hours...When it was our own thing, we weren't beholden to anyone, really...setting our own schedule, I think it was a lot easier than being in the professional world where...I get the sense that my boss is saying, 'Well, we can't double-bill our time often at all.' And unless I wanna just work for free--which he knows I don't--we're gonna be basically crossing paths every once in awhile on the road...

I just feel better in myself and in a community and in the world if I'm seeing people do things collaboratively. I think there's *all* these benefits that aren't tangible, and maybe are benefits to the practitioners more than the clients sometimes. Where you're actually just building community and exploring ideas and doing all this work on yourself that I think does trickle down or is reflected in the work you actually produce that other people experience. But **I find the experience of isolated work by myself—in the communal sense of being human—is dehumanizing.** And the amount of wasted time that I and most people around me that I see when you're doing work alone—there's a lot of time where you sort of check out and are lonely and feel like, 'Wow! I just didn't produce much today!' And so it's *not* like working individually is some golden ticket to productivity because you're not being bothered...I think, our particular match, with Monica and I, we worked highly efficiently...when we're working, we're both engaged. And maybe we don't produce some beautiful drawing each time or some object or thing. But we've done a lot of work when we're collaborating. And it just makes me happy! Like, that is aside from rationalizing it. Just feeling like other people have my back and that I have their back in this way, that we're a team, is just a way in the world that I feel most comfortable...And actually, *hard* things in life were happening in different points during the process, the eight-month thesis. And having someone else be in the back-and-forth, and to actually feel supported...I saw so many people working individually—and this happens a lot, I think, in architecture--it's psychologically unhealthy and people have breakdowns. And you can see on their face, *so* drained and anxious...

My hope [of working collaboratively professionally] has not been squashed in the year that I've been out of school. I guess I was never certain, but I still don't know exactly how I'll pull it off. I think I probably need to work for—or with—a more collaborative group to get more experience just seeing how other people do it. And I think that I'm just gonna continue the experiment with Monica, specifically, to see how we can continue to do work. When we were finishing school, we were like, 'We should apply to firms as a duo!' And I kept thinking, 'They're gonna pay us half! Like, if we come together, that's like one position.' And it's not! But it's also probably not, in terms of productively, two positions. And, especially after this year of professional work, I think I would actually be fine with that. Like, I would be much happier making half the money and being more than twice as happy. So, I think that's an important thing that I'm still seeing...

Partly it was where things landed that I ended up in this professional situation. But also, I feel like I could have held out [for] a collaborative situation like I wanna end up in...I know that I don't know everything. And I wanna see what people on the other side of the fence think, and then take it back to the realm that I believe I'll want to inhabit again more fully. I think that in most, if not all, situations, knowing a lot about the values of the people who think oppositely of you is really important. I think it helps expand my viewpoint and temper my sentiments a lot. Like, if I was sitting here being like, 'Collaboration is the only way! And it's the most efficient. It's the best for everyone!' I've had enough experiences in my life where it's been proven so wrong, that my viewpoint is the right one or the only one, that it makes me feel more sane to be in a balance of those things.

### *On the need to regularly unplug from architecture to achieve work-life balance*

I think there's consciousness behind [wanting to unplug from architecture]. Like, things will build up to a point where it will feel obvious that I need to be in a different space...I think that there is that bit of teenager self that enjoys being outside of the main group. Which is funny, again. Like, 'I wanna be in a group, but I wanna be outside the group.' But I think that **not immersing myself completely in the architecture community exclusively just feels really important to me. I think because architecture's not the only thing I care about in the world. And when it becomes too much of my life, I feel unfulfilled. And I think that more consciously setting up my life that way, making decisions to not work as much as I could be, or to not invest in the connections and friendships that are exclusively within the architecture community, are these attempts to get the balance that I feel the happiest in inhabiting.** So even going on a midday break or walking to school...I know I described processing and working and thinking on those walks, which definitely was a part of it. But also, somehow it was slow enough that I was also just walking [through the city] and thinking about that...Not in-transit in a car or a bus that's fast enough that I maybe don't have enough time to do that. I think I need maybe more time than the average person. I don't know...but I need a lot of time to really feel separate and unplugged...When professors or people giving lectures say things like, 'I essentially experience the rest of my life in support of my architecture,' that feels *crazy* to me! Like, the real point is to design buildings or think about architecture as the *one* thing. And I've thought a lot that like, 'Oh, that just makes me a bad candidate for this field or a bad architect or whatever. Like I don't fit in because of that.' I think that I *decide* that that makes me an outsider. And then when I talk to people, I realize that it's the minority of people that have architecture as their *sole* passion, and the sole thing that gives them joy and fuels them in their life. And the people that that is more true for—especially famous examples—I've heard stories from people who know them [and] it's like, 'Yea, the rest of their life, [they're] just suffering because of the obsession.' And then I fear that...And **in school**, at least, have *totally* gotten into spaces where I manifest that myself, ironically. **In this total contradiction to what I'm intending or thinking, I'll get really focused and get isolated and think that I have to do it alone. And I think the reason that I do this back and forth is just a personal struggle and exploration of these ideas. And I think it's getting easier and easier...**

### *Shifting perspectives and interests: feeling responsible for self-development*

[When I first became interested in it], architecture was this creative play with convention...I was enamored with the libraries that I saw that were new and ecologically designed. They were functioning as these machines that were regulating temperature and creatively interacting with the users of the library. They were breaking with convention, they were exploring new ideas...The building was important back then. And I would say now, I'm much more shifted to, 'Buildings are cool. But I think a lot about ugly buildings that work really well.' And in developing a sense for, 'What is a building that works really well for people *feel* like?' more than 'What does a good building *look* like?' And I feel more interested in people's interactions with the built environment and the social aspect of getting more people involved and engaged with the planning and design of their own environments. And at least talking to people about the possibility that they could be empowered to think about their environment. And then, as a professional developing this sense of how to facilitate a design process, I feel this real interest in exploring

how I can bring out the creativity of the client more and enhance that. I feel more mediator at this point, and really love the idea of working with clients and developing those social skills to help them realize *they're* [bringing] ideas. And less focused on me manifesting some idea that pops into my head. And obsessing on what I want to have happen...I feel like more designers should be advocates for the people they're designing for...

I feel like **I don't know how to predict what will be next [in my career]**...Being in school, there's this conception or curiosity of what professional life is going to be like. And getting out of this long process of education that was, in a way, encapsulated. And then now to be in sort of the open range of professional life where I really want to encapsulate and figure out what are the phases. Like, are there gonna be stages of growth, or phases of interests? **I've been experiencing a bit of an overwhelming feeling...It feels like this expansive, nebulous place now.** That either I could just do what I'm doing now forever. Or things will change along the way. And I'm sure there'll be happenstance, and there'll be opportunities that'll just be out of my control. But now, **I'm starting to feel like, 'Wow, I have a lot more responsibility to take those changes, make those shifts.'** Because hopefully I'm not just gonna get fired or laid off or whatever, [which would] just force me to totally reevaluate. I would rather choose like, 'Ok, I want to start a firm with a collaborative basis. Or join one at some point when I'm ready to. Or shift my focus of interest when I'm ready.'...I think **I'm seeing more that it's my responsibility to continue my evolution. Where I think I saw school and grad school as supporting me, doing that for me—like it was challenging me, it was telling me to change...And I think that that's a big shift, where now it's my job to do that.** And I didn't have much forethought about that, so it was unexpected...

I think that there's gonna be this shift where...I feel like, 'I've just been a part of a whole process where I wasn't being guided by anyone else.'...I think scale has to do with it. I think there's gonna be this shift when I, or Monica and I, or some version, are involved in this peer-based, totally self-supporting project that is big enough that I feel *impressed*. That I've actually learned enough skills to make that happen. Looking back, I tried to do projects that were too big for me in the past. And I remember how that felt in my body. And now, it feels different. There feels like a lot more confidence and background to actually contribute more fully...I think it's actually the feeling of competency before I even started. Maybe I will only see it in hindsight after some project is done...But I think there's gonna be this point where I feel a capacity to, and confidence to, do the creative project...Maybe it'll just feel rewarding to finish something and be like, 'Wow, I knew how to do that!'

### *Gaining enough confidence to attend architecture school*

**I knew I always wanted to do something design-related.** And I wanted to be in a creative field, but I didn't know what that was *per se*...I'm a first generation American. And my mother has like three years of education, meaning she only went to the third grade. And my dad went up to high school. And that's pretty much it! So education was never really that relevant in my family...In fact, when I graduated high school, my dad was like, 'Ok, you're gonna come help me in the family business.' I remember depending on friends and other people that I respected, like 'What should I get into?' And every time I said, 'I want to do something artistic or creative or design-related,' they're like, 'Oh, no no no. You're never gonna find a stable job. You should just do something where you know it's really interesting to you, but you know for a fact that you'll have a job.' And so, it wasn't until after I graduated my bachelor's where I knew I wanted to go back for a grad degree, but I didn't know what. I didn't think that my psychology degree was what I really wanted to pursue....**I just knew that I wanted to do something really creative and artistic, and I didn't know what it was. And to be quite honest, I didn't think I was smart enough to be an architect.**...My first two years of [undergrad], I excelled in psychology. I did really well in all my courses. And my professor was like, 'You really need to pick a major. You should do this! You're good at it!'...For me, [college was] sort of an incubator phase of my design interest...And I used all my free time to fill that creative need. I did everything from painting to drawing... constructing small things or knitting...Just kind of did everything else to fill that desire...

[After I graduated] I took off and went to [Europe] for a year. And I think it was when I was there that I really had an appreciation for architecture in a way that I never did before...And it just kept on coming back to me that architecture is *way* more interesting to me than anything else...When I came back...I...got into a different field altogether...for a good ten years before I came to a place in my life where I was completely debt-free, totally unhappy, and just said, 'You know what? If I'm gonna do architecture—I had been talking about it for about six years prior, and how I wanted to do it. But I just didn't feel like I had the means. And I just didn't feel confident enough. I didn't really know enough about the field to really think, 'Ok, I think I'm really capable of it.' And I think it was really hard for me to understand what that would look like. Then, I had heard about the summer program at the U-Dub and said, 'Ok, well if I'm gonna do it, this is the one thing that's gonna say, 'Yes I can do it,' or 'No, I can't.' And I was never in a position in my life to actually just pursue it. So when I finally was, I did...It wasn't a decision that I made really quickly. I pondered over it for months and months...And then, when I took [the summer course] and was introduced to the whole notion of studio culture and studio life and learning from your peers, I just fell in love with it. I was like, 'I can't do what I've been doing for the past ten years anymore. I have to pursue this! In every possible way!'

**Part of the reason why I went back to school was, sure, I was making a lot of money, but I was really feeling this loss of meaning in my life...I wanted to have a career that was meaningful to me.** And I was so tired of working at a job that really worked me to death, as well, but it was not fulfilling. And when I went to architecture, it was *way* more fulfilling to me than anything that I would ever want to do. And I think that's what I learned from [the summer program]. And I think honestly that's the only thing that's kept

me *in* architecture school and in the field, is because of that one single thing. Because I know I have these things I could go back to, but do I really want to? Do I wanna have that life anymore? Not really...

When you say you want to go into architecture--I think before you even get into the field--there's this notion that everybody that comes out of architecture school becomes an architect. Where the reality of it is, it's not that way at all. **And I think when I was in [the summer course, I] realized that, just because you go to architecture school doesn't mean that you have to become an architect...**It just gives you the skills to problem-solve, [but] you can do a lot of other things that are design-related...that [don't] actually require you to become an architect. **And I think that's kind of when I got my confidence in saying, 'I'm just gonna jump into it. If I become a licensed architect, I do.** How do I know by the end of the time that grad school's over that I'll still *want* to do it?' **But I think the attraction to architecture school itself was enough for me to say, 'It's worth it!'**...And so I quit my job. And then got a job at an architecture firm because I wanted to make sure that, 'Yea sure, I liked the school aspect, but do I actually like the work aspect?' So before applying to grad school, I worked a year and a half at a firm...

### *First year struggles: 'culture shock' and 'the massive breakdown in self-confidence'*

**The first month**, I actually tried to get out of U-Dub and see if...other schools would take me...I called the schools that I turned down and I was like, 'Is there any way that I can come back?!' 'Cause I just felt I was not amongst my peers. I felt like everybody just came from very stringent spaces and places...I thought I was gonna have a lot of people that were gonna be from totally weird places, too...[But I didn't feel] connected with these people at all!...I wanted to be around a diverse group of people...I really felt like there was a handful of people in my class that, because of my age or whatever—or, I don't know what exactly—but they just didn't think I belonged there. And made it really obvious that I [didn't] belong there. So I don't really feel like I ever felt like I should've been in architecture school and...**it was just initially a very unwelcoming experience.** And of course, when our class got bigger that changed for me. Also, in your first year of architecture school, you're so shocked. You're just *totally* culture shocked that you don't even have time to digest what just happened to you...

After my first year, I just was really disappointed!...The people that I worked for [prior to starting school], they all went to this program. And they talked about their experience in architecture school, and that's what made me *so* excited. And then after my first year, it was *so* the opposite of what they described. I mean, I was kind of ready to quit!...[When I started] I was *so* excited...I don't think I've ever felt that happy in my entire life...I was really, really excited. And then I got to school and I was like, 'Oh no! What did I do!?'...

If you're not used to a design education—like a lot of the people that take art school or whatever, they're *really* capable of handling the critique aspect and [the] peer-critique aspect of architecture school. But I...feel like you want so much approval from your peers and approval from your professor that you start to believe or think in certain ways about certain things...And then they kind of affect you just because then you're always around that so much. And I think a lot of people...it really changed their personalities, and the way they thought about things... Too many times in a studio did all the projects look exactly the same. And I think that's because there is sort of a dogma here that gets pretty ingrained in a lot of the

teaching and how the studios are run. And there's also a lot of professors here that kind of have this god-like status with some of the students. And it's kind of like whatever they say goes. And therefore, at the end of the studio, all the projects are just slight variations of the same idea. And that was just my general experience, really...But I'm remembering my first year, and how our first programs and our experimental projects, we all had our own voice. And everything was so bizarre and different. And I think definitely by the time that we all graduated, we all were kind of singing the same tune. In some way or another.

There was also a handful of people that sort of questioned everything. And when they were questioning, constantly appeared like they were rebelling against that dogma. And then were obviously always labeled as like that troubled child in the class. And there were a handful in my class that, throughout the whole experience, stayed that way. But then they were given this label by a lot of the professors that they were bad students 'cause they didn't adopt that way of thinking, I would imagine...A lot of the ones that were the questioning ones were my close friends. But I also have this...thing about me which is like, 'You respect your elders.' [And] that includes your teachers, even though they could be your age. And so it was kind of like this struggle between how I personally felt and all the things I knew I had to produce...Just knowing that you had to produce at the end of the day...I think that's why I feel like every project I did was horrible! I don't know. I never felt that a project that I finished at the end of the studio was actually *my* project. It was never like, 'This is my design. I totally stand by it.' It was more like, 'This is my interpretation of what my professor wants me to do.' And I was never happy about it! I always had a *really, really* hard time in school defending my work. Always. Because of that. Because every time I struggled with a desk crit--where I wanted to do certain things, or I had these ideas about certain things--I was always told that they were *wrong* or not good!...It's kind of like, 'Ok, well obviously, [the faculty] know more because they [have] so many years of experience. And so I have to at least acknowledge the fact that, if they're telling me something is really *bad*, obviously there's a reason for it, right?' But then it also could depend on the professor, too. Some I really respected, and some I didn't. And the ones I didn't, I just didn't listen to. Before architecture school, I wasn't like the most confident person. But I was really confident in my work. That was the one thing I was always confident in, that I could do a good job and that I was good at what I did...And coming here, and **starting architecture school** was sort of a breaking down of all of that. It **was really kind of like a breaking down of my own personal self-confidence**. So it was really hard. I **was much more of a confident person before grad school, before architecture school...**

After my first year, having the experience that I had, I was just like, 'Well, why do I want to do this two more years in a row, and then start this career that I know I'm not going to get paid really well?' After the first year, it was so tortuous that [I thought], 'I'm not sure if it's really worth it.'...My experience of working *incredibly* long hours, draining my body and my mind and feeling like, 'I'm not sure I'm really cut out for this.' And a lot of that has to do with just the experience I had with the students that I had [in my cohort]. And then also just my own personal self-doubt and lack of confidence and everything. And also some of the professors that I had, too, that were just really discouraging and really made me feel like, 'This was a mistake. I shouldn't go on. I shouldn't continue. Because in their mind, I'm not talented enough. And so, maybe it's not worth it! Maybe I should just cut my losses and just feel lucky that I only have one year of tuition to pay off and not three!'

**The first year was such a difficult time that I felt that massive desire to leave. Just the massive breakdown in self-confidence...** I was going to figure out what I wanted to do after summer was over. And either that meant quit or apply to another school or continue on at the U-Dub. Those were my three choices. And what happened was, because I love to travel so much, **I went on the summer architecture program where we were [abroad] for two months. And that was such an incredible experience in my life that made me stay at the U-Dub.** And also really affected what I did in the future in architecture school. And also was reinforcing because of the architecture I did see while I was there. **It just made me want even more to become an architect** because of how I experienced those spaces. And **just the happiness and joy I had being in the places that I saw. And knowing that that was something that was a possibility for me to do for somebody else, made me realize—I was like, ‘I *have* to do this! This is something I *have* to do.’** And I don’t think I’ve doubted it since, really...When I was there [I] changed my mind a lot about why I even decided to go into architecture...[I realized,] ‘Ok, architecture *is* exactly what I think it is. [You] can totally change the lives of [people] if you make an effort to really put your mind to things that matter to you the most.’...

*Second year experience: ‘what does it mean to belong in architecture school?’*

Winter Quarter of [my second year, my schedule] was actually *really crazy!*...Depending on the day...I was basically on campus from nine to eight—eight or later—everyday...There was *really* no time to question anything. **I think your first year, you’re getting taught...all these things that you’ve never even heard of. You’re kind of freaking out...But then [in your second year], you already have this general idea about what’s going on, so it’s not anymore about questioning anything but more about just getting things done.** And so that’s...a very productive time. And a time where I was just all about learning and doing...If I was at home, I was sleeping. School never really left school for me ‘cause I was always here... I lived in Seattle [before grad school, so] I actually had a lot of friends out of school. They just kind of all gave up on me at that point...I literally did not see any of my outside friends, and I have probably lost a handful of them because I just lost touch with them...Which was *really* weird, that school would do that to you. But it was definitely the case for me...I mean, what I really learned in school the first two and half years was everything takes three times as long as you think it’s going to take. And so...I just kind of gave up on my personal life. I just said, ‘It’s not gonna happen! And that’s fine.’...

I think a lot of times I would walk to school. And I think those were sort of my design times...Walking is the only time that I have my own silence...But I also was the kind of person, too, that would sit in studio *forever* and plow through thousands of books. In every studio that I was in, I was always ‘the library girl’. ‘Cause the minute I found out what our program was, I’d get like thirty books on it. And just comb through them and try to really digest what I’m trying to accomplish. So...my design process was really just a lot of research. I was always really heavily research-based. Before I even picked up a pencil to draw something or a model to play with conceptually...I feel like you can’t come up with a concept for anything Day One. I feel like you *really* need to be thoughtful...And so I always did a lot of reading and it always happened in studio. And then, usually, I think my...epiphanies were...while I was walking or just doing something outside of studio. But it never actually *truly* happened in studio!...

Especially around that time, and a little before, I continued the theme of the first year a little bit, about how I just felt really different. And that *really*...impacted a lot of my experience here at school. And **when I**

wasn't thinking about architecture, I was thinking about this sense of belonging and what does that mean to belong to something? What does it mean to belong in architecture school? Or what does it mean to belong in a field? I was struggling a lot with feeling like I deserved to be here in school. And just feeling really awkward. I don't know. There's just a few things that happened that [second] year that really made me *super* self-conscious about whether or not I am worthy to be in grad school. [As] an example...one of my studio professors [who] was never particularly helpful. And one time I came up with two different variations of the same scheme. And he basically said to me, 'Well, I think you should go with the crazy one! Because, I mean, look at you! Look at the way you dress...I mean, you're crazy! So go with crazy.' And I said to him, 'Um, wow! *That's* your desk crit?! *That's* what you're gonna say to me?! *Crazy?!'* ...And that was one of the days where I was just like, 'Ok, I don't belong here. I don't belong here!' ...And it was one of those things where it wasn't about architecture, really. It was something beyond that...That's how I started the year. And each quarter something similar happened. Not necessarily of that scale, but something very similar of that nature happened in every quarter, that...[made me think] there's these outside forces that are making me feel that architecture—that grad school's not for me. So that was sort of the main theme. **And it affected my work, I think, in many ways that year... 'Cause I was distracted with *that*, and I was distracted with the amount of work I had to do. And I...felt like I didn't really have any downtime to...decompress and take a step back and really analyze what was happening to me at the time.**

### *Finding camaraderie and a studio support network*

What I loved about studio culture was the camaraderie in school. I never got that when I did my bachelor's. The studio culture where you—or at least they tell you this, and I feel like I did get a sense of it somehow in grad school—the notion that you learn from your peers and that there's this collaboration that happens while you're learning and designing. And it was more of a community learning than anything...It's just a different way of learning. And I loved that element of being in a room with everybody that has this goal. And you're working towards this goal. And you get to feed off of each other. And you derive inspiration from each other. When I was really struggling in school, I always called one of my friends that I respected and demanded a desk crit from them. It was that kind of a thing, y'know?...It plays out in the profession, where you're sitting there and you're supposed to figure out how to do something. And you just call over somebody that you work with and have them work it through with you and explain things. And it's sort of that collaboration relationship that I really appreciate...

You have your support group in every studio in some way. There [were] a few people that I went through the entire program with...that I felt were *really* supportive and *got* me and got my projects and got my concepts. They weren't so shut down. And they really were the ones that I went to that helped me during desk crits and stuff. The handful of students that I'm talking about, we definitely had this thing, even when we weren't in the same studios, that we would just call each other up or email each other and say, 'I need a desk crit from you because I'm not getting what I need from everybody else around me.' And then we'd have a desk crit, we'd talk about something. And then those were also like my 'Aha' moments! Like, 'Ok! This is the direction I should go now, in terms of design, at least.'...

### *Finding an architectural voice*

When I think about [experiences]...**when I found my voice**, it wasn't like this 'Aha' moment. It was more in retrospect. And **initially, it wasn't here. It was actually [while studying abroad]**. We had to do a master plan and eventually do a project in that master plan that was about a specific site that we designed. But the whole entire project was really from big scale down to the building. And I really struggled with that. Because they didn't really give you a brief. No site, no nothing. And, when you come from a program where every studio is formulaic, and you work with a group to do site analysis and continue that formula, I was taken aback by that kind of approach to a studio. So **when I sat down with my tutors I said, 'I'm really at a loss here. I'm not sure what exactly you are looking for from me.'** And they just looked at me like, 'Well, anything you want! What do you wanna learn? What are you interested in?' And it was the first time someone has ever even asked me that question in architecture school. I was like, 'Oh my god! You mean I can do whatever I want!? This is really interesting.'...So I just started from the biggest scale...and [looked] at...the issues with each neighborhood. Then, it became automatically clear what I was attracted to most, which was this lower class, mostly migrant population that lived there...I just realized that if I was going to do anything, all the issues I'm gonna be interested in are always going to be veering towards that direction in some way. **And I don't know if it necessarily totally applied to what I did after I came back [to UW]. But it was more that, 'Ok, this is why I need to do architecture because this is what's the most fulfilling to me.'** ...Which also is the reason why I went [abroad]. I wanted to go to...find what I would be interested in, in terms of thesis projects...And so I thought, 'Ok, I'm gonna go...and it's gonna be so clear! I'm totally gonna find my thesis project!' And I actually kind of did, but it was in its sort of incubator stage. My thesis was so personal and so important to me that it really was a struggle for me for personal growth but also as a project. My thesis sort of grew [from] an idea into something that's a possibility...But the reality of it is...that **my thesis project [wound] up becoming a really true amalgamation of all my experiences in graduate school.** And I actually even said that in my presentation. I said, 'This is a project that really isn't just one project. It really is, from start to finish, everything that I've learned and grown and experienced in this program.'...

I think [those two projects] were different [from other studio projects] because I didn't have a difficulty defending them. Why I had such a difficulty in my other studios was because I felt that they were just lacking in substance...None of it was something that I had conviction about. It was really more like, 'We're designing this program on this site because this is what we were told to. Because for whatever reason they think it's interesting.' And I couldn't latch onto that interest for whatever reason...I think after the first year of architecture school, you start to realize what that formulaic program becomes. And then it becomes sort of devoid of meaning...And when I had those other two projects...it was just easier for me to defend!...

### *The catch-22 of curricular freedom*

There's a lot offered here...There are so many different paths you can go into...[that]...allow you to create a diversity within your own education given your own interests. I think that's a very organic process that

happens to each student...I think when you're in grad school, especially, you kind of decide what you want to learn. And you kind of weave through all of the different opportunities here to allow yourself to create the education that you want to have. But I don't think that there's a like a school-driven initiative that really says like, 'We want you to do *this*! And we think the best education for you is going to be *this* way!' It's really not as clear...

I feel like [building tangible objects] was something that I was always very, very interested in. But it was kind of amazing how it was *really* easy for me to avoid in architecture school...I didn't do design-build while I was in school. I didn't work in the shop as much as I would have loved to. I didn't do Furniture Studio. And I think that is one of my biggest regrets because it is an interest of mine. I love working with my hands. I like building things on a more simple level. But it's interesting how easy it is for you to go through architecture school and not do any of that at all...I didn't purposely avoid it. I was just, I got to school, and there were all these other, different things that I started getting excited about. And the way the schedule worked out, I just couldn't do any of those things...Because of my travel interests, doing Furniture Studio was never a possibility. Same thing with Design-Build...And...now in my profession I'm *really* nervous. And it's sort of a point of anxiety for me that I'm supposed to be [creating] these drawings that are all about envelope and connections. And I really have no experience with them at all! I think the only way that you could really, truly understand those things is by doing. And so I feel like if architecture went back to its old standard of actually forcing people to build things that, as a recent grad, you'd have more confidence in going into a firm and actually drawing these things...It's like... 'How can I even feel confident in what I'm actually doing or even stand by what I'm doing when [I've] never actually had to do any of these things?' ...And it's so easy to avoid in school! And maybe that's the problem with architecture school. It is that broad, where back in the Beaux Arts, you're forced to learn a skill and do something. And know it really well, and have that confidence...

When you go to a school that's not about theory at all, or has no theory, a lot of the people's projects that I've seen...were very devoid of really good meaning or architectural thought! It was really about just the building. And there was nothing about the phenomenological aspects of their project...that I feel like we should be talking about in school because you don't talk about that in the profession. And I think the more you get exposure to that in school, the more meaningful your projects will be when you're working in the profession...When I'm seeing how the projects get done now at my firm, it's like there's *never* even talk about that! It's really more about pleasing the client and making sure you're project's in budget...But I also feel like it's very much who you expose yourself to while you're in school, as well. There's certain professors here that are very much of the school of theory. And then there's some that are all about, 'How well do you actually know how to build stuff?' There's a few professors here that really latch onto the students that actually understand construction. And they tend to promote it within their own studio environment, too. So I felt, too, that certain times when I took these professors, that when I tried to be more thoughtful and theoretical about my projects that they didn't care about those things. They just wanted me to tell them, 'Ok, I know that this building is going to be made of concrete, and have this envelope, and have this certain sustainable aspect to it. So even within academia, you can try your best to kind of gear who you take classes from in order to coincide your interests. If you know that you want to have more theory-based studios, you just take those professors. And then avoid the other ones. 'Cause

they're not gonna care about the things that you care about. It's hard because you would think that, as a school, you would recognize those elements of your professors, and then force a combination of the two...Because the architect is supposed to be the generalist that we are. And if you don't get the broad education that you should require, you're kind of cheating yourself in some way. But at the same time, it's all about enjoying your experience, too. So it's really difficult. Where do you find that balance? 'Cause if you know you're going to take a course from a professor who doesn't care about the things that you care about, how do you get the most out of that course? That's hard, too. Because academics, they're just human beings, too. And they have their favorites. And they choose to teach the way they teach...

### *The profession: experiencing stigmatization and hierarchy*

I've worked for two small firms, and now I work for a big firm. I was always really attracted to the smaller firms...because I like that you can do so much and learn so much so quickly. I left the small firm to go to a bigger firm because when you work for a firm that only has one principal it becomes really hard. And...it felt that I needed the opposite of that. Just because I'm starting off and I need the opposite of what I would normally need. Basically, I need a firm to provide me with the tools that'll allow me to complete my goals, which is to get licensed...I've been [at the firm I currently work at for] six months...If what they say is true, and they do provide what I ask for and help me along the way, then definitely I'll stay there just because I wanna get licensed as fast as I can...

[At] my first job...I felt really ignorant and really ill-equipped to be even doing what I was doing just straight out of grad school. Now, six months into it, I feel a lot *better*. But I don't feel like I could take a project and do it on my own. I feel like I'm really far away from that. And I think part of that has a lot to do with the fact that they don't really teach you how to build anything in school. They teach you about architecture. But you don't know how to *build* anything. And you don't know anything about any legal process that your design has to go through...I haven't started studying for my license. And I think that once I start studying for those things, I'll actually kinda get a better sense of that...

I guess you'd call me the production person, in a sense that I make no decisions. I'm not allowed to give any input. And I just basically draw what people tell me that they need done. I draw, and I model. And I create images, like renderings and things like that. But when it comes to the way projects run or how a design is completed, I literally have no input...I want to design. I want to have more say in how projects are run. I told them when I was interviewing for the job that I would like to work for a firm that's going to respect the fact that I'm not this really young person that has *no* work experience, that will appreciate the fact that I have over six years of project management experience. Yea, for a different industry, but I don't think that those skills are lost just because it wasn't in architecture...

My own personal experiences is that [architecture is] very hierarchical. I think the profession is just in general very hierarchical...To get to what success looks like, what people consider an architect...you have to be old, and have ten-plus years of experience...Because the hierarchy's *so* strong in a bigger firm...on a day-to-day basis, you're more required to just kind of produce as an intern. And the opportunity to actually sit down and actually participate and contribute in more of a design way or design manner, it's never gonna arise...The idea of what that means, 'intern', is that you're really just there to be productive.

And not to contribute on a bigger, broader scale...It's like you have to be invited to the table. And when does that [label of intern] go away? Does it go away because you've got your license? And then they invite you to the table?...

When you're labeled an intern, no one thinks you know anything...Clearly, you don't know *some* things, but it doesn't mean you walked out of the womb yesterday...[But] no one listens to you, and no one values your opinion, because they just constantly think of you as an intern. The people that I work with on a daily basis, they've been architects for twenty-plus years, and the way that they talk to me, and the way that they talk down to me a little bit definitely makes me feel like, 'Oh my god, I'm such an idiot! That's why they're talking to me like this.'...And then I'm like, 'Ok, well no. It's because I'm this intern, and I've only worked here for three months.'...I feel like it's so ingrained...The field's so old that it's very much ingrained that way, to talk to an intern that way and to treat them that way...

I'm worried about my perception of usefulness. I constantly worry about that right now...I feel two things. One, the project that I'm working on the most hasn't been a project that has allowed me to show what I'm interested in or what I'm capable of. And two, not a lot of people know me in the office 'cause I don't really work with anybody...So it's really odd for me to be there 'cause I feel sort of disjointed from the firm...And so...I get concerned about...exposure. Being so new and not having anybody really know what you can do, what you're good at, is really hard! And so I worry about that a lot, too, because I feel like my happiness has everything to do with the work that I'm doing on a daily basis. If I'm constantly doing the same thing for the same project, obviously, it affects how I feel. And it doesn't make me happy to be at work!...I have to, I think, be really persistent about what I want to do at the firm. Because I feel like if you don't ask for it, no one will give it to you. I think because this is my second career, it's so important for me to really be happy every day. That's something that I'm really concerned about...It's the one thing I think about when I'm not thinking about my project at work...

School comes up a lot right now for me...because I am a recent grad. And I *really* miss designing! I really miss the whole process! And so, on a daily basis, when you're working on what I do every day--which is shove my head into [drafting on the computer] and never come out for ten hours--it really makes me think about how much I miss school, and how I miss theory, and how I miss innovative thinking. And on a daily basis, too...I'll say something...like, 'Oh, well, when I was in school, we did it this way!' So right now, I miss school *a lot*! Considering how traumatic it was for me, that's kind of surprising, but...I just miss it. I miss this idea-sharing and talking about ideas. I miss designing. I miss all of those things. And it's really hard when you're just this [drafting] monkey to not feel like, 'Man, is this what I signed up for?'...But that's what's really hard, though, because it's kind of like this notion that you have to pay your dues...I really wish there was more of a fluid process that makes it go faster. I feel like, if you didn't have this label as intern that people would trust you more or at least have more confidence that you can—it's not like you never designed anything! How feasible it is is another question. But I think, especially on a phase that's really highly conceptual, I think you should be allowed to have more input...But there's so much of this perceived notion that you can't be a part of that process 'cause you're not an architect for long enough. Which I really disagree with! I really disagree. That doesn't mean that I don't know anything about spatial quality or designing for a site. I mean, I think that's the one thing that you *do* get out of

architecture school is those things...I just feel that, because you have that stigma of being so young, people don't give you the opportunity to...even participate...

### *Finding true meaning and fulfillment in everyday work*

**It's been really hard to feel that invested [in architecture].** I don't know. I feel like the day-to-day minutia of things make it really difficult, in that **you have to have a constant reminder of what you loved about being in architecture while you were in school, to remind yourself that this is what you want to do, and realize that...you did it for a reason.** And it's sometimes easy to forget those reasons. I was **very much invested while I was here [in school]...I mean, I literally changed my entire [life] and left a career that paid really well to enter into a career that doesn't pay at all!...**

**The difference between architecture as a profession and what I was doing before...when I would be at work, for example...it was really hard for me to make the connection between [what I was doing] and how I was contributing to society...[It] was so much devoid of true meaning.** And that's why I was really feeling unfulfilled. But when I started my first job [in architecture] and my days would go by so fast, at my first firm...And I realized that the reason why it went so fast is because every moment I was working, I was doing something that I could connect to. Even though I was drawing in a computer...I could still make that connection at the end of the day: 'This is going to be a house. It's going to be *physical*. Something *tangible* that someone's going to actually *use* and will occupy and appreciate and enjoy. I would think. I would hope so.'...And so it just became more fulfilling for me. And...**I think [in] architecture, no matter what project I'm working on, I will still be able to make those types of connections.** For example, I'm on the *worst* project ever at my firm!...There's *no* design in it at all!...But at the end of the day, it's still going to be a place where people are gonna go, and they're gonna have to be there all day...**And so, trying to derive any kind of meaning for me to do my job and just to get it done is how I find meaning in my profession now...**

If you only look at the menial tasks that you do on a daily basis, you will *never* be happy. So you have to figure out how to sustain that meaning in architecture that you have. *All* the reasons why you went to architectural school. And you have to try to figure out how you can derive meaning in what you do every day...I'm really ambivalent about architecture right now because here are these ideas that I have about what architecture should be and do, yet I feel completely powerless on a professional level to do any of those things. Because if I have this agenda and I feel like in order for me to get to a place to do architecture in a way that's meaningful for me, I will have to have done it for so many years and do a *lot* of things I don't want to do in order to get there. So it's a challenge for me because...in order for me to do that, I will be like *seventy* or something. And it's like, 'Well, so what does that mean for my life? What am I doing?' And I don't know. That's a question I have to answer...

I feel like, for somebody like me to have gone through architecture school, or grad school at all, the fact that I have had those experiences have made me feel really lucky in life. And I feel like, if I can participate in any way, shape, or form--and those things [that are] produced contribute to society, then I feel like I'm pretty darn lucky...I just feel like every single person who has had the benefit of having really good parents and being educated in this world would probably not even think about those things. So I think

that I'm lucky that I can acknowledge them as something precious...Just acknowledging the beauty of [architecture] or the relevance of it...seems like a privilege to me. And the fact that I'm in architecture, despite everything I already told you, the reality is it's a privilege...

That's the funny thing about architecture. I think you constantly question it every day. It's sort of the clarity of the profession. You learn there's a clarity that you have about a lot of different things that people don't think about...I think, just in general, there's a clarity that happens when you're forced to think about a lot of the things that you think about in architecture school...And that's what I think architecture school did for me. I think a lot of people don't think about the things that I think about, just because they didn't go to architecture school!...I've had a lot of people say to me that they've learned to see because of architecture school. I don't know what that means, [but]...I've had a few people say that to me. That, because of architecture school, they can see the world through a trained eye.