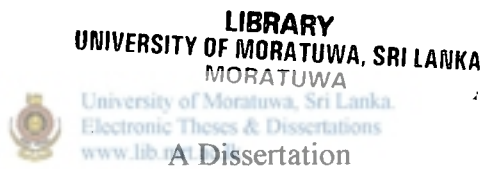


**ARCHITECTURAL COMPOSITION:  
AN EXAMINATION OF ITS USE AS A DESIGN STRATEGY  
TO CREATE MEANINGFUL ARCHITECTURE**



Submitted to the Department of Architecture of the  
University of Moratuwa in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of

Master of Science

in

Architecture

85459



University of Moratuwa

by

**A.N.C.K. WIJESOORIYA  
17-01-2004**

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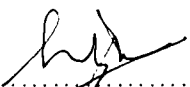


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## DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation represents my own work, except where due acknowledgement is made, and that it has not been previously included in a thesis, dissertation or report submitted to this university or to any other institution for a degree, diploma or other qualification.

Signed: .....  
( A.N.C.K. Wijesooriya )




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## PREFACE

This is the dissertation submitted to the University of Moratuwa for the final examination of M.Sc. in Architecture for year 2004.

The M.Sc. dissertation is based on research and analytical thinking where the student is expected to display the skill in developing an argument into an accepted statement by proving it with research and analysis. Thus communicating it effectively.

This dissertation is examining a design Strategy already existing but not examined as a design strategy that uses the principles of composition. At the same time it is trying to identify the relation between composition and meaningful architecture.

The principles were discussed briefly while trying to illustrate as much as possible examples within Sri Lankan Context even though many written books are western in origin and the principles are illustrated through western examples.

The selected case studies even though they may not have been done conscious according to this strategy , will be analysed within the given strategy to establish meaningfulness and degree of composition and the adaptability of the design strategy.

ARCHITECTURAL COMPOSITION: AN EXAMINATION OF ITS USE AS A DESIGN  
STRATEGY TO CREATE MEANINGFUL ARCHITECTURE

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## ABSTRACT

There is no doubt to the fact that architecture must be meaningful. This is needed in Architecture as it is an art; yet a unique kind of art. Expression of the built form will convey the meaning or the message in Architecture. there are different expressions that contribute to the total expression in architecture: Symbols of function, Expression of technique, Expression of Form, Expression of Space, Expression of functional Elements, Expression of decorative elements. It the grasping of the total expression that one will be able to understand the true meaning of Architecture.

There are several strategies since ancient times that man has experimented trying to create meaningful architecture. Earliest attempt was to reflect the cosmic realities they believed through Architecture,

geometric principles in composition to create meaningful built forms , space concept was exploited in creating meaningful spatial experiences and the concept that for follows function was used in creating meaningful architecture. Composition plays a major role in determining the expression of the built form when it finally comes to realising of the concept into architecture.

The principles involved in architectural composition are numerous but proportion, scale, unity, element in contrast and accentuation are essential to be discussed. The principles of combining elements and ordering principles are also widely used in architectural composition. Several types of compositions prevails each having their own implications: composition of Form, Composition of Space, Composition of progression path, Composition of functional elements, Decorative Composition.

Merely understanding the principles would serve no purpose unless the methods of applications are researched and studied. As composition is relation of parts to the whole a composition strategy would start from the single element then transforming it to the required form and then combining of different elements according to principles. After composition of basic form the spaces within the form will be composed or the composition of plan may occur. Yet this is a two way process where the plan can revise the form and form again can revise the plan. The ordering and articulation must be based on the axes and centres of the composition to make it really meaningful. To take the strategy further in to making the built form more meaningful proper surface articulation must be done.

In this way composition can be successfully used to create meaningful built forms, which serve the ultimate purpose of architecture.

# INTRODUCTION

## AREA OF STUDY

The Architecture deals with human habitation in enclosed spaces and it started when people settled in the caves for shelter and protection. And yet it is also an Art Humans identified the need to please the senses by using various arts at the inception of the civilization. These various arts must also have a meaning to take people from mere delight to joy. Any art should give unbinding pleasure that can only be given by a meaningful work of art. Being an Art itself Architecture has no exception. Therefore Architecture should also have a meaning.

“architecture in combining form and space into a single essence, not only facilitate purpose but it communicates meaning. The art of architecture makes our existence not only visible but meaningful” ( Ching, F.D.K., 1979, p.386)

The creation of meaningful Architecture had gone through an evolution process and even different cultures have realised it in different ways. But even the most primitive communities had assigned a meaning to their buildings that had been merely a cave or a tent. Using the spatial potentials the social hierarchy and cultural knowledge gave meaning to these primitive structures.

There are many methods identified by academics and philosophers to give a meaning to the building that has been in the subject of debate for along time. Architectural composition has been identified as a method to create meaningful . Architecture. Although many have written on the principles of the composition the relation between the meaning and composition has not been a subject for discussion commonly.

The existing principles of composition can be used in creating meaningful architecture and the study will examine a strategy that relates meaningful architecture and composition.



## OBSERVATION

The situation today is that many buildings that come recently lack in their meaning. This has an impact on society where people expect buildings to be meaningful and find there is no meaning and living through the spaces very frustrating. Even if the buildings by Architects have the attraction of it only by the shaping and the use of an elegant language that it is eye catching but the meaning is not to be found. Even in building designs where meaning is very important Architects tend to neglect this fact. At some instances Architects are using very complicated form and roofs as to give elegance to the building.

"As Hans Sedlmayr wrote, In *verlust der Mitte*, ' the new type of architect has come hopelessly uncertain of himself. He glances over his shoulder at the engineer, he fancies himself in the role of inventor and even in that of a reformer of men's lives, but he has forgotten to be an architect' " (Scruton, R. 1979,p. ix.)

## IDENTIFICATION OF PROBLEM

There are several possible causes for this situation.

1. The designers are not aware that the architecture must be meaningful and the buildings coming up are meaningless

But designer are aware that architecture as an art should have a meaning. Many elements are incorporated in order to achieve this un- satisfactory. Therefore it is not this first cause that generates the problem.

2. The designers are aware of it but there are many other factors that over- rule this need for meaningful Architecture

But Meaning of a building is said to be the dominating factor when designing the buildings by architects, as they are aware of it as professionals.

3. The designers are aware of it and have identified this as a governing factor but do not know a proper mechanism to overcome this problem.

The most possible cause is that Architects are not aware of how to do meaningful buildings. And as a result they also do not know the parameter in which a design is assed to be a meaningful design. They are struggling to come up with meaningful Architecture without a proper mechanism.

## STUDY AS A REMEDY FOR THE PROBLEM

What is a meaningful building and the mechanism in doing a meaningful building has to be identified. For this there are many existing mechanisms that had been evolved by academics and philosophers that have been subjected to many debates and evolution with time.

Therefore it is vital that a proper understanding of how to create a meaningful Architecture must be given to the designers. For this it is critical that University carries out proper research and studies as responsible institutions that produce architects. There are several methods of creating meaningful Architecture and these must be identified by studies and research works. A dissertation will form part of this remedy.

## CRITICALITY OF THE STUDY



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Even the most primitive caves had a meaning given by the arrangement of the spaces. This meaningful Architecture is vital for comfortable living. The situation today is that many buildings that come recently have only a beauty but no meaning. This has an impact on society where people expect buildings to be meaningful and find there is no meaning and living through the spaces very frustrating. This has resulted out of the commercialising process and many arts are impacted by this the mere beauty of it is lost within a little time if no meaning is given. It is this meaning that take a person from mere delight to joy that is unbinding.

As an art Architecture will communicate with people and this communication will give the meaning of that particular built form. Truthful meaning will help the humans distinguish different build forms and this breaks the monotony of the built form as well.

Thus this meaning architecture will make the profession sustain within the community. Many people get Architects to design their houses paying a much higher rate because they need a better house from the Architect whereas they would have gone to a Non-Architect for a less amount of money. But if the difference in the design by the Architect and the Non-Architect very little and even if the difference is only in the Language and in the shaping people will cease to come for Architects to do their designs. This will result in a crisis in the profession, which is already seen as many non-Architects dominating the industry and some of their designs have done better than the Architects who are designing by the language only.

A non-architect designing a meaningless building is understandable as he is not professionally responsible. But the criticality is when the architects are also making the same mistake as a responsible person to the society. It is their utmost responsibility that designs are done with a meaning and people are presented with comfortable spaces.



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The situation today is that the meaning of the building is lost and meaningless buildings are dominating the built environment.

“the processes of his mind should be so trained as to enable his conception to be cast in such harmonious form that its realisation will satisfy certain aesthetic requirements which a consensus of enlightened opinion demands of what is termed a work of art” (Howard Robertson, 1945, p.3)

## **INTENTION OF THE STUDY**

The intention of this study is to examine a strategy to create meaningful Architecture by composing of form and space and articulating through axes and centres.

## **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

- To understand the basics of architectural composition
- Examine the importance of composition in making the form meaningful
- Examine the importance of composition for a surface planes of the form
- Examine the importance of progression through axes and centres.
- To derive a strategy to compose form and space

## **SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

This study is limited to the Sri Lankan context in case studies although the mechanisms for creating meaningful Architecture will be discussed within a larger context depending on the written books and documents available relevant to the study. The conclusions will be drawn upon the case studies that exist within the socio-economic, political and cultural framework of the contemporary Sri Lankan society.

The study will start assuming that Architecture must be meaningful depending on many theories that had been in existence to support the statement. There are many methods of creating meaningful Architecture that cannot be covered by the scope of this study. And the study will be limited to discuss the importance of composition in creating a strategy. There are many principles of composition but the scope of the study will not go into depth with the principles but will discuss a strategy to use the principles. There are many different compositions that are used in architecture but the study will be limited in discussing a strategy of composing form and space within the form. This study will be limited to examine the composing form of the building and composing of plan within the form.

## METHOD OF THE STUDY

The basic method of study was a case-study based study. And for this a frame work was established.

First phase of the study was to establish that Architecture must be meaningful and for this research was carried out that was done as a literature survey. Second phase was to identify the importance of the composition and the principles that are related to composition.

Third phase was to identify the design strategy using the composing principles and this included careful study of buildings to understand the compositions, ordering etc. used. The final phase was to analyse the case studies to examine the relationship between the composition and the meaning and thus draw conclusions based on that.

