CONCEPTUALIZING ARCHITECTURE
Enquiry into the Meaning of Monuments in the Civic District

by
Lee Yoke Ling Jacquelyn
HD 991265J
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Dissertation Supervisor: TK Sabapathy
Title: Senior Fellow

Bachelor of Arts (Architectural Studies)
National University of Singapore

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National University of Singapore

ABSTRACT

The intentions of studying Architecture as a repository of Meaning have
been my preoccupation for awhile. Meaning\(^1\) imbued into the architecture of our
Civic District encapsulates the colorful essence of our historical past. History in
this context refers to a desire for a common consensus of meaning, whose
representation is based on the sentiments of the Nation as the sum of the
individual personal experiences\(^2\) of the People

It is my intention to study the Monuments of the Civic District as an
investigation into its shifting interpretations, as values that we associate these
monuments with today have changed chiefly to one that satisfies the consumer
market as prescribed by Statutory Agencies. The study investigates the expectancies that arise from changing the context of history and the repercussions of manipulating settings for reading these monuments.

Deriving meaning through the basic readings of Semiotics and Phenomenology, methodologies for investigation are developed and employed. The sign-symbol relationship of individual Monuments, in particular the Raffles Statue, the Civilian War Memorial and City Hall are analyzed in relation to the varying levels of signification in the context of Singapore's history. The ability of these monuments to function as effective sign-symbols of our history requires a perceivable trail that primes the settings for viewing the monuments. The perceptual analysis of sight, sound as near senses and smell, touch and taste as distant senses are analyzed with regards to the reading of the trail that connects these monuments.

11 Tracing its roots back to the German word ‘*meinen*’, the verb ‘*mean*’ is defined as ‘to purpose’ or ‘to have an intention in mind’. The ‘sense of purpose or intention’ is to have a reference and relation to certain things or words that draw relevant signification. ‘Meaning’ in architecture may then be denoted as to have ‘a purpose or an intention in mind’ when engaging influences in the design of architecture.

2 Meaning also becomes a sum of views as agreed by a common consensus, and expanded upon by views brought in as ongoing and alternative interpretations. Meaning becomes a variable in varying context of time and place.