

UNDERSTANDING SEQUENCES IN CHARLES CORREA'S ABSTRACTION OF SPACES

HARSH BHAVSAR

GUIDE: DR. SEEMA KHANWALKAR

SYNOPSIS

This research aims to explore meaning formation with the use of sequence as a metaphorical symbol in three buildings of master architect Charles Correa. The study of different sequential patterns included here vary in the visual narratives organised around them and take the participant on an *evocative journey* of the '*pradakshina*' amidst the sequence of spaces and the play of symbols around them.

FIXATION TO THE SUBJECT: **SEQUENCE AND MEANING**

Each human makes sense of his own narratives by making his own links and forging connections. These connections are nothing but sequential explorations, which are a universal impulse, in all human beings, and in all cultures and religions. Similarly, in an architectural space, sequential journeys are the paths where meanings are generated, both unique and universal, attributing it with ritualistic properties, generally associated with what one encounters on their religious - spiritual experiences. These meanings are generated by what our senses come across, where each engagement is a symbol, and when an architectural built-form offers symbols to interact with, it forms a web of inter-reflecting meanings. The author has explored this web of meanings embedded in architecture via visual media, thereby constructing a visual narrative, establishing his 'presence' in the space.

A VISUAL RELEVANCE OF SYMBOLS

The built-form, as an inter-reflecting web of meanings, is a symbol. It is an "*Imago Mundi*" as expressed by Adrian Snodgrass. This image is a pattern created by interlocking series of symbolic components: myth, rituals and doctrines. The relevance of each symbol lies in the tracery it creates, where the meanings are not confined to any single tradition, but extends over other traditions, forming a trans-cultural network. The author also refers to Victor Turner's, *The Forest of Symbols*, to understand how a place grows around its symbols and how the presence of symbols are always felt, in space and on surfaces.

SEQUENCE OF SYMBOLS: A CONSCIOUS ORCHESTRATION OF SYMBOLS - AN ABSTRACTION

In the context of an architectural sequence, the symbols construct a field of meaning through a composition, a '*pradakshina*'. This field of meaning gives a two-fold understanding into the nature of architecture and the traditions doctrines. Some of the architectural sequences which have been explored are linear, circular, sporadic, etc. A basic understanding has been developed that a linear grid moves through a rigid framework from point A to point B, on an axis, whereas a sporadic grid is where one has the opportunities to discover his own path by taking clues from the symbolic expressions present in the architecture.

AN ARCHITECTURAL INDIAN MODERNITY

As Ramanujan puts in his essay, 'Is there an Indian Way of Thinking?', that modernisation for India has largely been a movement from 'the context-sensitive to the context-free in all realms' and at the same time, the 'modern' context-free is another context in itself, infinitely more difficult to contain. The author finds Correa to be cognisant with this phenomena, and explores the devices used by Correa to compose his idea of 'Indianness'. References are made to Habermas's idea of modernity being a consciousness of an epoch that posits itself with the past and views itself as a result of the transition from the old to the new.

CHARLES CORREA

Correa recognised the presence of traditions in all spheres of the Indian society, spread across its private and public realm, and the manifestation of these traditions as gestures led to the construction of his phenomenal work. The case studies here identify themselves with this role of positioning themselves well, to be enquired for sequencing as a method to construct the desired phenomenas in space.

Correa's sequences rely on both; sense of discovery and prior knowledge of the allusions he makes to the Indian traditional roots. However, he de-contextualizes the traditional Indian motifs by transferring them to the contemporary contexts, creating an avenue for their rediscovery through his architecture. He deliberately orchestrates the system of this rediscovery by creating architectural sequences, where the journey one takes into his architecture builds the knowledge necessary to experience what he wishes for the participant to 'see' and 'feel'.

BRITISH COUNCIL, DELHI : THE LINEAR GRID

The sequence is like walking towards the Garbhagruha, of an Indian Temple when one walks out into the four-fold garden of paradise, while following the sight of Shiva's head (A huge head of the deity in Meditation. With gesture of the Ganges flowing out of its hair). Each Mythic event turns into a celebration of sorts, when one follows the path orchestrated by these symbols. 'Solving Factors', as the author likes to refer to these negotiators, are the symbolic experiences the participant engages with as he meanders within the binaries of Inside and Outside, Realms and Frames, Light and Darkness and Sky and Earth. It is along these paths, Binary 1 – Solving Factors- Binary 2, that each sequence is created.

The story starts building up as one perceives the presence of a strict axis at the British Council building in Delhi. The great shadow of the Banyan Tree mystifies the visitor, and pulls them towards, inwards, and upwards, into it. The linear order of the sequence, comes to a standstill with the first Mythical Pause, the Symbol of Lotus with thousand petals. One which Michelangelo adopted for his floor, one that the British laid out in the Viceregal House of Lutyens, one that Correa plants to produce wonder and one which has been part of the Indian consciousness as the Sahasrara Yantra, known to generate energy of consciousness.

JAWAHAR KALA KENDRA

The embedded program at the Jawahar Kala Kendra, is a synchronisation of the units of time - often named as seasons or festivals - in play. Each part caters to the needs of the participant and evokes wonders in his mind with the atmosphere that Correa has perceived. Standing in the sensorial melodrama, each sequential volume offers a wholeness of its multi-sensorial experience. Each sequence is woven in the fabric of the spaces, with occasional visual pauses narrating the stories of the past myths. Either a push and a pull, in between these pauses.

The *Madhyavarti*, a stage for the cosmic recital, remains untouched and bare, staring at the sun with its mouth wide open. Each attempt to reach the Centre is made futile because of the tremendous amount of Energy that it collects sitting in the centre, churning from all sides. The one who stares at this play, from one of the portals is pushed away to the side walls into the sequence of the Grid.

Emanating from the centre (the place of the Sun) each one of the nine squares, the planets, attain their position in their association of their mythic values. The symbols for each value derived from the Vedic, are seen arresting the eyes for the visitor. Each symbol more profound in its mythical value, but still a coherent blend to the function which it houses.

GANDHI SMARAK SANGRAHALAYA

A forest of sorts, enriched by the very ideals for the memory it is built for. Embedded in its forms are the individual sequences of simplicity and order. We perceive those as we immerse into the walk where we encounter the in-between spaces and the simple enclosures, occasionally opening out to a serene landscape, or to a tranquil waterbody, or to the assemblage of silence. The built syntax defines a context by establishing a structure of relevance, rules for allowable permutations, frames for building references and constructing a meta-narrative about what all can one attain from the space. A forest of mythical symbols, each one a hint to who Gandhi was, each one found in the labyrinth of shades, evoking your conscience.

CONCLUSION

Correa's architectural imagination was a reservoir of many Indian paradigms, key to them were symbolic visual compositions derived from the traditional Indian village. In his architectural reflections, there is a constant emphasis seen on the making of a balanced composition. In his pursuit of Simplicity and Order, Correa extracts the essence of what the Indian Modern can be.

Correa has always played between the realms of the past and what it can mean to the future. The conscious use of an image from his past is symbolic, because each use implies something more than its obvious and immediate meaning. His largest mythical resources have been the seasons that make the climate of the region.

Sequencing of symbolic devices into his spaces has so much psychic energy that we are forced to pay attention to it. This energy is largely a resultant of the '*rasas*' or the aesthetic experience that Correa's spaces offer. From within his spaces, the sensation hints at the existence of something; thought guides towards deciphering what exists.

Correa's gifts to us, in the form of such sensational architecture, makes each sequence of experience celestial, and levitates the mind, the hand and the eye into the consciousness of the Unknown. His sequences are the '*mantras*'-which are nothing but a set of rules that determine the rhythm of each *mantra*.

Each time the rhythm modulates to take a form, it results into architecture.