An Investigation of Levity within the Architecture Pedagogy

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Architecture education is typically cast as trying and bleak, a simultaneous exercise in sleep deprivation and innovation. All too often, practicing architects’ long hours and low pay are rationalized with, “You do it because you love it”; even Ayn Rand wrote specifically of finding “joy” in one’s profession. I argue here, however, that the education of the architect should also be a joyful pursuit. I am not suggesting revelry and jokes in studio, but rather pedagogical methodologies that engender lively engagement.

First, I will examine the notion of joy in education through cross-disciplinary study. I will review scholarship on educational psychology and apply it to the architecture studio. I will consider philosophical rationales within the field, furthering the work of scholars such as Alberto Perez-Gomez who argues in *Built upon Love: Architectural Longing after Ethics and Aesthetics*:

> [T]he materialistic and technological alternatives for architecture – however sophisticated and justifiable they may be, in view of our historical failures – do not
answer satisfactorily to the complex desire that defines humanity. As humans, our greatest gift is love, and we are invariably called to respond to it. Despite our suspicions, architecture has been and must continue to be built upon love.

Second, I will posit methodologies to introduce joy in the architecture studio. For example, the addition of narrative to program is an effective tool for introducing levity to projects. When a character or cast is given equal significance to program, the studio prompt becomes lively, human and relatable. Students realize joy in finding something dynamic in otherwise normative and potentially homogenous projects, consequently developing commitment to their work.

Through this presentation and paper, I will posit that levity, appropriately incorporated in the studio curriculum, can improve the academic experience and quality of student work.

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

Neena Verma is an architect and theorist based in New York City. A former attorney, Neena’s background adds a criticality to her architectural analyses. Her research and writing focus on the intersection of practice and society; she was most recently invited to present her work at the Harvard Graduate School of Design.

Neena’s writing has appeared broadly, including in Architectural Research Quarterly, and her collaborative work has been presented before the Association of American Law Schools, Buenos Aires Biennale and Venice Biennale. She was an invited participant to the American Institute of Architects Emerging Professionals Summit and an appointee to the AIA Center for Emerging Professionals. Her first built work was completed as an architecture graduate student with Tulane’s UrbanBuild program. A recipient of the John William Lawrence Travel Fellowship, she has studied slum architecture in India.

Neena holds degrees from the University of Pennsylvania, The Wharton School, Rutgers Law School and Tulane School of Architecture. She is teaching at NJIT College of Architecture and Design and is principal of an eponymous practice.