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URBAN SPACE AND SPATIAL EXPERIENCE

- AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

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A Dissertation presented to the

FACULTY OF ARCHITECTURE



SRI LANKA

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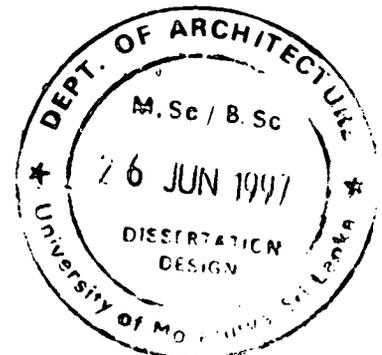
DILANI GUNAWARADANA

Faculty of Architecture

University of Moratuwa

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PREFACE

Experience is central to life. Each of us starts life differently and live through a completely personal stream of experiences. Life as lived-in generates its own stories and memories that are bound in space as well as in time. They form the residue of our experiences ; the experience of space lived-in.

Space is life filled. It constitutes elements and relationships of events past and present that form a part of its reality experienced. Every one has different associations to such places, in memories tied down, distinguished by colours, feelings and individualities.

..... a description of a poet, traces the lives lived in a demolished house, left on the walls of an adjacent building.

"But the walls themselves were the most unforgettable. The stubborn life of these rooms had not allowed itself to be trampled out. It was still there; it clung to the nails that had been left on the walls; it found a resting place on the remaining hand breadth of flooring; it squatted beneath the corner beams where a little bit of space remained.

There were the mid day meals and the sickness and the exhalations and the smoke of years and the stale breath of mouths, and oily odour of perspiring feet. There were the pungent tang of urine and the stench of burning soot and the grey reek of potatoes and the heavy sticky fumes and rancid grease. The sweatish lingering smell of neglected infants were there, and the smell of frightened children who go to school and the stuffiness of the beds of nubile youth".(Rilke, Reiner Maria, The Notebook of Malte Laurids Brigge)

It is an astonishing document revealing the poets empathy towards re-creating the memory of the space experienced; lost amongst the ruins of the old building. It traces the profound nature of everyday experience. Touching its depth with vivid attention to

details, reminds us of the power of literature, that weaves together experiences and memories of the past into a vision of a lived world

The images of the space so coloured are evoked by the imagination of the poet. By the light of his art we can savour the moment and the experience of the place - that would otherwise have faded beyond recall. It is through thoughtful reflection that the elusive moments of the past can draw near to us in the present reality and gain a measure of permanence.

Thus the kind of experience related focuses our attention to the diversity of human emotions, thoughts and experience that tint and colour our perception of the world. Space reflects the quality of human senses and mentality. All senses have a part to play in the ugliness or in the beauty of space experienced, but all too often they are considered in isolation to the mere physical attributes of space. The fleeting intimacies of direct experience reflecting the true quality of spaces often escape our notice for we are more oriented towards recognising the more tangible attributes such as physical entities of space. These are often what we are taught to look at and grasp. It reminds us time and time again that our conception of space around is not always confined to the narrow boundaries of its obvious physical entities alone. "We do not perceive space as it exists but space which is lived in". (Heidegger M, 1962) This makes us aware of the deeper human dimension involved in creating, or enabling spaces for people, that stretches beyond the more tangible attributes of space. As expressed in the philosophy of Matore (1962, p.22-23)-

"We do not grasp space only by our senses. We live in it, we project our personality into it we are tied to it by emotional bonds. Space is not perceived, it is lived".

Human experience establishes a reality to our understanding and broadens our knowledge. In order to comprehend this we must take on a different approach towards seeing space for what it is and what it reflects to the experienter. What is the nature

of it's experience ? And in what ways do spatial experience affect us ? These are the questions to which thought must be given.

To develop a way of looking where the spontaneous feelings and emotions as well as the meanings and experiences of people can be brought in. Similar to the poet's empathetic resonance of life, the built environment too transcends from the very same base of knowledge, in which the existential meaning of inhabiting space can be created by the art of architecture.

