TANGIBLE - INTANGIBLE HERITAGE(S): AN INTERPLAY OF DESIGN, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CRITIQUES OF THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

• Paper / Proposal Title:
The Cosmopolitanism of Proliferation and Adaptation: Architecture, Multiculture and Thai Identity in London.

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• Presentation Method. I would like to:
  i. present in person (with/without a written paper)

• Abstract (300 words):
In recent years, numerous challenges to public imaginaries have contributed to rising anxiety about globalisation, identity, and uncertainty over political issues associated with migration - from the Syrian refugee crisis, to boats sinking off the north African coast, to the ‘Brexit’ decision. In the architectural discipline, the 2018 Venice Biennale theme for the British pavilion is ‘Island’, reinforcing the tension between isolation and a sense of siege; the 2016 theme, ‘Reporting from the front’, raised concerns over Saskia Sassen’s ‘three types of migrant’, noting also a dramatic rise of ‘millennials’ that added to the catalogue of proliferating anxieties and characterise the urban context for many cities such as London. Today, this sense of proliferation seems to demand adaptation of techniques of cosmopolitanism, of urban behaviours and ways of coping in cities. This
calls for the examination of how intercultural interaction in cities should be addressed in a multicultural, cosmopolitan urban environment.

This paper sets out to address the challenge of adaptation in reaction to the dynamics of proliferation. It ascertains, from the standpoint of spatial practices, important gaps in the interdisciplinary understanding of identity construction in architecture. Drawing from Bourdieu’s notion of *habitus* and Lefebvre’s ‘spatial triad’ concept, the study aims to identify a socio-spatial understanding of identity in the contemporary urban context through the lens of Thai cosmopolitan identity. Thai Londoners, represent one the smallest ethnic groups with a distinctive pattern of settlement in comparison to the city’s mainstream expatriate communities. Many UK naturalised Thai migrants arrived through marriage and are statically more likely to be scattered across the country with their partners. The Thai community, in this sense, is dispersed and – as a community – comparatively invisible. The development of a qualitative approach through semi-structured interviews and interpretive collage drawings led to a cumulative understanding of how identity is made, and the multicultural urban environment negotiated. The envisaged outcome will demonstrate an architecturally grounded, socio-spatial understanding of Thai cosmopolitan identity through an expressive mode of analytical drawing, a method that aims to document how the lived, built environment accommodates Thai cosmopolitan identity, contributing to the development of a shared, sustainable future for London’s civic and cultural character.

• Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

Bobby trained as an architect and worked in Thailand and London before commenced his doctoral studies at London Metropolitan in 2017. His research focuses on the Thai immigrant currently living in London, with a view to understanding the spatial and social practices involved in the creation of their cosmopolitan identity in a contemporary urban environment.

Globalised urban contexts for everyday life, in cities such as London, have raised significant concerns about how the city is able to handle multiculturalism as well as preparing for the integration of ever-widening spectrum of inhabitants. In keeping with today proliferation of multiple identities, the study argues that the techniques of cosmopolitanism require further examination to the question of how intercultural interaction in cities should be addressed, as well as greater awareness of the strategies of allegiance, participation and belonging that allow environments like London to flourish.