

Intimate Encounter

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The question of experience, including the researcher's reflexive entanglement with her subject matter, is frequently excluded from architectural epistemology, especially in architectural history. This PhD - 'An Architecture of Intimate Encounter: Plotting the Raffles Hotel Through Flora and Fauna, 1887-1925 and 1987-2005, - therefore reconfigures the 'architectural subject, as a relational double-entity inscribed through a network of spaces and times holding together the experiencing subject (researcher, writer, critic, historian, theorist or occupant) and her architectural object of study.

The intimate encounter also describes a methodology, which expands the repertoire of architectural evidence. It reclaims inventive forms of evidence - such as anecdotes, fictions, rumour, gossip and trivia - which are central to popular perceptions of a space like Singapore's colonial Raffles Hotel but which are ultimately repressed in its architectural histories.

Specifically, the thesis explores how two 'trivial' historical architectural facts - the hotel's relationship with writer W Somerset Maugham who fabricated stories of the 'exotic east' in the hotel's Palm Court, and a trail of true but bizarre animal tales - could potentially transform, undermine or corroborate its idealised architectural representations. Within the context of a monument's history, this feminist-influenced approach also challenges how an 'architectural subject' is defined. Here, the hotel is not an a priori subject, since the architectural subject unfolds only as a consequence of an encounter with Maugham and the animals.

The writing is informed by two parallel voices. An academic argument is punctuated at various points by creative texts and objects, a fugitive archive drawn from the hotel's past, thus underscoring how archival materials are public yet private, factual yet fictive. Despite their proximity, there is no attempt to make one voice reciprocally annotate or illustrate the other. Instead, each voice forwards different modalities and questions, thus reflecting how architectural meaning-making delicately negotiates between experience and deliberation.

