

CONFERENCE REFLECTIONS



Day One Conference Reflections

The first day of the SOCB - School of Collectively Building International Conference on Art, Architecture and Anthropology in the Age of Artificial Intelligence offered far more than a sequence of presentations about emerging technologies. It became a broader conversation about what happens to human experience, culture, architectural judgement, domestic life, creativity and collective knowledge when artificial intelligence increasingly enters the spaces in which we live, work, design and make decisions. What made the day particularly valuable was the interdisciplinary character of the discussion. Rather than treating AI simply as a technological instrument, the speakers repeatedly brought the conversation back to people, places, relationships, values and responsibility.

The conference was intentionally structured around a relatively small number of presentations, with greater emphasis placed on quality, dialogue and discussion. This approach proved productive because the ideas presented were not left as isolated academic arguments; they were questioned, challenged and developed through the subsequent exchanges between speakers and participants.

Yali Zhang: AI, Domestic Space and Embodied Experience

The first substantial presentation by Dr. Yali Zhang, *From At-Home Cyberspace to AI-Mediated Domestic Space: A Feminist Auto-Ethnography Approach to Architecture, Emotion and Embodiment*, established an important human-centred foundation for the day. Her research originated in her doctoral study of domestic life during the COVID-19 lockdown, particularly within a Chinese mother-daughter household in Sheffield. The home, under lockdown conditions, was no longer simply a place of residence. It simultaneously became a workplace, classroom, childcare environment, meeting space, social interface and emotional refuge.

One of the most compelling ideas was that the camera itself can become an architectural boundary. The camera frame creates a temporary spatial condition in which part of the private home becomes publicly visible, while other parts remain outside the digital field. Yet visual privacy does not necessarily mean acoustic or emotional privacy. A child may be outside the frame but remain present through sound, interruption or care responsibilities. In this sense, digital communication does not eliminate architecture; rather, it reorganises how architecture is inhabited and performed.

Zhang then extended this argument towards AI-mediated domestic space. If a screen previously connected one human being to another, AI introduces a new actor into the relationship. AI can potentially observe, predict, recommend, respond and influence domestic routines. This raises questions about visibility, privacy, care, atmosphere, learning and connection. Her proposed principles, transparency, controllability, care support, cultural situatedness and spatial sensitivity, were particularly relevant because they positioned AI design within the realities of human life rather

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than treating the home as a neutral technological environment. The discussion following the presentation reinforced another major concern: data. Questions were raised about how information gathered through cameras, sensors and domestic technologies might be protected from misuse or commercial exploitation. This was an important reminder that technological innovation cannot be separated from questions of governance and individual rights.

Gabor Soos: World-Shaped AI and Landscape Intelligence

Gabor Soos shifted the conversation from the domestic interior towards landscape, place and collective knowledge. His presentation, *World Shaped AI in a Living Landscape*, used the proposed Tihany Water Museum near Lake Balaton in Hungary as a concrete case through which to consider accountable AI.

The central proposition was particularly powerful: instead of asking only how AI can be applied to culture, heritage or architecture, we should ask how real places and communities can shape AI itself. His concept of “world-shaped AI” challenges the conventional movement from data to model to prediction. In cultural and ecological contexts, a place cannot simply be reduced to data points. Landscape contains relationships between water, soil, vegetation, architecture, history, memory, ritual, labour, ecology and community.

The proposed water museum was therefore presented simultaneously as spatial, social and epistemic infrastructure. Its importance lies not only in what visitors see, but in how knowledge about the place is produced, validated, corrected and transmitted. Soos argued for a recursive process in which AI remains a provisional participant rather than the final authority. His “Bartók 4.0” learning cycle similarly emphasises encounter, evidence, interpretation, human and community correction, governed memory, shared learning and renewed action.

This was one of the strongest conceptual threads of the day: AI should participate in collective inquiry, not replace it.

Bhupendra Kumar: Value, Neuroscience, Culture and AI

Dr. Bhupendra Kumar introduced a markedly different perspective through the relationship between anthropology of value, neuroscience, finance, culture and AI. His argument began with human evolution and the neurological foundations through which people construct and experience value. Money, emotions, social relationships and cultural meanings were considered as interconnected dimensions of human behaviour.

His presentation encouraged the audience to think beyond AI as software and towards the deeper question of how intelligent systems may influence human behaviour and systems of value. The subsequent discussion connected his neuroscience perspective to reward, motivation and the possibility that AI could increasingly influence social behaviour by making certain activities faster, easier or more rewarding.

An especially thought-provoking aspect was his suggestion that AI could eventually challenge our assumptions about human centrality. Rather than simply reinforcing existing human knowledge and values, AI may introduce perspectives that exceed our current intellectual and biological limitations. At the same time, this possibility was accompanied by uncertainty: greater intelligence does not automatically mean greater wisdom, and technological capability may also create new forms of risk.

Arie Hayun: AI, Mass Housing and Cultural Specificity

Arie Hayun brought the discussion back to architectural practice through his research on typical Israeli residential floor plans and the relationship between AI, regulation, repetition and cultural identity. His central concern was the tension between efficiency and contextual relevance.

Historically, mass housing has often relied on standardisation and repetition. AI dramatically accelerates this possibility because generative systems can produce numerous design alternatives within seconds. Yet repetition is not necessarily the same as blind replication. Hayun distinguished between copying an identical solution and reproducing an underlying principle while allowing contextual variation.

This distinction is crucial. A residential building is not merely an arrangement of rooms. It reflects family structures, cultural practices, security requirements, climate, regulations and ideas of belonging. Hayun therefore suggested that architects must become more involved in defining the parameters through which AI understands architectural problems.

The discussion produced an especially useful observation: AI can recognise patterns extremely efficiently, but it may struggle to recognise relationships. This distinction captures much of the tension running through the entire conference. Architecture is not only a collection of measurable patterns; it is also lived experience, memory, adaptation and cultural meaning.

Panel Discussion: Where Should Architectural Judgement Reside?

The final discussion brought the individual presentations together. Questions focused on whether AI expands architectural intelligence or merely expands the field of possibilities, and where human judgement should remain decisive.

The strongest answer came through the idea of an accountability chain. Gabor Soos argued that judgement should exist both upstream and downstream: first, in determining what AI is permitted to perceive, encode and parameterise; and second, in deciding which AI-generated conclusions are allowed to have material consequences. AI should therefore not become a sovereign decision-maker. Professional expertise, affected communities and institutions must remain part of the process.

Another important conclusion concerned the transferability of AI practices across different contexts. The discussion proposed a distinction between transferable principles and non-transferable authority: methods and governance tools may travel, but meanings, conclusions and local authority must remain grounded in particular communities and professional contexts.

Personal Reflection

My strongest reflection from Day One is that the most important question is no longer whether AI will enter architecture, art, anthropology or everyday life. It already has. The more urgent question is under what conditions we allow it to participate.

The presentations collectively challenged the temptation to view AI as either a miracle or a threat. Zhang demonstrated that intelligence entering the home must respect intimacy, care and privacy. Soos argued that intelligence must remain connected to place, community and ecological

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relationships. Kumar opened a discussion about value, reward and human behaviour. Hayun showed that even apparently technical architectural tasks such as floor-plan generation contain cultural assumptions that cannot simply be extracted from archives.

The panel discussion ultimately brought these perspectives together. AI may be extremely capable of recognising patterns, processing information and generating possibilities, but architecture and human environments depend upon relationships, meanings and lived experience. Moritz Elbert captured this tension by questioning whether AI is genuinely improving design or simply adding another layer of complexity and uncertainty. He also described AI as, at this stage, more of a risk than an opportunity within his own design context, while deliberately asking students to work with, for and against AI.

Day One therefore left me with a cautious but constructive position. We do not need to reject AI, nor should we surrender judgement to it. Instead, we need to build better relationships between human intelligence and artificial intelligence, relationships grounded in culture, place, ethics, professional knowledge, community participation and accountability.

The most valuable lesson of the day was perhaps also the simplest: AI can help us see more, calculate faster and imagine more possibilities, but it does not automatically understand what matters. Understanding what matters remains a collective human responsibility.

Day Two Conference Reflections

The second day of the SOCB International Conference continued the questions raised on Day One, but moved the discussion into an even more practical and demanding territory. If the first day asked what artificial intelligence might mean for domestic life, landscape, value, culture, and architectural judgement, the second day confronted a more immediate question: what happens to creativity, professional experience, education, authorship, and architectural practice when AI becomes part of the everyday process of making?

What made Day Two particularly valuable was that the discussion did not become a celebration of technological novelty. Instead, the speakers repeatedly returned to experience, judgement, responsibility, education, material reality, and the difficult relationship between human intelligence and artificial intelligence. The programme deliberately allowed substantial time for presentation, questions, and collective discussion, creating an atmosphere in which ideas could be challenged rather than simply presented and accepted.

Feras Talji: The Disappearance of the Draughtsperson

The keynote presentation by Feras Talji addressed one of the most immediate consequences of AI in architectural practice: the changing structure of the architectural office. His presentation, centred on the “disappearance of the draughtsperson,” explored how AI is transforming the traditional relationship between juniors, mid-level professionals, coordinators, and senior architects.

Feras presented this transformation through three paintings, including *Narcissus*, *Consulting the Oracle*, and *The Magic Circle*. The metaphors were effective because they allowed a technological subject to be discussed through human behaviour. *Narcissus* represented the danger of becoming trapped within one’s own image, habits, conventions, and established architectural language. *Consulting the Oracle* captured our contemporary tendency to treat AI as a source of answers about

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an uncertain future. The final image, the magic circle, suggested the need for boundaries and balance between artificial intelligence and what Feras called “actual intelligence.”

One of the strongest observations concerned the traditional professional ladder. Architectural knowledge was historically accumulated through years of drafting, coordination, detailing, and practical exposure. AI is now beginning to remove or compress many of those middle-level procedural tasks. This creates an uncomfortable educational question: if young architects no longer learn through the repetitive work that previous generations experienced, how will they develop mature judgement?

Feras did not argue that AI would simply replace architects. Rather, he suggested that AI could become an additional hand, provided that a human remains in the loop. AI can generate options, identify clashes, explore materials, update models, and accelerate coordination, but the architect still has to determine whether the result is appropriate, buildable, ethical, and meaningful.

This distinction between generating possibilities and exercising judgement became one of the most important ideas of the day.

Heba Murad: Originality in the Age of Algorithmic Creativity

Heba Murad then shifted the discussion towards perhaps one of the most difficult subjects in creative practice: originality.

Her presentation, Architectural Originality in the Age of Algorithmic Creativity, emerged from her teaching experience and from a creativity-enhancement course developed with a music professor. The course explores how architecture students can find creative inspiration through music and other forms of interdisciplinary thinking.

Heba questioned the assumption that originality has ever been an entirely pure or individual condition. Drawing on discussions of authorship, cultural precedent, and architectural history, she argued that similarity and repetition have always been part of creative production. Architecture develops through learning, transformation, reinterpretation, comparison, and cultural exchange.

AI complicates this relationship because it can generate images and design alternatives that appear original while being produced through enormous bodies of existing knowledge. Her research therefore moved away from simply asking whether something “looks copied” and towards asking how knowledge and creative contribution are produced, transformed, and attributed.

This is an important shift. In the age of AI, perhaps the more meaningful question is no longer, “Who produced this image?” but, “Who contributed the thinking, decisions, knowledge, interpretation, and responsibility behind it?” Her study involved architectural students working under different conditions of AI use, with attention to declaring authorship and preserving evidence of their own design contribution.

For architectural education, this is particularly significant. If the final image becomes less reliable as evidence of learning, educators may need to assess the process of thinking rather than only the final product.

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Antonio Lara: Learning, Creativity and the Question of Evidence

Antonio Lara extended this educational concern by examining how architectural education itself may need to change. His contribution brought attention to the difficulty of distinguishing genuine human creativity from creativity produced through sophisticated prompting.

The question is uncomfortable because there may be no simple visual test. An AI-generated image can look remarkably similar to something produced by a highly skilled designer. Conversely, a human designer may consciously draw upon precedents, references, and existing cultural material. Therefore, originality cannot be reduced to appearance alone.

This led to a deeper question: what evidence of learning should architectural education protect?

This was one of the most consequential questions of Day Two. Education cannot simply prohibit AI and assume the problem is solved. Nor can it permit unlimited AI use and continue assessing students through old methods. The educational challenge is to preserve curiosity, critical thinking, material understanding, independent judgement, and the ability to make decisions without technological assistance.

Gaetano Di Gregorio: From Virtual Images to Real Things

Gaetano Di Gregorio brought the conference back to creativity and material reality. Speaking from his experience as an architect, designer, artist, manager, and teacher, he reflected on the generational difference between professionals who experienced decades of design practice before AI and students who are encountering the technology at the beginning of their careers.

His argument was ultimately constructive rather than defensive. Artificial intelligence and creativity do not necessarily need to be opposites. They can work together, provided that technology remains connected to reality.

His closing observation was particularly memorable: we cannot live entirely through images or virtual worlds. Architecture ultimately has to produce real things, spaces, buildings, objects, materials, and environments that people can inhabit and use.

That point seems simple, but it carries considerable weight. AI can produce an extraordinary image in seconds. It cannot, by producing the image alone, guarantee that the building should exist, that it can be constructed, that its materials will perform properly, or that people will actually want to live with it.

Panel Discussion: Human Intelligence in the Loop

The panel discussion brought the different presentations together and returned repeatedly to the relationship between simulation and experience.

Moritz Elbert raised an important continuity with Day One: AI may be able to simulate a place or material experience, but simulation is not the same as physically knowing a place or working with a material. His example of the “mozzarella sofa” became a useful metaphor for the limits of AI-

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generated desirability. AI can make something look convincing, desirable, and even possible, while the physical world may tell a different story.

The panel also questioned whether genuine human creativity can actually be distinguished from effective prompting. The answer was deliberately uncomfortable: perhaps it cannot always be distinguished.

This uncertainty does not make human creativity irrelevant. On the contrary, it makes the process of authorship, judgement, experimentation, and responsibility even more important.

Personal Reflection

My strongest reflection from Day Two is that AI is not simply changing the tools of architecture; it is changing the conditions under which architectural knowledge is learned and transmitted.

Previous generations learned by drawing, making mistakes, correcting details, coordinating with others, visiting construction sites, handling materials, and slowly developing an instinct for what works. AI can accelerate many of these processes, but acceleration is not the same as education.

The final discussion made this especially clear. Heba argued that the coming generation must be prepared to work with AI and without AI, particularly in a world where technological systems and internet access cannot be assumed to be permanently available.

That, for me, is the most balanced conclusion of the conference.

We should not teach young architects to fear AI. But we should also not teach them to depend upon it. They need to understand how to prompt, question, test, interpret, reject, modify, and ultimately take responsibility for what AI produces.

Day Two therefore left me neither optimistic nor pessimistic about artificial intelligence. It left me more attentive to the human responsibility surrounding it.

AI can accelerate production, expand possibilities, analyse enormous quantities of information, and help us discover options that might otherwise remain invisible. But architecture is ultimately concerned with people, materials, places, memory, culture, and lived experience.

The challenge ahead is not to choose between artificial intelligence and human intelligence. It is to ensure that human intelligence remains capable of questioning artificial intelligence.

Perhaps the most important lesson of the two-day conference is therefore also the simplest: use AI to extend our capacity, but never allow convenience to replace judgement.