I, Czaee Malpani, hereby submit this original work as part of the requirements for the degree of Master of Architecture in Architecture (Master of).

It is entitled:
**Drawing Between the Lines: Intersections of Gender, Narratives and Representations**

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Drawing between the Lines:
Intersections of Gender, Narratives and Representations

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by

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Predicated on the notion that architectural identity is inextricably linked and produced through the architectural representations, this thesis argues that the identity so produced is gendered masculine through its dependence on ideals of objectivity, universality, and normativity. It specifically investigates the role of narratives, either as the singular or meta-narrative of the discipline or the obviation of the ‘other’ narratives, in generating an identity which is rendered hegemonic and patriarchal. Within this paradigm, issues of linearity and translation which inform architectural representations, are raised and questioned.

The project explores the translation of narratives through examining the autobiography of one of the first South-Asian female (trained ‘modernist’) architect, Minnette De Silva, to understand how her narratives can be employed not just to facilitate the design process for an exhibition that allows an experiential insight into her life and work (not mutually exclusive), but create representations of her representations such as to retain her narratives and make the same accessible. Rather than depend on normative plans, sections or elevations, the method of representation uses structuring mechanisms such as multi-temporality and multi-spatiality by playing with techniques of scale and repetition, which have been borrowed from ‘other’ forms of indigenous art, such as Warli Art.

Thus, this thesis attempts to expand the vocabulary of architectural representations to include differences, in that, it attempts to allude to the regional, social and gendered identity of the very subjects that inform it. Simultaneously, it also attempts to understand how the architect’s role and subjectivity, as represented in the drawing, can be employed towards mediation rather than authoritarianism.
Four years ago, I encountered a minor hiccup in both my architectural education and architectural identity. This hiccup turned into a fundamental question, and thus, a thesis over due course of time. However, none of this could have happened without the support and encouragement of many individuals in the time that I spent ‘thesisizing.’

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The praxis of architecture is invariably routed through the construction and production of two elements: narratives (as that which inform drawings) and drawings (as that which respond to the narratives). The relationship between these two is often unwieldy and made to seem linear in spite of the actual difficulty – if not impossibility- of a perfect translation. Moreover, in effect, there is only one real element that links the two phenomena, and that is the architect, who thus, is accorded the role of being the agent of translation. Within the course of this essay, I attempt to discern not only why this idea of translation through drawings came about, but also why it is essentially problematic. I challenge the nature of drawings, arguing that when wielded by the architect, architectural drawings such as the plan, section or elevation are not inert innocuous documents, but instead mutate to become patriarchal tools that endorse hegemony and domination through the exclusion of narratives outside of the singular narrative of (supposed) translation. I ground this exploration in both working with the narratives as found in the autobiography of architect Minnette de Silva, as well as looking for alternative representational models/schema to ‘show’ the aforementioned narratives. By doing so, I posit Minnette as a fictional client who left behind a large corpus of stories that could be translated into a design project, thus, critically appraising the idea of translations through representations. As one of the first few women South-Asian architects trained both in India and London, as well, as the first female architect for Sri Lanka, Minnette’s narratives are extremely significant to the architectural history of South Asia. Moreover, these might be the only published records of the experiences of a woman architect in what was a nascent (modern) profession in that geographic location during the mid-twentieth century. Keeping this in mind, an exhibition complex, Pragati Maidan, in Delhi has been selected as the (imagined) site upon which
this design exploration is carried out. This particular complex serves as an apt site owning to its Modernist underpinnings, wherein the immediate context (of the site) is provided by some of the key Modernist projects of South Asia. Moreover, Delhi is one of the seats of architectural power within the region. The design project is imagined as (the representations of) an exhibit/exhibition which allows for Minnette’s narratives to unfold in built space, where the act of traversing narrates events rather than, a museum which stores her work.

The document is divided into three parts. The first part: Cut raises the central question that this thesis is trying to investigate. It critically examines the issues driving the role of architectural drawings and narratives in the production of architecture. The second part, Fill, documents the responses to this question in the form of representations for design/narrative strategies. In this, the first and second part shares a reciprocal relationship. The third, and last, part Content explores and lays out, in greater detail, the various narratives, aside from that of the architectural discipline, that are pertinent to this thesis. Thus, Minnette’s stories, representational strategies of Warli Art and site strategies, are discussed at length in the sub-parts to the third part. Due to the very nature of a document, often (though not necessarily) a linearity often becomes inherent. However, it is certainly not necessary to traverse each one of these parts in the sequence in which they are ordered in the document. In essence, each part of the thesis carries forwards a particular narrative, each of which can be taken as a starting point.

There is a value attached to narratives, whether formal or informal. Our communications are often couched in them in varying degrees of proximity, and it would seemingly be counter-productive and counter-intuitive to deny their importance. Yet, often narratives are devalued owing to their ‘subjective’ nature, and the cast aside in lieu of an episteme that can be measured and tallied i.e. a knowledge which is ‘objective’, towards a defined cultural production. Hayden White lays the blame squarely on the shoulders of Western paradigms, stating “Narrativity could appear problematical only in a culture in which it was absent – absent in as in come domains of
Figure 1.1: Europe as a Queen, by S. Münster, Cosmographia, 1588. Image from Duncan, James S. and Trevor Barnes. Writing Worlds: Discourse, Text & Metaphor in the Representation of Landscape. New York: Routledge, 1992.
contemporary Western *intellectual or artistic culture* (my emphasis), programmatically refused.”¹

His claim, though suitably general, lays the ground for the particular investigation this thesis undertakes. One of the proponents of ‘intellectual or artistic culture’, in fact putatively both, is the discipline of architecture.

My discussion of narratives, though concerned with the discipline, is actually routed through examining traditional forms of architectural representations- plans, sections and elevations – drawings that are made ubiquitous through the discipline’s (whether in an academic environment or practice) continuous reliance on them. As will be shown later, the discipline has always hinged itself on the fact of drawings, and derived its identity from it. I use the word ‘always’ with a degree of caution, since this discipline is still a relatively young profession, and not one of antiquity as is often claimed². Herein, lies one of the two myths of architecture. The second myth is that of the role of representations is to translate an idea into a building. These two myths (and corresponding similar ones) establish a singular narrative of architecture, through which representations are rendered normative and hegemonic. The two myths work together to establish the notion of translation being possible through drawings, of it being done for all of time, so that the discipline can lay claim to its own created identity of being creative and delivering a product different from other disciplines. Borrowing from feminist scholars, I argue that the dominance of a singular narrative of architecture, transforms the drawing not so much into a translative mechanism, but a tool of patriarchy and masculinity by obliterating any and all other narratives (that would have informed it).

The tension inherent in the relationship between architectural representations and narratives is not an easy one to establish. However, it might be useful to turn to Jean Baudrillard’s work to set up, if nothing else, an analogy. Writing on simulation, Baudrillard describes a dance between object and

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² This is not to say that architecture has not existed forever. Architecture understood as built environment has, however, the discipline understood as being practiced by architects was a modern undertaking.
Figure 1.2: Axonometric drawing of the Temple of Karnak by Auguste Choisy (1899) from Choisy, Auguste. Histoire De L’architecture. Paris,: Gauthier-Villars, 1899.
representation through maps and territories,

Abstraction today is no longer of the map, the double, the mirror or the concept. Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without an origin or reality: a hyperreal. The territory no longer preceded the map, nor survives it. Henceforth, it is the map that precedes the territory.3

The map traditionally thought to follow (in terms of discovery, invention or production) after the territory that it represents, no more plays its assigned role. It has bypassed the territory to the degree that it no more resembles nor relies on it. The power the map holds is absolute. The ‘copy’ or the ‘representation’ has come to overtake the putative origin to the degree that the origin really is of no value any more. What we have here is also a description of the relationship between narratives and architectural representation. The architectural drawing, which purportedly, follows through from real narratives of clients, site etc, on making its way down its linear production, is like the map. It stands on its own, with its own narrative- the narrative of the discipline, and has nothing to do with the narratives that informed it. It is the ‘precession of the simulacra’4. Moreover, the simulacrum in this case is hardly a passive, gender-neutral entity. It is embedded with ideals of objectivity, truth, honesty, culture, power and masculinity.

Recall here Le Corbusier’s famous statement, which went onto become nothing short of an anthem for modern architecture – “The Plan is the Generator.”5 Through the simultaneous explicitness and powerful ambiguity of this claim, that plan-drawing was placed at the epicenter not just of all of buildings-as-architecture, but even as ‘the generator’ of life and human experiences, thus effectively collapsing the distance between many different tangents: representations, building, experiences. The force that Le Corbusier channeled through his own ideas about the plan are evident in his belief that the plan imparted requisite richness to all of human experience, through its espousal of the discipline and creativity, to give rise to “one of the highest activities of human

4  Ibid., 2
spirit.” The obvious question that arises from the above is why was it necessary to make such strong claim about an architectural tool, a drawing-type? Why pull a drawing method into such a center of prominence? Had architects not always used plans (and other orthographic projections) as evidenced by drawings of ancient architectural marvels. The answer to the last question is negative, the history of architectural drawings (like the profession) is short and recent, though the myth works incessantly to project it further back into the past, to validate and ground its own identity.

It has been a continuing project of modernity, as expressed and understood through architecture, to lay stake the architectural drawings as wonders, which allow an architect to creatively translate ideas into two- or three-dimensional graphic images, which are communicative. Sentiments like this abound in the writings of many architectural historians from the time of Laugier and Alberti to the current historians such as Iain Fraser, Kendra Schank Smith, Magnago Lampugnani, et al whose arguments all fall along the lines outlined below,

Architecture in its historical evolution can be shown in various ways. In words, with a text which outlines the development. In photographs, showing buildings which ‘make’ history. Finally, through drawings by architects.

There are three reasons for the last choice.

The decision in favor of architectural drawings eliminates the distinction between what has been built and what has not. The realization of the project which generally depends directly on the economic circumstances is no longer the condition sine qua non of architecture. Through drawings and sketches it is possible to present architectural ideas tout court, thus preserving what is culturally valuable and would otherwise be lost in architectural consumption. This is of no little relevance, since ‘desk drawer architecture’ is often artistically and historically as important as what has been built…. Creativity appears in its purest form, visions, unfettered by compromise unfold freely. Apparently released from reality, their disruptive and stirring impulses contribute the most to changing it.

Moreover, architectural drawings are often the clearest indicator of the genesis of a project. The basic idea leaves its mark on paper, while the further stages of the work are visible as superimposed layers. The creative process decodes like a geological formation.

6 Ibid., 49.
Finally, architectural drawings can often express more than finished buildings. Technique, manner of presentation, cut, format, handling of line and trend are all revelatory of the artist’s intellectual intent. Drawings of architects are consequently testimonies to cultural attitudes; passionate as they are exact, they take on an independent artistic value and can stand in their own right as autonomous works.⁷

This passage taken from Lampugnani’s book ‘Architecture of the 20th century in Drawings’ is illustrative of the claims of historicity, autonomy, originality made by architecture through the use of representations. It accords a agency to the architectural drawing, while playing within the field of translation i.e. it allows for the drawing to be thought of as an entity which can have many roles and possibility within the gamut of its otherwise ‘obvious’ role as the mediator between the architect and the built object. It tips its hat to the linear relationship between idea and architecture, which the drawing may or may not fulfill. It would be pertinent to question these myths. For example, how can an idea be envisaged if there is not already in place an understanding of the representational strategies involved which would allow for this idea to take on a graphic ‘form’? Secondly, are drawings only representative of buildings, or can it be reasonably argued that they actually are representative of architects and an architectural identity. Lastly, are not the seed of hegemony sown through the employment of a universal language of architecture, thus masculinizing the enterprise?

To be able to provide some reasonable answers for the questions thus raised, it is worthwhile to look at the development of a graphic architectural language over the last few centuries, since this period marks the invention of drawings as we now know them, as well as their importance to the discipline.

A Brief History of Architectural Drawings

‘“[A]rchitecture also came to be understood as a liberal art, and architectural ideas were increasingly conceived as geometric lineamenti, as ubiquitous two-dimensional, orthogonal

Figure 1.3: ‘God as Geometer’ from The Frontispiece of Bible Moralisee (mid 13th century). Image Courtesy: Wikipedia.
Architectural representations cover a wide range of type and structures such as plans, sections, elevations, axonometric, isometrics, and perspectives portrayed through napkin sketches, preliminary drawings, presentation drawings, models and construction drawings, amongst an ever evolving list. Of these, I examine plans, sections and elevations as the two-dimensional drawings that gained ground and became the modus operandi for architects during the modern period. These drawings which may be banded under ‘technical drawings’ enjoy an unquestioned importance and presence during Modernism as they became representative of not just the buildings that they illustrated, but also came to stand in for the architects. Thus, working with a similar structure of the plan-type, stylistic and other differences were evolved which distinguished a Miesian-Plan from a Wrightian-Plan. While one conjured up minimalist images, the other established earthier tones. It should be noted though that these connotations that are conjured up, are dependent on our socialization as architects that allows us to ‘read’ into drawings.

The architectural drawing has always had a symbolic value, as it is indicative of the social and cultural leanings of its historical milieu. In the creating of an architectural history to root a fledgling profession, drawings have often been produced as evidence and testimony to the lineage of architecture. For example, historian Kendra Schank Smith, in writing a section discussing the history of drawings and sketches, starts with claiming, “The history of representation is probably as old as civilization itself.” She suggests a history of representation (easily mistaken for architectural representation) wherein there has always been a focus on representing/drawing from the paintings at Lascaux, to the Greeks, through the middles ages, and naturally, in contemporary times. She bemoans the lack of actual existing drawings from various periods, and excuses her own complaint through offering and accepting the notion that architectural drawings were not

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Figure 1.4: Plate by Jacopo Barozzi da Vignola demonstrating problems created for perspective by binocular vision, 1583. From Perez-Gomez, Alberto, and Louise Pelletier. Architectural Representation and the Perspective Hinge. Cambridge, Mass.: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1997.
considered valuable, thus, preserving them was not considered necessary. Smith is not the only historian to support this line of thought. The discipline of architecture has had to construct its own narrative through skillful appropriation, since in reality it is only a product of Modernity.\textsuperscript{10}

The usage of drawings as method of translation and representation is not a truism from ancient history. As recently as the Gothic period, the process of construction relied largely on the knowledge of the master-mason and on-site geometry to shape the form and structure. This knowledge was embodied, experienced and handed-down through the generations.

The extraordinary proliferation of very precise technical terms for various parts of the building suggests that means other than drawings had to be used by the master mason to communicate the design to others working on the building. Because the technical supervision had to be constant and was for the most part conveyed verbally, the master mason was tied to the site of the building design throughout its constructions.\textsuperscript{11}

The master-mason shared a very intimate relationship with the work being carried out. Apart from being the one who possessed the most skilled set of instruction and supervision, he was responsible for constructing a “model of the city of God on Earth.”\textsuperscript{12} There was an interesting dialectic between the master-mason and higher Supernatural powers. The mason was imagined as the conduit through which God’s will (with regard to building) was carried out on Earth. Thus, it was the master-mason who was the tool of translation, as opposed to a graphic representation, which would eventually come to stand in for him. Similarly, this also highlights another aspect, which is that this was one of the instances of a God-like identity being imbued upon a mortal, whose act of further projecting geometry was then seen as sacred and prophetic. This ‘illusion’ as E.H. Gombrich terms it, can still be observed with craftspeople. In his description of the work of a Sri Lankan craftsperson, Gombrich describes the act of sculpting a Buddha statue. The eyes are the last facet to be painted onto the Buddha. The craftsperson does so by turning his own back

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{12} Perez Gomez, Alberto, and Louise Pelletier. Architectural Representation and the Perspective Hinge. Cambridge, Mass.: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1997, 8.
\end{itemize}
towards the statue, and then painting the eyes over his shoulder with the use of a mirror. The reason behind this is that the painting of eyes imbues the so-far lifeless statue with eyes, and immediately sanctifies it. Similarly, the medieval craftsperson through the act of building, or even orating the building, was imagined to hold sacred powers.

The medieval period and the ones that followed were very interested in theories of vision. Ocular-centrism was privileged through the belief that sight and vision rank the highest amongst the senses. An increasing number of philosophers investigated issues of optics and light, often through a metaphysical lens, thus moving towards issues of representation. An understanding of spectatorship and distancing was evolved which made reflective thought, authorship, and metaphysics possible. Distancing and spectatorship was especially embedded with Platonic ideals, and the (re)use of the term ‘chora’ or space was re-established. This space was the space of ontological continuity, a meeting ground for the Being and beings which enabled participation. The idea of such a space of distance and participation, in some ways anticipated and foreshadowed the development of perspective. Simultaneously, it provided the necessary platform for the articulation of geometric discourses. This period though, was not particularly concerned with appearances, in that, questions of how things are viewed (relative to Gods-eye) were being explored more so than how they look. There was a realization though that what is experienced is not the same as what is seen. Euclidian mathematics, in particular was developed, to grasp physical and metaphysical structures of reality. The structure of reality was assumed to be similar to the structure of light. This illustrates that light was one of the primary components of inquiry due to its mystical and symbolic nature. Light was associated with the space of God, thus to re-create the space of God, it was important to be able to understand and recreate the properties of light. Grosseteste would claim that light is the greatest and the best of all proportions, and that all material world first appears as light. Light itself radiates in straight lines, has a geometric shape allowing for the perception of beauty. Understanding the nature of light propelled the development of perspective naturalis, based on Euclidian geometry
Figure 1.5: Durer, Albrecht (1471-1528), *Draftsman Drawing a Lute (1525)*. Image courtesy: ArtStor

Figure 1.6: Durer, Albrecht (1471-1528), *Draftsman Drawing a Recumbent Woman (1525)*. Image courtesy: ArtStor
of similar triangles, according to which the proportion between a light source and the object illuminated remained constant through multiple projects which proportionately grow smaller and enter the eye.

The Renaissance witnessed an increased drive in understanding the nature of light. Some philosophers such as Cusanus believed that only God’s sight is Absolute Sight, that only He has access to the ubiquitous center of convergence (since we view the world perspectively), and hence, He possesses the vision of Truth. Many artists were interested in the empirical rules of perspective, and thus Guidabaldo de Monte was one of the first few to start taking data like the position of the observer, the distance to the object and the angle of viewing as points of departure for perspective construction. This period marked the birth of *perspectiva articialis* which took to distancing itself from metaphysical questions, to empirical ones, though it was still embedded with the notion of the truth of reality. Topographical techniques for surveying were instrumental in creating this chasm, since it would allow for perspective to be applied towards architectural representation vis-à-vis pictorial naturalism. This facet harks to the need of architectural representation to place itself a step ahead of painting, to promote its own identity as truly rational. While paintings and art was still interested in the realm of God, and using perspective to better narrate myths, the ‘architectural drawings’ took to concerning themselves with depictions of public spaces, akin to scenographic backdrops awaiting inhabitation. The depictions marked the birth of the ‘objective’ space. Newly defined lineamenti helped Renaissance architecture to move from medieval construction to liberal arts. Two important strands of thought came out of this understanding. Firstly, a building could now be conceived geometrically and orthogonally in the architect’s ‘mind-eye’ which was the same as the earlier eye of God. Secondly, by having a method which was dependant on the architect’s thought process, the architect could sever the cord between his conception as the possessor of the idea and the master-mason.

The sixteenth century witnessed a movement for the separation of architectural drawing from
Figure 1.7: Giovanni Battista Piranesi (1720-1778), Carceri, plate IX (1769). Image courtesy: ArtStor
painting and sculpture. Lucas Gauricus and Tolomeis were two of its proponents for the autonomy of architectural drawings. The mathematical and geometric regularity of these representations putatively imbued them with the capacity to demonstrate the presence of the transcendental. Further differences between the work of artists and architects were offered by Alberti. According to him, architects could produce two forms of representations: ichnographia and orthographia. The former referred to inscriptions parallel to the plane of the horizon i.e. the modern plan, whereas the latter described inscriptions on the vertical plane i.e. the modern elevation. Both ichnographia and orthographia were considered to be true and honest representations, since they did not alter any lines of angles, which were the suspicions now attached with the perspective-drawing. Robin Evans argues that the development of orthogonal drawings was a by-product of perspective, and thus, while they were initially construed as subservient to the perspective process, they asserted their own identity through their appropriation by architects as their own tools. Late Renaissance saw these ‘mechanical’ representations strengthen their own position because of a growing interest in abstract instrumentality.

The development of the plan and section can be traced to questions of metaphysics around the idea of God and Light. The section drawing, on the other hand, emerged equally out of a scientific revolution, but interestingly, had biological underpinnings. Dissections carried out on the human body to understand its mechanism and functioning, led to an understanding of sectional drawings, which were initially labeled sciagraphia. The section was a drawing which intersected the cone of vision (the way in which objects are viewed), and was equally an ‘honest’ representation. Alberto Perez-Gomez explains this through Albrecht Dürer’s experiments.

Albrecht Dürer’s famous machine (1525), for example, consisting of an eyepiece and a glass panel, was mainly intended to demonstrate a rigid method for copying nature by cutting a section literally through the cone of vision. Significantly, Dürer’s machine is still an appropriate metaphor for the scientific objectification of reality. It shows man placing the world in his cone of vision, making it difficult to acknowledge the reciprocity of perception by the Other (originally, God), the intersubjective (erotic) reality
that makes us possible as embodied consciousness in the first place.  

Therefore, the architect was again posited not only as the all-seeing eye, which remains rational and unaffected by its own phenomenal experience, thus enabling it to see reality (external to him) objectively. The image captured by this eye could be represented as the section.

The recognized arrival of plans, elevations and sections influenced a shift in understanding. Imagination or creativity (as we still refer to it) was perceived as being superior to philosophical thought, contemplations and technical knowledge. This possibly was the birth of the creative genius within architecture, a sentiment Le Corbusier would echo as a truism centuries later. Perspectival representations had previously enabled artists and architects to be able to see and represent in a manner similar to a/the divine being. The ability to create ‘true’, orthographic drawings out of an imagined idea gave the initial shape to the architectural identity.

Arguably, drawings keep up a steady growth during the 17th Century. Particularly important to their development was Cartesian philosophy, which not only placed man as the thinking subject, it allowed for a division of the world based on the thinking subject, and everything outside of him as the object. During the second Enlightenment, a mathematical lens was employed for viewing all ‘external’ reality, which augmented a burgeoning technological obsession. Mapping as a science came about, with the belief that external reality can be conquered, dominated and represented through reductive, instrumental systems. The history of colonization is intimately tied with the history of representational techniques such as mapping, which far from being by-products of it, may actually be construed as what enabled the act in the first place. Simply stated, the notion that a complex structure can be comprehended through a graphic representation, immediately makes it more accessible, classifiable and eventually capable of being dominated.

In a world that was rapidly changing its shape and form, for ‘architects’ there was a rising concern with the ‘accuracy’ of perspective. Following centuries of development, suddenly perspective was

13 Ibid., 34.
Figure 1.8: Seminal texts on Architecture and Gender
regarded with a measure of skepticism. Geometry had managed to retain its symbolism, the value of which now decreased. Perspective became an empirical way of depicting reality. As Perez-Gomez explains, “The operational homology of qualitative lived space and quantitative perspectival space encouraged the architect to believe that a projection could accurately present a proposed architectural creation.” 14 The architectural implication of this is that space was represented on a two-dimensional Cartesian grid, and architects could be more responsible for the making of ‘pictures’ than the construing of symbolic ideas. This was aided by a realization that meaning may be a matter of convention. The works of Giambattista Piranesi and Jean-Laurent LeGeay strove, through architectural representations, to de-structure homogenous space and the linear time implied in perspective drawings, and can thus be seen as the progenitors of deconstructivist drawings of the late 20th century. For example, Piranesi’s drawings of the Carceri depict a space where it is impossible for the eye to follow a logical sequence that ends at a determined point. Thus, the eye travels up staircases that lead nowhere, along walkways that end abruptly, spaces in the foreground are equally in the background, and elements depict volumes that are physically inaccessible.

At the same time as Piranesi and LeGeay experimented with destabilizing the perspective drawing, Étienne-Louis Boullée and Claude Nicolas Ledoux were instrumental for pushing forwards the neo-classical movement, in which more systematized methods of representation emerged. They employed perspectives to show the proposed building in a natural setting, with an aim of refuting the knowledge of the mason-builder who was perhaps able to better envisage the built product based on years of experience. Architect’s faced stiff competition from two other nascent ‘modern’ professions: engineering and science. The Ecole Polytechnique, founded after the French revolution, trained both architects and engineers. Descriptive geometry formed an integral part of the educational process. It allowed “for the first time a systematic reduction of three-dimensional objects to two dimensions and permitted the control and precision demanded by the Industrial

14 Ibid., 74
Descriptive geometry formed the basis of all modern architectural representational endeavors. J.N-L. Durand, who was suspicious of perspectives, for their ability to distort reality and not be exactly commensurate with measurements, instead advocated the axonometric drawing as did Auguste Choisy.

By the nineteenth century, the technical drawings were at the forefront of the palette and vocabulary of architects, who had developed their own niche identity separate from artists and engineers. Descriptive geometry i.e. the plan, section and elevation became the norm for the modern architect.

A Different Triad: Representation, Identity and Gender

Architectural drawings have a history that is intricately entwined with a history of power and knowledge. In Foucauldian tomes, the wielding of power was defined by access to knowledge. Few architectural historians have touched upon this, though cultural and social geographers have been arguing since the 1990s about the exercise of representation being inherently political. With issues of power, and especially given the masculine nature of architectural praxis, a gendered analysis of representation becomes relevant.

Feminist analyses of architecture are a relatively recent phenomenon, with a lineage that extends a little over two decades. Influenced by the work of feminists such as Simone de Beauvoir, Betty Friedan who worked with issues of (female) identity as it is shaped by various practices in the world; feminist-architectural theorists turned the lens onto architectural practices that gender the environment and work to objectify/subjugate women. Central to their argument were issues of domesticity and representation in terms of roles and places of women architects and clients in the profession.

Beatriz Colomina can be imagined to have been at the forefront of this movement with respect to architecture, with her seminal work ‘Sexuality and Space’ (1991), a collection of essays that not
Figure 1.9: Architect at his drawing board. This wood engraving was published on May 25, 1893, in Teknisk Ukeblad, Norway's leading engineering journal.
only brought together many feminist-architects to discuss issues of gender, but also gave a major
ingetus to such works in the future. The timing of this movement is particularly interesting as it
started to gain ground in the post-modernist period, where the body of work of the Modernist
period lay scattered providing fecund ground for this exploration. Many a feminist returned to
the scene of modernism to undertake spatial and other analyses. For example, Colomina provides
a fascinating analysis of Adolf Loos’s work and psyche as he designs for celebrated danseuse
Josephine Baker. Herein, he quite literally, through spatial strategies, objectifies the body and
imagines it as something to be put on display.16 Similar themes and issues are picked up by Alice
Friedman, who primarily discusses the marginalization of those women patrons who were at the
forefront of the Modernist movement, and commission architects like Mies Van der Rohe, Frank
Lloyd Wright, Thomas Reitveld and others for iconic works such as the Farnsworth House, la
Miniatura and the Schroder House.

Feminist-architectural historians have worked hard to bring the masculine and patriarchal over-
tones and sub-tones to light through analyses which have looked at issues of gaze, voyeurism,
appropriation and marginalization. Altogether, they make the following claims: 1.) Spaces are
gendered, 2) Spaces were/are gendered by architects who are male, or trained to think like males,
and thus, are masculine and 3.) Therefore, the discipline is Masculine. The question/s I would
place in conjunction with the above claims are 1) through what mechanism are spaces gendered?
2.) How do these mechanisms operate to reflect the male-ness of the architect and 3.) Where
and in what does the disciplinary identity of architecture lie? The reason these questions become
pertinent is that the normative method of feminist analyses, which examine spatial connotations,
gloss over the minute but important fact that architects do not directly produce ‘space’ (or the
built environment). However, they are responsible for producing representations, the myriad sets
of drawings and graphic media which are denotative of space, and connotative of a disciplinary

16 Part of Loos’s (unbuilt) design for Josephine Baker, involved placing a substantial glass-walled swimming pool at the centre of the
house such that in the event that Baker would swim, her floating body could be observed from lower levels through the glass walls, thus framing
her as an object for the audience’s (and most likely, Loos’s posits himself as the imaginary audience) consumption.
identity, the mechanism of which will to a large extent form the focus of this thesis.

At this point, it becomes interesting to examine the relationship between architectural representations and architectural identity, which is often used interchangeably with the Image of the architect\(^\text{17}\), but I retain a distinction between the two, for the former is an identity which I will show is gendered outside of sex-specificity.

The Modern period in architecture saw the evolution of the noble, gentleman architect and the honest truthful architectural drawing. In trying to reach the ideal of nobility and universality, both fixed their identity as frozen and hegemonic, and thus as masculine, since they derived this from the quality of being objective. Yet, neither one moved independent of the other. For architectural identity to have a qualitative underpinning, the architectural drawing had to provide a means of achieving it.

Anthropologist Edward Robbins looks at the architectural drawing as a cultural and social instrument employed by architects upon which their identity is hinged. According to him, though the exact methods of appropriation might differ, the drawing aids in the phenomenal representation of a conceptual practice, and therefore exists apriori to the act of building. In his investigation, he places the use of drawings as a carefully constructed moment in the history of architecture which allowed architecture as a discipline to separate and sever its bonds with craftwork. This separation allowed architects the chance to elevate themselves above the ‘labor’ connotations of craftwork. In his words, “Drawing is at once an idea and an act, an autonomous concept and a mode of social production.”\(^\text{18}\)

One the one hand, Robbins is correct in identifying the autonomy of drawings, the representational tactics of which flow independent of external realities of society, culture, economics and politics.

\(^{17}\) The image of the architect while often masculine, is slightly different. The best example I can provide to invoke this distinction if through Ayn Rand’s character, Howard Roark in The Fountainhead. Roark exemplifies machismo, driven by an unflinching idealism about modernism. While the image here is that of a man, the gendered identity of an architect is not predicated on the architect’s biological sex.

data. Contrary to Robbins, I would argue that drawings are borne out a strong socio-cultural understanding, but presented in a manner so as to obfuscate the same understanding, and this presentation is precisely that of universality and supposed objectivity, that was also embedded in the architectural imagination.

Despina Stratigakos, studying architects and the profession in early-modern Germany, illustrates how the architect was imagined (by Karl Scheffler) as a figure who pursued “a man’s supreme yearnings”19 and possessed “great, masculine qualities.”20 Karl Scheffler’s ideas (bordering on a rant) were a reaction to the entry of women into the discipline of architecture. His description, of the qualities possessed by an architect, was to actively assert that women did not share the same characteristics, and should be excluded from the profession. The actor (or instigator) was imagined to be a Man, who held the key to both the idea and the act as he was the one who was in search of something noble more creative, which would bring more civility to humanity. Both the idea and the act can be imagined to be contained or represented by the architectural drawings, as Robbins states.

Action here might have been understood as the act of designing/building, and thus advancing not just the profession but also the world. The lapse, though, in this scenario is that a sudden jump is made from the Idea to the Building. The possession of an idea by an architect who is necessarily male and not female, with the ability to translate and transcend, tinges the idea with masculine attributes, since it comes from a position of power. The masculinist Idea further finds its translation within the realm of the profession, and more importantly, the built environment which is expected to be rendered masculine by virtue of the Idea being imbued with masculine notions. This is a widely accepted notion, yet it is erroneous on the account that architects have no control over the actual built environment. Their moment of control is actualized and realized through architectural

20 Ibid., 148.
representations, an argument that historian Robin Evans supports.

Evans offers the view that the act of drawing premises itself on the perfect translation of an idea (ephemeral) into the built world, while still retaining its meaning. He derides this notion as being naïve, stating that “a suspension of critical disbelief is necessary in order to enable architects to perform their tasks at all.”

Comparing the process of architects with artists, he illustrates that the latter group, initial sketches notwithstanding, do physically engage with the work that they are producing. Architects on the other hand, produce representations, not buildings, and it is the act of representing that engages most of their attention and time. This calls into focus issues of distancing. It also complicates the argument offered by feminist scholars that architects gender the built environment. In taking away the control of the built environment, the only tool of where control can be exercised is on representations. Furthermore, Evans too argues for a measure of immanence to be accorded to drawings, which he views as facades upon which often-times meaning is forcefully projected by excavating through history, and other things, thus placing the drawing ahead, above or beyond some meaning that must exist.

Returning to his argument about the role of representation, exercised differently by architects and artists, he selects different versions of Pliny’s story of Dibutades tracing the shadow of her lover, as drawn by each group. The first version which is painted by artist David Allen in 1773 shows a young couple seated in a room full of shadows and darkness, save for the light from an oil lamp in the foreground that illuminates both of them. The man’s head is in profile, his back towards us, looking and holding onto his lover seated in his lap as she traces his silhouette on the wall. Her body is exposed to us, but her gaze turned away, looking intently at her lover as she supports his chin with one hand. The scene is intimate. Our presence there seems somewhat voyeuristic, as suggested both by the oval frame of the painting, and the candle in the foreground, which throws us into darkness. In contrast, the version painted by neo-classical architect Karl F. Schinkel in 1830...
is dramatically altered. It shows a group of people gathered around a rock (an empty white canvas), upon which a young man traces the silhouette of a woman. There is no suggestion of intimacy, as the woman has her back to the man, and another woman holds the first one’s head still. Young cherubic people and sheep look onto this act. The lighting is different: the oil lamp which cast shadows has been replaced by the Sun thus bathing the scene in bright, ubiquitous light. The angle of viewing this scene differs from the previous. Whereas in the former, our position seemed almost at eye-level, the second version elevates this eye-level to suggest an aerial view, not dissimilar to a plan. Evans does not offer the above analysis, in fact his reading of the two paintings, leans more towards theories of labor and differentiation. I, on the other hand, am piqued by a) the change in the ‘author’ from a woman to a man, b) the angle of viewing which suggests and omnipotence and c) a shift towards an ‘objective’ act of representation.

What colors representation as static and masculine? Dorothea Olkowski, employs a feminist lens to explain that within all walks of life, be it social, cultural, political or economic, representation allows for the creation and substantiation of the normative, on the basis of which all other things are judged. For example, ‘white’ has often been collated with good or pure. As a consequence, all that is not-white tends to become dirty, impure or sinful in varying degrees. Moreover, all that is not normative is thus a) inferior and b) forced to aspire towards the normative. These generalizations or norms are neither abstract nor particular enough to incorporate the notion of difference. Additionally, claims of hegemony which result from the above are often couched in the liberal language of individual rights. Olkowski states, “For liberalism, fixed and knowable truth guarantees the hierarchical order and grounds representation and truth.”

This is precisely where the problem with modern architectural representations starts to intensify: in their combined self-belief in both the universal (democratic) and the individual (the architect with the idea), drawings are oriented towards a ‘truth claim’ that helps establish a hegemonic order. This truth was accessed
by the architect who was a/the Man.\textsuperscript{23}

Ordered representation belittles and ignores anything which is ‘other’ to it, for it is forever and falsely, perpetuating itself as the “Same”. Gilles Deleuze explains,

“The Same discovered a unconditioned principle capable of setting up its rule within infinity; namely sufficient reason; and the Like found a condition by which it could be applied to the unlimited: namely convergence or continuity.”\textsuperscript{24}

The problem of the Same and the Like is perpetuated in architectural representations, both of which seems to aim towards the continuity of the idea, and in this case, it is an idea of masculinity arising from its own interwoven-ness with truth and universality, so that a structure or code remains rooted in place, and is not disrupted by difference, for it believes in its own purity, in its own ideal. Turning back once again to Deleuze, the World can be read in two ways, “One bids us to think of difference in terms of similarity, or a previous identity, while on the contrary, the other invites us to think of similarity or even identity as the product of a basic disparity. \textit{The first one is an exact definition of the world as icon. The second against the first, describes the world of simulacra."\textsuperscript{25} (My emphasis). This can lead to two interpretations. One, drawings are copies for they try to represent the (Platonic) Idea, which is a pristine entity and thus, of the greatest value. Second, the drawings are in fact also simulacra because they are attempting to simulate the idea, i.e. they do borrow certain properties from an idea, but the idea itself does not possess any concrete reality. As simulacra, they are actually images of a ‘substance’ that does not exist. Torn between copies and simulacra, drawings always aim towards transcendence.

Some part of the this nature of modern architectural drawings lies in their putative objectivity (which aims towards an veritable ideal, therefore, being transcendental). Dorothea Olkowski explains (using Catharine McKinnon’s argument) how the idea of objectivity itself is very problematic:

\textit{As a scientific stance, objectivity is justified by an epistemology with two}

\textsuperscript{23} Interestingly, as has now become common knowledge, the women who entered architecture, and moreover practiced it were seen as suspicious, with their identities as women coming under severe criticism. They were often deemed lesbian or hermaphrodites.


\textsuperscript{25} Ibid.,52.
primary characteristics: first, sufficient visual distance from what is viewed so that the viewer is no longer limited by “his” position as material beings; and second, aperspectivity so that the viewer can observe the world from no particular place or time, but rather from all places and times. In short, the observer presumes “he” is no longer part of the process and also assumes that “he” is essential to the object and not merely incidental to it.26

The belief that an entity contains within it properties that are objective or make it objective, produces a certain degree of homogeneity predicated on the entity’s replicability and reproducibility. Difference is actively occluded from such a closed-off system. Architectural representations are presented as 1) objectively copying the world and 2) the world itself being a objectively-codified substance. In other words, while making a design proposal in the form of an architectural drawing, the architect believes that what is being drawn is how the world is understood. There is a very subtle, but important, shift in the understanding of reality here. For example, examine Le Corbusier’s plan for Villa Sarabhai. Drawn almost towards the center of a borderless or margin-less sheet, it understands the context of the ‘building’ as being empty and clean upon which the ‘built’ object can be placed and erected. There are no lines of topography or even micro-site conditions which interfere with his drawing of a house as extending in north-south direction. Local conditions of the site, of the inhabitants are understood as differences which are extraneous to the design idea/concept and thus, are ‘logically’ and ‘objectively’ expelled.

In a field that is defined by its own visual bias, ideas often are tied to images.27 With regard to architecture, as I have argued before, it would be rather difficult to think of an idea or a concept without having the idea of architectural representations available to our mental faculties. Ronal Bogue argues that the perception of something visually, is an exercise in failure, as attention to an object comes to rest with the eye, which follows a line of attention, recognition and finally comparison. In doing so, the entity itself stops being dynamic, gets coded, and is subsequently lost.

The architectural plan is an example par excellence of this. Firstly, it creates a visual field which

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is necessarily distant; in fact it is an infinite distance. Hence, the angle at which it allows access
to itself is nearly impossible in real life, hovering as one does over it. This fact is in and of itself
interesting, for it places the creator of the drawing in a position not dissimilar to the creator of the
world, who has often been understood in many discourses as having been necessarily masculine.
This male position of creation obviates any subjectivity other than its own. Also, implicit in this
stance, is a notion of autonomy which by claiming the drawing to be putatively subject-less,
imbues it all the more with the subjectivity of the author. This causes the drawing to become more
so an authoritative tool of patriarchy. The idea of subjectivity is explored by Griselda Pollock
through her work on modernist women artists. She hypothesizes that modernity is a matter of
representation, and to understand the subjectivities that are brought to the forefront, it is important
to deconstruct the “masculine myths of modernism.” A discussion on this encompasses issues of
gaze and the male eye/I.

Thus, many authors argue that the image serves to capture and inscribe societal values, and one
can well imagine how an image is a projection of our own reflections. The problem arises when the
some images also work to create taxonomies and hierarchies that affect our perceptions of others,
thus serving to marginalize certain people and groups. For example, Oriental Art has often been
accused of creating the Orient and the Oriental, hence setting up a power-structure. The image,
which carried many values, is not an innocent medium. Similarly there is no such thing as an
innocent eye (E.H. Gombrich), as all ways of viewing are a product of our socialization. Thus, while
many might try ascribing purely denotative qualities to the architectural drawing, it is true that it
also works simultaneously as a connotative mechanism. The connotations associated with it are
not so much so the meanings projected upon it as most would ascribe, but rather connotations such
as truth, objectivity, translatability which comprise its singular narrative of Western Rationality.

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Figure 1.11: Mies van der Rohe, Ludwig, 1886-1969, *Brick Country House Project & Plan*, 1923. Image Courtesy: ArtStor
The Place of Narratives

The previous sections have sought to establish the link between architectural identity and the creation of the image in the form of architectural drawings. Architectural praxis work through insertion and subsequent deletion of narratives. The beginning steps of any architectural journey is the creating of a story or a concept, however, it is rare for these stories to be illustrated into the form of representation. Under these circumstances, it is important to gain an understanding of the intersection between narratives and representation, especially where it effects architectural drawings.

A point of departure for the discussion of narratives is discerning the difference between narration and narrativization. Narration occurs as an understanding borne out of issues of objectivity – it is a factual telling of incidents, it lacks the form of story-telling as it has no beginning, middle and end. Historiographies, which are narrations, are most identifiable in their need to narrate, but not to narrativize, i.e. incidents are placed in a chronological manner with a thread running through them that ties them together, but is not the same as telling a subjective-story. Narrativization, on the other hand, entails a view of the world, where a story is told. Thus, the difference is, quoting Hayden White, “between a discourse that openly adopts a perspective that looks out on the world and reports it and a discourse that feigns to make the world speak itself and speak itself as a story.”

Imagine this in the context of architectural drawings, and just for specificity’s sake, let us imagine it with context to a plan such as the one for the Brick Country House by Mies Van der Rohe. Does it narrate? Yes, but not in explicit ways. There is a meta-narration that it adheres to, that of being a plan which is translating an ideal or the value of for a reconfigured imagination of a home. It is also lays claim to the narrative of truth or of being factual. Moreover, as an ‘object’ unto itself, it does inherently lack the form of a story. When looking at the plan, the typical-analysis that one can subject it to, are those of the spaces it creates ( I would say that these are spaces on paper, though

30 Ibid., 7.
usual analyses treat it like ‘real’ space) or circulation patterns suggested or volumes depicted.

We can connotatively associate the aforementioned narratives with it, as I will show shortly through leaning upon Sonit Bafna’s thesis, but it does not have the structure of a beginning, middle and end. In and of itself, it an uni-dimensional entity which actually does not lend itself to any kind of movement ( it can be argued that we can read movement in it in terms of its connotative circulation but that is not the narrative that I am raising here). The plan does not have a story to tell, as it rests on obliterating these stories or narrativizations which initially inform it. Thus, a plan for a shelter for abused women, may conceptually be borne out of the narratives of the women, but for the architectural drawing to exist as a factual entity these narratives have to be removed from the drawing itself, denotatively and to a certain degree, connotatively as well.

To illustrate the narrative of architectural drawings in better detail, I lean upon the work of Sonit Bafna who examines these drawings of the Brick Country House by Mies Van der Rohe. Bafna endeavors to make a distinction between the imaginative and notational use of architectural drawings, wherein (borrowing from Nelson Goodman) he describes the former as an act where the drawing is suitably ambiguous enough to not actually describe referents (as a notational one might) but allow for a process which allows the ‘reader’ to derive a connotative understanding based on certain predetermined features. Essentially he argues that architects often instigate a collapse between the reading of the drawing and the experience of a space. This collapse if afforded by the connotative reading of the drawing, which becomes a depictive act of representation and an architectural work in its own right.

Using the example of the Brick Country House by Mies, Bafna illustrates how in spite of the actually paucity of information regarding the project, the project itself has come to occupy a central place in the discourse with many architectural theorists discussing and writing about it.

32 Sonit Bafna explains that the Brick Country House (1924) by Mies Van der Rohe was part of an entry for a competition, and was never meant to be actualized. In the absence of an actual built house, very little information survives about it. This basically comprises of two drawings (in the form of two negative prints) and a short statement by the architect.
What is remarkable though, as Bafna points out, is that these descriptions are fairly conjectural and blur the boundary between the drawing and the purported building, by making the leap as if the building itself was being experienced. He attributes this not to the actual physical accuracy of the drawings (in fact, the plan and the perspective drawing do not correspond accurately, and are most likely ‘fudged’), but instead to their purposeful ambiguity and depictive nature. For example, he states, “There are perceptual aspects of the Brick Country House (for instance, the de-centralizing quality that Colin Rowe writes of as experienced) that are only available through the drawings, not in the actual experience of the building,"33 thus making a case that our architectural experience is equally grounded in the perceiving and reading of drawings, as it is in the reading of experienced space. In fact architects often seem to confuse the two, and use them interchangeably. Through this claim, he argues that “representation is not an end in the making of an art work; it is the means by which the art is transfigured into an imaginatively engaging meaningful entity.”34

Bafna’s thesis can be employed as a springing point from which to establish that architectural representations have a singular narrative that focuses on teleology and a fixed temporality. I concur with his argument that representation is a means, and not the end. However, in the meaning/purpose ascribed to representations they always end up themselves configured as static, immutable entities, whose purpose is to act as a vehicle towards another goal. In the fact that they are only understood as mechanisms of translation or even imagination, their own narrative is curtailed. Thus, enabling theorists like Colin Rowe to derive information from a plan-drawing almost as if he was experiencing the actual building, but obviating any other kind of narrative that might be have had other implications on the drawing itself, such as the narrative of the client, the narrative of the socio-political-cultural climate within which such a project is imagined.

Teleologically, architectural drawings are fixed as moving towards the (imaginative) realization of a built form. In doing so, the only narrative it really is capable of is the one of the author’s process.

34 Ibid., 550.
Figure 1.12: Delacroix, Eugene. *The Women of Algiers* 1834. Image Courtesy: orientalist-art.co.uk
of translation of a creative idea into a form, depicted through the use of a graphic understanding that can only be accessed a select group of people. It for this precise reason that the universalized drawing-style of the Brick Country House can be used and replicated anywhere on the globe, without much of a concern for regional understanding. Additionally, due to the drawing always orienting itself future-wards or towards a telos, the temporality of the drawing is made static. Drawings such as these profess a degree of all-time and time-less-ness simultaneously. With the plan especially, it is rare for it to associate itself with any kind of calendrical time, though there might be some instances of depicting shadows alluding to day/night differences etc. Overall though, drawings align themselves with being atemporal, thus, attempting to rise above what might even seem like the mediocrities of the everyday. In doing so, they fall back upon their primary narrative of objectivity (though this is extremely debatable) and this defines their singular narrative.

Examining narratives in greater detail,

This distinction between discourse and narrative is of course based solely on an analysis of the grammatical features of two modes of discourse in which the “objectivity” of one and the “subjectivity” of the other are defined primarily by a “linguistic order of criteria.” The subjectivity of the discourse is given by the presence, explicit or implicit, of an “ego” who can be defined “only as the person who maintains the discourse.” By contrast, “the objectivity of narrative is defined by the absence of all reference to the narrator.” In the narrativizing discourse, then, we can say with Benveniste, “Truly there is no longer a narrator”. The events are chronologically recorded as they appear on the horizon of the story. Here no one speaks. The events seem to tell themselves.35

White flips the traditional subject/object divide as it relates to history/story on its head here, by arguing it is precisely the need of discourse to maintain itself as object and the author as impartial, that eventually renders its subjective. This is true of the discourse of architecture as well. The tools of the discipline are primarily drawings, not histories in the traditional sense, and thus, the whole impetus of the discipline lies in burying the narrativizations that could possibly be reflected in them, in lieu of a singular and meta-narrative that holds up the narrative of truth and universality.

of creativity and translations, of impartiality and objectivity. Though seemingly different claims, these are at their very core, the same narrative charted spatially and temporally.

The question arises: why should a singular narrative be problematic at all? The answer to this is intimately tied with questions of representation as tackled by post-colonial scholars, where issues of the structural divides between the object/subject, the normative and the other are brought into focus. For one, the subjectivity of the informant (understood in the largest possible sense) is negated in lieu of the architect and the disciplinary narrative. As Edward Said explains it, “There is very little consent to be found, for example, in the fact that Flaubert’s encounter with an Egyptian courtesan produced a widely influential model of the Oriental woman; she never spoke of herself, she never represented her emotions, presence or history. *He* spoke for her and represented her. *He was foreign, comparatively wealthy and male, and these were historical facts of domination*”36 (my emphasis). Said brings to light hegemonic structures inherent in the dissemination of information through representation in any given media. Architectural representations work much in the same way; the person representing (i.e. the Architect – ironically *foreign* to the problem, *wealthy* in terms of knowledge base and *male* through the disciplinary identity) inherently gains an immense power over the represented and the representation, as it is the author who gets to choose a form of representation and its content. This structure of power is especially pertinent when the issue is off representations of one culture by another culture. Architecture has quite effectively denied the happenstance of such an occurrence, and through its own alignment with the cause of the universal or the objective chosen to bring all its representations to the same common plane devoid of the concerns of the represented. An interesting example to bring to the table here might be from Le Corbusier’s sketches of the ‘Orient’. Taking up the example of his sketch of Algiers, Le Corbusier shows the land depicted as a voluptuous woman, thus exotifying it, yet, his architectural sketches reflect no such quirks, and go back to their universal, masculine language.

In fact the reach of universal, ‘truth-based’ form of representation is so far-spread that an architect

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from any other part of the world will use the same representational techniques, thus excluding their own cultural heritage from informing the representation, and imbuing it with other narratives, which are outside of the gamut of Western Modernity.

Chandra Talpade Mohanty discusses the denial of heterogeneity through issues of feminism. Mohanty’s argues that in spite of well-founded concern, western narratives by (western) feminists about the conditions of women in non-western parts of the world, actually work to create the ‘third-world’ women as a homogenous body, through a discursive colonization of their material and historical heterogeneities, highlights the importance of allowing various narratives to come to the fore. The same issues can be traced in architectural representation: through the appropriation and homogenization of the ‘other’ narratives, in order to create/ represent a singular narrative, a dominance and violence (of the kind where the other is silenced metaphorically) is exercised, wherein the only voice allowed to come through is the one of normativity.

Narratives are denied because they exist in the realm of the natural (subjective, feminine) but not in the realm of cultural (objective, masculine). They sit as odds with the disciplinary identity of architecture, and consequently, are subdued. Yet, if the primary task of architects is to create representations, then it becomes a matter of equality to bring these stories to the forefront. Thus, again, the issue becomes how does one bring back into the representation, the narrative of the represented? How does one mediate the ground between the various subjectivities at play on the battlefield of the white drawing sheet? To discern this, one needs to return to the drawing space itself, and look at alternative ways in which it has been understood, within the specific structure of the issue this thesis is trying to question.

The (Non)-White Space: Specific Narratives, Alternate Models

The discipline largely hinges itself on architectural drawings, and through the lack of narratives
From top-left clockwise,
Figure 1.13: Minnette De Silva, photograph scanned from “The Life and Work of a SouthAsian Woman Architect”
Figure 1.14: Inside cover of Minnette de Silva’s autobiography
Figure 1.15: A proposal drawing made by Minnette de Silva, scanned from “The Life and Work of a SouthAsian Woman Architect”
or stories outside of its own (unproclaimed but tacitly agreed upon) disciplinary meta-narrative, is ultimately rendered masculine. How would our representations change if the narratives of the client were to exist parallel with the representations of the design, instead of being an initial step somewhere in the teleological process?

The client in this case is Minnette de Silva (1915-1998), the first (trained) modernist woman architect from Sri Lanka. As the first South-Asian woman to receive a modernist training in architecture she becomes an unrecognized but important figure in South-Asian architectural history. In the late 1990s, she wrote her own autobiography. More precisely, the client is then the autobiography she pens which runs in the form of a chronicle\textsuperscript{37} i.e. a structure which aspires to a story or narrative, but fails to achieve it due to the lack of a narrative closure. A chronicle is also distinguished by its acknowledgment to the fact of its having an author (authority is an important characteristic), self-consciousness, and a marked morality all of which are evident in Minnette’s book. It is chronological i.e. placed along linear time, with many points on it, each of which aspire of tell a story that fits into a larger scheme, but literally and figuratively fails to achieve the larger narrative. This failure may be ascribed overtly to the fact that Minnette actually terminates the autobiography abruptly without coming to any kind of real end. In a chronicle, a larger plot is always implied but never attained, that is each one of the nodes on the chronicle are imagined to be there as moving towards an over-all conclusion which is itself never made explicit. The dichotomy between the implicit and the explicit haunts all of Minnette’s writing, which thus can be described as working on a text-subtext structure.\textsuperscript{38}

The task at hand is to ‘translate’ these stories, without actually losing their value, into representations that speak for themselves, thus, facilitating for the ‘client’ a voice.

The normative way of architectural representations, subsequently, tend to impede this more than encourage it. Examine, for example, how the drawing sheet is configured and imagined as a tabula

\textsuperscript{37} Narratives can be annals, chronicles and histories. For a further discussion on these see Hayden white
\textsuperscript{38} For a better understanding of Minnette, refer to Part:Contents_A_Minnenette’s Narrative.
Figure 1.16: Possible steps in painting of a section of the Kandyan scroll murals. Image Source: Author’s own.
rasa. Thought of as the site-world, it is a blank un-encoded Cartesian space, upon which the architect acts with all and complete authority. Its pure form is not sullied by the presence of any information, be it graphic or narratives. Every bit of it is mapped-out and conquered space, thus, even drawings that work upon existing site plans already have the information controlled to the degree that it is not in any real way in conflict with the ideas of the architect. The architectural drawing is ultimately a sanctified space which can only be entered by the architect, and thus, can only proffer a singular authoritarian narrative. The appropriation of the space and act of drawing is almost ritualistic in nature. If we move out of the domain of inaccessible architectural representations (at least as how we now know them) and into other forms of folk or accessible representations, we are introduced to structures which work primarily to communicate and disseminate narratives.

Take for example, traditional Kandyan representations, in the form of murals done on the walls of sacred and important spaces, done under royal patronage and popular during the Dutch-occupation of Sri Lanka. This art-form is governed by strict structural rules in terms of usage of color and the actual depictions, thus, obfuscating the need for ‘creativity’. Paintings are organized like continuous scrolls on the surfaces of the space. A brief analysis of this painting shows us that there was an elevation-like understanding of space, and perspective did not have much of a role to play in depictions. It was important to bring the characters of the narrative out in how they related to the space. Thus, we see a kingly figure seated in the sheltered pavilion like space of what is presumably a palace, judging by its grandiose rendering, and its invocation of various birds and beasts. It is also made evident through the slight platform upon which the palace stands, thus elevating him and his queens above the stature of the nobility and the kingdom. The latter is also suggested by the drawing of a river which separates the nobility from the common people, thus invoking the spatiality of a kingdom. The same character is drawn over and over again to show scenes from the narrative. It is not unlike imagining a roll of film within which each scene is framed. Narrating spatiality like this also affects the position of the spectator, whose experience of the narrative then
Figure 1.17: Lady preparing for lover miniature painting c. 1810 Punjab Hills, Guler, India. Image courtesy: ArtStor
becomes far more embodied, as s/he is forced to move with the narrative rather than stand in one spot and gauge the implications of the rendering.

Kangra is another school of art from India whose primary purpose is to tell a story, and often it is the same story which is depicted in a multitude of ways. It sits at a confluence of orthographic drawing, with hints of flattened-out perspective. The purpose of a Kangra painting, usually following a miniature style of painting, is to convey a narrative. Thus, different paintings may thematically follow the same story of a tryst between two lovers, often mediated/negotiated by the lady’s companion who forms the link between the private and the public sphere. Molly Aitken’s analysis of Kangra paintings suggests that the delineation of the space within the painting is very important. The lady/princess is often shown ‘locked’ (not literally) in the formal bounded space of the palace, which we as spectators/the lover are allowed a voyeuristic access through the framing of a window or even the drawing frame. There will usually be some kind of a built structure such as a pavilion, a jharokha or a platform which holds her in place. This in some ways is very familiar even in terms of the architectural drawing wherein the margin acts to hold a drawing within and hold the spectator without, allowing access but with some restrictions, thus setting up a series of hierarchies. The companion/s on the other hand are allowed far more flexibility. Apart from how their figures are illustrated in that they seem to have more movement, than the ‘frozen-in-profile’ lady, they are also seen being able to spill out the framing device in the painting. Additionally, in the absence of an actual drawn figure of the lover, we are posited in the same viewing structure as him. There will be indications through built elements that will act as a ‘lure’. For example: a series of steps might begin at the base of the painting, centered in the formal space, indicating a path we can traverse. Or alternatively, in a painting which shows the princess in a far more private nature, for example, of her taking a bath, we are blocked off from actual access to her by the illustration of low-set railing. Yet, she is covertly made accessible to the audience by additional frames within a frame, such as the holding up of a plain white sheet by the companions who form the background
Figure 1.18: Warli Painting from Maharashtra, India. Image Courtesy: ArtStor
to her mid-ground.

It seems that while still working with orthographic projections within a Cartesian space, in particular the elevation, this school of art provides an alternate model to our imagination of architectural drawings. The forms of representation discussed above are not devoid of their own codifications. A set of rules or canons govern the depiction of space and figures. The point of departure between these and architectural representations is that the degree of authorship changes due to the understood role of the painting as being configured to narrativize. To a large degree these are a form of architectural drawing, but they have not been stripped of the narratives that inform it. It clearly indicates that the reading of a space is a story and architecture is narrated.

The representational form that has the most implication on this particular thesis though is the folk art form of the Warlis. 39 Though Neolithic, in many ways, it intersects brilliantly with the structure of architectural drawings, through its invocation of strategies which may be understood as plans, elevation, sections, or even a hybrid of all of these. It is a ritualistic form of art, but concerned more with the depiction of the multiple and simultaneous narratives that take place within a community, rather than a narrative with explicitly moral or ethical implications. It is not an instructive form of art (it cannot technically be understood as religious iconography), but is more a celebration of living and life, as understood through stories. What is interesting about Warli art, beyond its depiction of multiple-narratives, is its multi-temporal nature. Thus, unlike architectural representations which are always frozen within one temporal moment (if at all), Warli art shows the changing times and characteristics of the life. 40 Using strategies of monochrome, repetition, multiple foci, undifferentiated space, and others, this form of representation seeks to exhibit the life-world of a community, and thus forms a strategy for this thesis.

39 For a further discussion on Warli representations, see Part:Content_B_Warli Art
40 An architectural drawing is usually atemporal. It does not refer to time either in the form an annual calendar or seasons or lived experiences in terms of movements in any overt and easily accessible manner. Time in plans or sections or elevations if often entirely connotative. At times small concessions are made to show shadows, or a rendering of a night-view ( plans and sections almost never show this), but this time shown is static time. It could be true for any part of the week, month, year, decade etc. This is tied to the universality-claim of the drawing.
Conclusion

There is an impasse presented, but rarely, discussed in the appropriation of architectural drawings as the very tool upon which the disciplinary identity is hinged. The problem that underlies most if not all architectural representations in the form of orthographic drawings or even perspectival drawings is that through their denial of other narratives, and their firm adherence to the myth of being a vehicle for the translation of an idea into a building, through putatively objective and factual mechanisms, they are actually rendered masculine and hegemonic. This thesis attempts to explore methods of design as evidenced through representations, which borrow an understanding from other forms of representation, to illustrate the specific narratives of Minnette de Silva towards an exhibition-as-form-as-exhibition-as-representation.41

41  For the specifics of the site, see Part:Content_C_Site Narratives
I have previously raised the question as to how can architectural drawings become more inclusive of narratives so as to ameliorate their otherwise masculine nature. In order to investigate this question, I have sought to translate Minnette de Silva’s narratives to inform an architectural design, and most importantly, the representations of that architectural design.

The design project has been understood as a metaphor for the very book, Minnette’s autobiography (The Life and Work of a South Asian Woman Architect), it attempts to represent. There are two ways in which linearity in the book is understood. In the first instance, as the physical structure of the book, and thus, different elements of the design ‘follow’ the other. This is informed by the chronicle-like nature of the book, which also forms the second instance of linearity, wherein sequences are meant to be read in a chronological order. However, there is counter to this ‘conducted’ experience which is the act of infiltration or trespassing that occurs when the reader ‘cheats’ and ‘enters’ the book at any point. While infiltration is entirely possible, it precludes the reader from achieving a holistic understanding of the narrative. Yet, interpretations are possible either way.

The textual division is understood by a division of movement in the design. In keeping with the book, a split occurs wherein the book is divided into the (subjective) life and the (objective) works, thus, encouraging a physical split in the design. While the skeleton (in the form of pages) of the book remains the same, the content changes. Thus, in the design, each of the plates which stand for temporal periods in Minnette’s life retain their basic form (of a plate) and material (concrete), their constitution changes over from being a monolith to a lattice. Visibility, and the lack thereof, is played with to question the notions of objectivity/subjectivity. The relationship between solid/void, interior/exterior, and ‘in-between’ to structure the distances and placement of the plates, where the inhabitable plates, become thresholds or events preceding a thematic section.

In the design, and moreover, the representations the idea is to view and experience, through a slow reading. Rather than use orthographic drawings, I have employed a combination of axonometric drawings and Warli paintings. The goal is to use the latter to corrupt the putative objectivity of the former. Due to the absolute lack of structural similarity between the two, they have been
put together to create a tension, yet tell a story. Strategies of repetition and scaling have been employed as the means to this end. In the very act of denying me the tabula rasa of the white sheet many possibilities open up. Hence, simultaneity is enforced upon the act of creating the red background which erodes the supposed white foreground of the axonometric drawing. Further, focus is redirected from the elements of the architectural drawings by attaching to it and pulling from it, representations which address the narratives embedded therein. Similar drawings repeat with mutations, which necessitate an involved and subjective reading.

Thus, the drawings shown here are attempts to counter the hegemony of normative architectural drawings, which profess to capture an objective reality. These drawings, instead, strive to be more democratic by being more subjective, inclusive and narrativizing.
Illustration 1: The architectural drawing, since it’s inception, has professed a linearity hinged upon the translation of an idea into a building through an orthographic drawing. This, however, imbues the projection with a hegemonic stance, which is masculine.
Illustration 2: Given the critical appraisal of normative methods of representation within Architecture, which follow more from a Western Perspective, this project attempts to blend multiple representational tools. Two, which find the most prominence are axonometric drawings and Warli art forms, each of which attempt to infiltrate the other by strategies of orthographic projections, scaling and repetition.
Illustration 4: Czaee Malpani, *Minnette: Section 2- Adolescence*, 2010, Paint on Paper, 12”x 8”. Property of Author

Illustration 5: Czaee Malpani, *Minnette: Section 2- Adolescence*, 2010, Paint on Paper, 12”x 8”. Property of Author
Illustration 6: Czaee Malpani, Minnette: Section 3- Indian Sojourn, 2010, Paint on Paper, 12”x18”. Property of Author
Illustration 7: Czaee Malpani, *Minnette: Section 4- Time in London*, 2010, Paint on Paper, 12”x18”. Property of Author
Illustration 8: Czace Malpuri, Minnette: Section 5 - Works, 2010, Paint on Paper, 24”x18”. Property of Author
Illustration 9: Site Diagram.
Illustration 10: The sections of Minnette’s autobiography are used to form the program of the exhibition.
In the first iteration, the representation is imagined to present the design strategies alongside and at par with the narratives that inform it. Thus, the five thematic sections are narrated visually to correspond to the five sections in the design.

The design is collapsed with the book. Reading of the book provided for a linear experience, punctuated by events in the form of chronicles. Themes become evident upon traversing sections.

However, one kind of narrative (Minnette’s, for example) can not exist independent of the narrative of the site, of the intended audience (both real and imagined), of representation, and of the author.

The intent of the design is the intent of the representation, and thus, a slow reading is not only invited, but encouraged. Signs and icons, as always, are open to interpretation. For example, the horse-figure, with a five-headed figure atop it represents the Warli God of Death, yet, the reader may be able to draw out other stories.
In keeping with the five thematic sections in Minnette’s book, the design is envisaged as the traversing of the book. Five sections: Identity, Adolescence, Indian Sojourn, Time in London, and Works are explored by the placement of concrete plates to create conditions of solid/void, light/shade, sound/quiet to bring out the various phases in Minnette’s Life.

* The figure of the horse with a deity seated on it represents the God of Death as per Warli representations

Illustration 12: Identity and Adolescence sections of The Story/Book of Minnette in Built Form, 2011.

The first and second sections, with which the autobiography begins, are shown in the illustration here.
The third and fourth sections pertaining to the Indian Sojourn and the Time in London are shown here. The two phases helped develop Minnette’s architectural identity.

Illustration 13: Zoomed in section of *The Story/Book of Minnette in Built Form*
The last section of Minnette’s book contains a chronological documentation of all her works, and ends with the death of her mother.

Illustration 14: *Works section of The Story/Book of Minnette in Built Form*
The stories of the site form a part of the narrative of the design, thus, moving towards a multiplicity of simultaneous narratives.

Illustration 15: Zoomed in section of *The Story/Book of Minnette in Built Form*
Changes to the design form a part of the narrative of the representation through repetition. Thus, with each iteration more of the story is added to the drawing. Yet, to understand parts of one story, it is important to connect it to parts of the other. No story exists in isolation.

As with the previous version, the five themes are maintained, though each theme is preceded by a threshold condition where the threshold plate becomes inhabitable. Reading the book/design is understood through two ways: conducted experience (the act of reading the book from cover to cover) and infiltration (slippage between pages). Interpreted, the two are separated vertically. The split in the book (the life and the work) is understood by a shift in trajectory and formal aspects of the plate. The first and last (not shown here) plates function as covers, concealing this split. The section on Works, sits atop a submerged repository (not shown here), the surface of which is etched with skylights in the form of Minnette’s drawings.

Illustration 17: New panel added to initial work. The Story/Book of Minnette in Built Form Iteration 2
As with the previous version, the five themes are maintained, though each theme is preceded by a threshold conditions where the threshold plate becomes inhabitable. Reading the book/design is understood through two ways: conducted experience (the act of reading the book from cover to cover) and infiltration (slippage between pages). Interpreted, the two are separated vertically. The split in the book (the life and the work) is understood by a shift in trajectory and for mal aspects of the plate. The first and last (not shown here) plates function as covers, concealing this split. The section on Works, sits atop a submerged repository (not shown here), the surface of which is etched with skylights in the form of Minnette's drawings.

Illustration 18: Zoomed in section of *The Story/Book of Minnette in Built Form Iteration 2*
The second section on Adolescence is shown here.

Illustration 19: Zoomed in section of *The Story/Book of Minnette in Built Form Iteration 2*
The third and fourth sections of India and London are shown here, as well, as the textual (and imagined) manner in which Minnette splits her life.

Illustration 20: Zoomed in section of The Story/Book of Minnette in Built Form Iteration 2
Repetition plays a role in the design itself. Her works seem to form the ‘objective’ section of her book, but due to the contested ground that the idea of objectivity sits upon, these plates work as perforated filters. The plinth, which is looked down upon, as a plan has representations of her work (not shown here).

Illustration 21: Zoomed in section of *The Story/Book of Minnette in Built Form Iteration 2*
Illustration 21: Lattice Pattern for each panel in the Works section of The Story/Book of Minnette in Built Form Iteration 2
Illustration 22: Zoomed in section of the representation of the repository in *The Story/Book of Minnette in Built Form Iteration 2*
Illustration 23: Views of the design/book. Top: Representation Conducted Movement, Middle and Bottom: Infiltratons
content
Minnette’s Narrative

Minnette de Silva (1918-1998), was born into a prominent Ceylonese reformist family, and was one of the first women from the South Asian subcontinent to be formally trained as an architect. She, therefore, occupies a very central position not only in the history of the profession in the sub-continent. Her narrative in particular, pulls together issues of Modernity, gender and post-coloniality. Her modernist training was in keeping with her unusual upbringing, and many facets of this are brought forth through her autobiography, “The Life and Work of a South Asian Woman Architect.” In spite of the recognition she received during her practice, and the extremely prominent social network she associated and moved in, today, there remain very few records of her, one of which is her autobiography. The autobiography, which she started writing a few years before her demise, was possibly imagined as two volumes. The first volume covers Minnette’s life from her birth to 1965- the year of her Mother’s death, with a promise to pick up the remaining half of her life in the next volume. However, the second volume was never published, thus leaving us more so with her formative years.

Before actually examining the stories contained within the book, it is important to get a sense of the structure and form of the narrative that Minnette is trying to bring forth. The book, as many others, can be examined through the writing of text, and the placing of images, which too is a kind of writing. The languages of both come together to give a comprehensive order to the work. With the text especially, a chronological ordering of events is followed. Images supplement the text, thought often they might break away from that chronology to capture a feeling, a phase or a mood, rather than attempting a strict and factual correspondence. Internal divisions work in the form of events. Though the table of contents lists them as chapters, they are not chapters in
Figure 2.1: Tracing Identity: Composite of Images taken from De Silva, Minnette. *The Life and Work of an Asian Woman Architect*. Colombo: GEDSands Press, 1998, 1
the truest sense of the word, as they seem to move more from event to event, where each one of these markers is a personal marker in Minnette’s life. Perhaps, the only portion to actually act as a chapter is the first thirty pages of the book, which introduce the audience to Sri Lanka’s geography, history, and cultural artifacts. This section has been written by Minnette’s sister, though Minnette’s involvement in it is implied.

While working with this kind of event-based movement within the book, I have sought to divide the writings (including the images) into 5 broad sections based on a thematic grouping. Tracing Identity, Adolescence, the Indian Sojourn, the Time in London, and Works. The text of her narrative, simultaneously also presents a sub-text, issues that are hinted at, thoughts and feelings that are left suitably ambiguous. Thus, I also provide simultaneously (through conjecture) the writing between the lines. The idea of a sub-text comes in part also from her architectural drawings, which can be broken into multiple layers, each layer being connotative of a different side of Minnette’s identity which was tempered and made ambivalent by her identity as a woman, a south-Asian, a colonial subject, a post-colonial subject, a modernist, and an architect amongst others.

Tracing Identity

Following introductions and acknowledgement, Minnette begins her journey by establishing the history and identity of Sri Lanka. This particular section in the book has been written by her sister Anil De Silva-Vigier, with the initial page showing the development of Sinhala writing in Sri Lanka from the 3rd century BC to the 20th Century AD. Following this, a general history of Sri Lanka is mapped out, by tying it to various markers in history. For example, Anil discusses the epic of Ramayana wherein the demon God Ravana abducts princess Sita and brings her to Sri Lanka. Interestingly, the epic has been compared to the Trojan Wars. She describes Sri Lanka as having provided inspiration to many ancients travelers, and having welcomed people from Greece, Ethiopia, Arabia, China to name a few. The Arabs named the island Serendib, which is the root of

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the word serendipity.

In describing the geography of the island, with its central mountain, Anil describes the first map of Sri Lanka which was drawn up in the 1st century AD. The mountain was associated with all kinds of religious belief. To the Christians, it was the peak upon which Adam and Eve landed upon their eviction from the Garden of Eden. To the Buddhists, and Sinhalese it was contained the footprint of Buddha. She also uses this understanding of the mythic associations to dwell upon the traditionally religiously tolerant nature of the people of Sri Lanka, given the various streams of culture and beliefs that have made its way to Sri Lanka. Aryan invaders from Northern India were one of the first few to arrive in the 5th century BC, to the island which was inhabited by an ‘aboriginal people called Veddhas.”2 This led to the growth of a Sinhalese culture, borned out of languages such as Pali and Sanskrit. Approximately two centuries later, Buddhism arrived to the country through the representatives of King Ashok (India) who following a blood-soaked annexing of (then) India, became an avowed Buddhist. Anil suggests that the history of the country is very intimately tied with its subconscious ideals, and its arts and craft.

At this juncture, and slightly abruptly, Anil introduces the “greatest monuments bequeathed to the Sinhalese people”3- water tanks, which have always occupied a central position in any kind of Sri Lankan settlement, range in size from small ponds to great engineering lakes, and are associated with many myths. She attributes their presence to the great engineering marvels that have always existed in the country through its various craftspeople, engineers and architects, who have built “the cultural heritage of the people of Sri Lanka.”4

Anil returns briefly to the social and political history of the country, describing in some detail the main center such as Anuraddhapura and Sigiriya. She does this almost with an architectural

3  Ibid, 1.
4  Ibid.
intent, as she outlines their art and built heritage. Accompanying the texts are many architectural photographs of the locations described. To ground Minnette’s narrative in the larger history, Anil writes a section on Kandy, the hill-city to which they both belonged. The history of Kandy comes into prominence during the third major phase of the country’s history. Over a succession of time, Kandy was occupied by the Portuguese (16th century), the Dutch (17th Century AD) and finally, by the British until 1947, the year of Sri Lankan Independence. The last four centuries saw the development of a strongly European culture, with many people being forced to convert to Christianity, though Anil does maintain that the mingling of people enabled a pluralistic society. She describes the art, crafts and architecture as belonging to the last phase of Sinhalese architecture, vestiges of which still influence the daily lives of the people whether as lived traditions or built artifacts. In this space, Minnette is described as absorbing her country’s traditions. Accompanying this are images of traditional architectural forms as well as the strongly colonial influences.

The importance of this section lies in Minnette’s need to frame herself in a larger historical and social context. Typically, a personal autobiography need not start with the history of a whole country, however, she chooses to do so from the point of view of Sri Lanka’s identity often being subsumed under other identities (analogous with her own?). In many ways, this might be a move typical of a post-colonial subject, searching for and establishing roots. There is almost a need to validate her own history by tying it up to a larger context which then serves as a reference and a frame work, and allows for Sri Lanka’s (and by extension her own) narrative to stretch back into time. It is thus rendered legitimate through its own situated-ness in linear, historical time. For example, Anil (and Minnette as well since she acts as the editor for this book) compares a section of the epic of Ramayana to the Trojan war. This little analogy may usually go unnoticed, however, it is pertinent as by using an already established and extremely Western marker in history, a link is forged between the two separate narratives. Would she have felt the same need to delineate her context had she been from a ‘Western’ country? Who does she imagine as the intended audience of
her discussion? Quite possibly, an audience not from Sri Lanka, or perhaps even India, for many of explanations otherwise might have been taken as granted.

Why would a discussion of the different religious and cultural leanings of the people of Sri Lanka seem important? It is, because, Minnette’s narrative will ensue tempered by this. She never quite specifies her own religious leanings, though her parents practiced Christianity. Moreover, the discussion is important to her, as she is a modern secular subject who wishes to look at all religions equally.

Another remarkable thing about the introduction is the stress laid upon the architecture of Sri Lanka. Ostensibly, again this is done with the intent of placing Minnette within her context, and hinting at the larger influences upon her work. On the other hand, the use of an architectural background also hints a lot at the way Minnette understood her own modernity as affected by architecture. For her, and Anil, steeped as they were in art and architecture, the comprehension of a place depended equally on the built environment of it. Thus, a description of the different architectural styles and periods is invoked, based quite ‘modernly’ on a linear time, whereas quite possibly indigenous building practices were taking place simultaneously with buildings in the colonial or modern style not just before but much after Minnette’s arrival on the architectural scene. Of course a concession is made to the simultaneity of this via the subject of crafts, but architecture does not find the same mention. The photographs for instance are mostly of historic sites, details from stonework or other kinds of craft work, and an occasional map. There is a sole image by Henri- Cartier Bresson that shows the every-day life around Sri Lanka, and another one of the Queen of Kandy which step away from a laying out of the built heritage of Sri Lanka.

To recapitulate, the purpose of this section is mainly to set the grounds for Minnette’s identity, to ground it in history, which having ‘occurred’ must be laid out more-or-less chronologically.

Structurally, the section is laid out thematically under an umbrella of linear time. Thus beginning
with the mention of Sri Lanka in a mythic manner, to earliest travelers and ending in (recent) colonial times. Its structure, thus, is fairly similar to any typical survey-book, which assumes a beginning and an end, in which things happen one after another, rather than occurring simultaneously.

The over-riding emotions here might be interpreted as a sense of pride in the country, mingled with a deep sense of insecurity about not being recognized.

**Adolescence**

The first page of the section, where Minnette begins to write her own story, opens-up with a photograph by the famous Henri Cartier-Bresson, who would remain a close family friend throughout her life. The aerial image of Kandy shows up a colonial settlement, sitting on the bank of a lake, bathed in sunlight, and hills shrouded in mist form the backdrop. Though not indicated in this image, Minnette’s childhood home sat on the hill, and from here she narrates her family history, starting with her home which followed Italian influences.

Minnette’s father, George E. de Silva, came from a modest family. While penning his own autobiography, he describes his father as having been an erudite scholar, an ayurvedic medical practitioner and a Buddhist, who came to settle in the town of Nuwara Eliya quite by chance. Though George grew up learning Sanskrit and Sinhalese, he voluntarily converted to Christianity at the age of 12. Initially uninterested in pursuing any education, through conversations with friends and other patrons, he found himself in Colombo pursuing an education in Law alongside running a small vegetable shop. He not only managed to establish himself as a lawyer, but also came in contact with some of the influential people of that period who took great interest in him. During this period, he met Agnes Nell, and went on to marry her (1908), in spite of many class and caste differences between the two families, as he was “a poor unknown lawyer” and she “a

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5 An indigenous form of medicine.
6 Ibid. 24.
Figure 2.2: Adolescence: Composite of Images taken from De Silva, Minnette. *The Life and Work of an Asian Woman Architect*. Colombo: GEDSands Press, 1998, 1
beautiful aristocratic Burgher." This was an extremely progressive act to carry out, and it reflected in how both George and Agnes chose to live their lives. Both would go on to become nationally recognized reformists who worked with issues of emancipation for wage laborers and women.

In 1910, George and Agnes, accompanied by their 3 children: Marcia (Anil), George and Fred moved into St. Georges, there house atop the hill in Kandy. This is the place Minnette would call home till the end of her days.

What is perhaps most poignant about this section is the socio-political climate that the Silva family was immersed in. Minnette places old family photographs of her parents visiting important historic sites, side-by-side with descriptions of the riots of 1915 which prompted her father to join the Ceylon National Congress, affiliated with the Indian National Congress, both of which were pressing for autonomy from the British Government. In 1918, her father was elected to the Kandy Municipal Council, and worked tirelessly for the economically challenged and the betterment of the city. The years that followed were extremely charged in both Sri Lankan and Indian History due to the on-going freedom struggle. In many ways, this brought many prominent personalities from both nations in close contact together over a common cause. Thus, growing up Minnette welcomed as guests to their home some of the most important luminaries, such as Sarojini Naidu, Ramsey Mcdonald, and Kasturba and Mahatama Gandhi. She saw them not just as extremely important people, but also gained glimpses into their personal lives. For example, describing her mother’s encounter with Kasturba Gandhi, she writes,

It was typical of my mother’s concern for others that she realized Kasturba Gandhi was rarely noticed or considered when accompanying her husband. She took her for a drive along the river where she saw elephants bathing. Kasturba Gandhi cried like a child. My mother thought she had committed a faux pas and asked what was wrong. No one, she told my mother, had ever taken her for a drive before.  

With this anecdote, Minnette starts discussing her mother and fleshing out her experiences as an

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7 Ibid.,24.
8 Ibid.,31.
advocated for women’s right. Though she doesn’t discuss her mother’s history in any particularly
great detail, she reproduces a section of an article written her mother for the Suffragette Movement
in Ceylon. It is through her mother, though, that Minnette develops a love and concern for the Arts
and Craft of Sri Lanka and “these traditions are reflected in my later work as an architect.”9 Both
Agnes and Minnette were extremely influenced by the writings of Ananda Coomaraswamy, and
the former especially set out to “rescue and resuscitate the arts and craft”10, a value Minnette would
imbibe. To substantiate their interest in the same, she reproduces a section of the catalogue from
the Exhibition of Arts and Craft (1906) describing through pictures and text the various forms of it.

Under a section titled ‘Growing up in My Parents’ World of Political and Cultural “Blow-ups’”,
Minnette describes her childhood. Sent to a boarding school at the age of seven, she initially loved
the experience, but then grew increasingly isolated due to her lack of interest in gossiping about
boys. She attributes this to growing up with three brothers, who during their typical child-hood
games would assign her house-keeping roles.

In the late 1920s, Minnette and her sister Marcia travelled with their parents to Europe, where the
latter were to attend a conference on Adult Suffrage and Suffrage for Women in England (1928).
Minnette recounts her memories of tea of the river terrace of the Parliament house, travelling via
boat to Marseille and then Paris, and gazing out from the window across from the Opera Houe
(Paris), as well as sight-seeing in the city, though she isn’t sure whether her memories are actually
from a time later on. Breaking off from her memories, she switchers to describing all the work
her parents had taken-on and the impact it had in Sri Lanka. Accompanying this are two pages of
photographs showing her father with various dignitaries at many conferences. Post this, Minnette
reverts back to the story of her education. During the visit to Europe, it was decided that she would
remain behind and attend St. Mary’s at Brighton (Britain) under the guidance of her great-aunt.
She describes this decision as changing her life irrevocably. At school, she soon became a non-

9  Ibid., 33.
10  Ibid., 33
conformist, calling herself “a sports-loving, prankish, girlish version of the current schoolboys.”

Here she attended classes with Elsie Fogerty at the Central School of Drama, and retained a lifelong affection for this art-form which she found closely allied with architecture.

In the 1930s, owing to a financial crisis, Minnette was pulled out of school and called back home. Though she doesn’t describe her feelings regarding this, she does mention an anecdote from her journey home where for the first time she felt “othered”. At home, she joined the local school, but had to drop out of that as well, to look after her mother who fell ill with rheumatoid arthritis. After her mother’s recovery, no one insisted that Minnette return to school, and though she had a tutor, she self-educated herself through time spent at the various libraries around Kandy, reading books and listening to western classical music. Through this, she also describes the social and cultural environment of Sri Lanka, where Victorian convention still ruled.

The independence efforts were still making ground, and Minnette’s parents were actively involved. In 1931, Jawaharlal Nehru (he would become the first prime-minister of independent India in 1947) visited with his family and entourage. During this time, Minnette grew close to his daughter Indira (later, India’s first female prime-minister) though this closeness was short-lived.

Simultaneously, the de Silva family also grew close to the foremost modernist artists from Sri Lanka: David Paynter and George Keyt. The latter would remain a close friend, and strong influence on Minnette through-out her upbringing and even on her professional life. As a young teenager, she describes her escapades along with her sister, in the world of theatre and Art, reproducing newspaper clippings and programmes from a particular act. Given, that the de Silvas were an extremely prominent family, there were many public references to them, including Cedric Belfrage’s book ‘Away from it All’ which describes their lives under different names.

Minnette concludes this section with the a small paragraph about Anil (Marcia) and her English

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11 Ibid., 39
husband, who introduced her to poetry, and unfortunately drowned during active duty in the Navy.

She ends with an excerpt from Yeats.

As Hayden White would claim, a narrative is constructed as much through what is omitted, as what is included. The representation becomes a delicate balance of presence and absence in Minnette’s story, and this comes out keenly in the section on her adolescence.

The family structure she grows up in is in parts tradition, modern and rather elite. Her life by no means was an ordinary life, and from an early stage she was in constant contact with dignitaries, luminaries and the who-is-who from the world of politics and the arts. She belongs to an illustrious family which affords her many opportunities, though she never directly puts this on paper, instead attributing many an event in her life to solely to happenchance or her own agency. Meeting with all these people had a huge impact in her life, and every personal anecdote is tinged with the privileged life that she led without quite realizing it.

An interesting relationship is set up in the cosmos of her own home. She seems to be in awe of her parents, though her relationship with her mother might have been more complicated. This is noticeable in the time she spends fleshing out her father’s history, but relegates her mother to a page at the most, of which the better part is taken from an article. It is not that Minnette does not include her mother in her stories and narrations, yet the inclusion is not very expansive, and once or twice takes on a slightly bitter tone as well. Her siblings, specially her brothers, do not find much mention outside of the one anecdote where they expected her to keep house during their childhood games. Her annoyance at this also hints at the beginnings of the shortcomings she might have experienced being a woman, and a somewhat diluted feminist bent. This is seen again in her isolation from other girls her age at her refusal to partake in gossiping about boys. The feminist (though neither overt nor stated) is in many ways not surprising given her mother’s work for suffragettes. At the same time, her mother also was at the center of their household. Thus,
Minnette’s gendered identity is rather complicated.

The influence of her parents is also clear in the family’s great concern for the arts and craft. During the late and post-colonial period, the elite of many countries set out to re-discover and re-instate their own heritage. Trained though by the very people they were trying to oust, there were times when their projects even bordered on auto-orientalizing. The aspect of auto-orientalizing with respect to art/architecture is not apparent in Minnette’s narration, there certainly is an over-riding concern for the local culture and history, which is her own words, needed ‘resuscitating’. Though well-founded this concern was also somewhat one sided, since (similar to architecture) it treats events as happening in a linear fashion and ignores the simultaneity of the crafts. This ideology was deeply embedded in her mind, and admittedly informed her work as an architect. Yet, at the same time, unbeknownst to her, there were many other influences growing-up which shaped not only the direction she chose in terms of a career, but how her sensibilities were tuned towards that practice and profession.

The instance of privilege and also an understanding from an early age of being a ‘global’ citizen (and a Modern subject) is also apparent through Minnette’s early exposure to a European lifestyle not just at home, but also in her being educated in Britain. This marked a not only an early enamoring with Europe, but also a subjectivity which was shaped to a great extent by English practices and understanding. Minnette describes herself as being a non-conformist and a rebel from the start, but it is worth speculating whether this might also be a post-facto rationalization in tune with her identity as an architect, which in her view, was equally non-conformist. Moreover, her description tries to capture her in the framework of being closer to the arch-typical English school boys (found in many a colonial boarding school tales). Again, this might also be a post-facto identity establishing mechanism, so as to fit in better with the disciplinary gendered identity of architecture (as a praxis) which she would go on the imbibe.
An interesting moment in this section is the story regarding her journey back home to Ceylon, after having to quit school unexpectedly owing to the financial crisis at home. Young Minnette travelled aboard a ship to Ceylon. Here she became close friends with a couple of English school children, who alienated her upon reaching their destination, both physically and emotionally distancing themselves from her. Though annoyed, hurt and confused by this encounter, Minnette does not describe it as ‘othering’ and marginalization. She faced the effects of colonialism in a obvious way, but resists classifying it as such. This is true for most of the narrative in the book. She mentions instances of orientalization (which she does not seem averse to), but never talks about any instances of marginalization she might have faced as a native of the colonies while at school or later, during her post-graduate studies. In some ways, this does show that she was quite comfortable with her own identity as a colonial subject, especially since she was in the special circumstance where this position came with a certain degree of power and privilege, even in times of financial instability.

The structure of this section is, like the one before, largely follows a chronological order. Within this order, sub-sections get divided according to subjects moving from the history of the house, onto the history of her father and mother, segueing often into other relatives who were off some national or local importance. If the narrative could be categorized into degrees of intimacy where a story about herself would be the most personal, then narratives often jumps from being most, to mid, to least where the mid-personal are stories about the family and the least being those about events that were shaping both personal and impersonal histories. Minnette’s stories often migrating between these. An account is not provided for each and every year, but more so for significant events in her life, which she watched as a participant (such as Gandhi or Nehru’s visit to their home) or as an involved observer. Sometimes, the narrative may not even follow a logical order. For example: a discussion/character sketch of her father is followed by discussions on the Ceylon National Congress, Donoughmore Commission, Sinhala-Tamil relations, Mahatma Gandhi, before providing a character sketch of her mother, which is followed by a sub-section on the Arts and
Craft. This does hint at subjects that she (in a very gendered manner) explicitly associates with each of her parents: father-politics, mother-crafts, though each was equally involved in the other.

Also throughout this section, text is treated on par with images, with the text never formally taking up more than half the page, and in many instances the pages actually might be composed entirely of images. The choice of images is eclectic, at times supportive of the text, they are often a jumble of memories: people and faces that might have crossed her trajectory, letters written to or about her, pages from books that might have held some value, clippings from newspapers and magazine concerning the family, event programs, paintings and even invitation cards. In fact, if one follows the images devoid of the text, there are instances where they break away from the chronological order. The photographs, of which are many, often take precedence over the text itself. This hints at the proclivity towards the visual, which if often something modern architecture was accused off. For this reason, the photo-essay which attempts to move parallel with the writing, might be interrupted by a photograph of elephants bathing by Henri-Cartier Bresson. On the surface of it this might seem anything from nonchalant to incongruous, but it needs to be seen in the light of the dependency on the visuals and also the remarkable life that Minnette led where significant people just formed a part of her everyday life.

It is through this section that one sees the development of Minnette’s character emotionally. As the youngest of five children, she looks up to her parents who along with Anil have the most significant impact on her. Sibling rivalry, and a fierce determination to prove and channel her own independent nature makes for the most important sub-text here. The journey from childhood to adolescence is fraught with trials and triumphs, frustrations, dislocations and simultaneous jubilations.

**The Bombay Sojourn**

Minnette states that she was interested in architecture since childhood, and her desire to pursue it as a profession, was triggered by Mr. Oliver Weerasinghe, a town planner acquaintance of her
Figure 2.3: The Indian Sojourn: Composite of Images taken from De Silva, Minnette. *The Life and Work of an Asian Woman Architect*. Colombo: GEDSands Press, 1998, 1
father’s who lent her magazines on the subject. The impetus was also provided by Mr. Billimoria and Mr. Peiris, architects who worked together and offered her an apprenticeship till Minnette’s father consented to send her to Bombay (he was both opposed to her moving away from Ceylon and women architects were unheard of), which had the only architectural school in the region.

In 1938, Minnette travelled with a friend, Violet Chandrasekhar, who paid for both their passages to Bombay. In Bombay, she was received by the Khataus, an influential industrial family. They helped put her in touch with architects Perin and Minoo Mistry. Minnette was offered an apprenticeship with them, and also gained admission to the Academy of Architecture, but had to first return home to matriculate. Back home, she enrolled in the local technical college to complete her education, and earned a small living on the side.

Arriving in India, and the time spent there, Minnette claims “brought me back to my roots.”\textsuperscript{12} as the “threads of a renascent India were woven into the fabric of my life.”\textsuperscript{13} Her journey in India began with finding board with a Scottish woman, and getting trained by draughtsmen and architects at the Mistris’ office. Bombay, at that time, was a cosmopolitan cultural center, unlike Delhi which was more of an administrative one. Here, Minnette was introduced and absorbed into a vibrant but small group of intellectuals and elites, who formed a support group around her.

In due course of time, Minnette commenced her studies at a private Academy of Architecture. She was instructed in the Beaux Art Style, up until one of her instructors, Shareef Mooloobhoy returned after a stint at the Taliesin, and propagated a more Wright-ian style. She stresses upon the attention paid to survey-courses, for which she was grateful. As part of her education, she (along with classmates) travelled extensively to many historic sites in Northern India, documenting and producing measured drawings of the same. She mentions Cyrus Jhabwala as one of her cohort. He would later go on to become the dean of the first national school of architecture in Delhi. This

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 59.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 61.
whole section has many reproductions of her drawings and photographs from this period.

Though she does not dwell much upon it, Minnette mentions her unusual circumstance of being the only woman studying architecture, in a college full of men. Talking of this, she states “They had this kind of Madonna complex about women: I could hardly have studied anywhere else in the world without being teased and made to feel uncomfortable.”

Through the course of her studies at Bombay, Minnette made several trips back home. During one, she drew up a design for her mother’s kitchen and helped implement it. Following the tenets of her education, she designed it keeping the standards in mind, only to have to kitchen fail as the counters were too high for the typically short Sri Lankan women.

Through the 1940s, Minnette continued her architectural education, transferring over to the College of Architecture, which she describes as being extremely regimented and stifling. Her stint here was short-lived though, as she was expelled for joining other students in protesting Mahatma Gandhi’s arrest during the ‘Quit India’ movement (1942). She refused to be apologetic about it.

After describing a brief return home, Minnette though goes back to describing the various cultural activities she partook in, and the many friends she made including the Bhabhas, the Sarabhais, and the Tatas (some of the most important industrialist families in India, who were also responsible for many modern cultural initiatives). Of all things, she found fascinating and wonderful about India, one of the primary ones, was the women of India. She met many women-leaders who played a key role in the independence-struggle.

Her stay in India ended with a period of work with Dr. Otto Koenigsberger. Koenigsberger is an important figure in Indian architectural history. A German refugee, he was appointed the state

14 Ibid., 61.
15 The Quit India movement marked a major chapter in India’s struggle for freedom, where the Indian National Congress switched its demand from partial autonomy to complete autonomy and freedom, campaigning through various methods for the British to leave the country.
architect for Mysore. A modernist, he was keenly interested in investigating solar and passive methods in architecture in India. His writings on the same still remain a core-subject in architectural education in India. Working with him, Minnette imbibed many influences which would shape her own practice and work in the years to come.

An important event that Minnette describes is the establishing of the first architectural journal in India ‘Marg’. The magazine was a brainchild of the social circle Minnette had established, and she herself acted as a contributing editor, along with her sister as an assistant editor. A whole host of luminaries from the field of art and architecture would contribute to it.

In 1945, Minnette returned home to Sri Lanka. Her father, who had initially been skeptical of her decision to study architecture, was now very proud of her. During the same time, she was introduced to Lord Salsbury, who would be instrumental in getting her admission into the RIBA.

If the previous section shows the development of Minnette’s character through her familial socialization over a period of time, this particular section sets in motion a phase in her life where she comes out of her family’s shadow, exerts her own agency through the beginnings of an architectural identity. This is most notable when she states that coming to India brought her back to her roots.

The Bombay sojourn is a time of opposition and determination, hurdles and solutions. Her financial instability is not vocalized in many words, but is apparent through her friends paying for her passage to India, for the initial journey and then again. As with the rest of the book, there is an extensive discussion of the people she met, the friends and support group she garnered. Her extremely prominent social network seems to keep expanding, and though she calls it a small group of people who shared the same ideas and concern, this is a group of the most culturally elite from some of the oldest and richest families in India. This group worked tirelessly for the cause

16 Initially, one of the princely states
of various kinds of art in India, and was the same group who had travelled the world, and more often than not was educated in Britain or other parts of Europe. Like Minnette, their socialization straddled two worlds that of the putative East and West. They supported the freedom movement, though many were not immediately involved in a grass-roots manner.

There is surprisingly not a great amount written about the actual experience of the school. The most poignant moment, naturally, is her almost exclusive status as the only female student at the college. She does no describe there having been any drawbacks of this situation. With the exception of a line or two about the style of teaching, there is more of a focus on the various field trips that they had to go, which exposed her to a far larger and diverse India, then the sheltered climes of Bombay. Yet, these places were visited not as a common tourist, but an architecture student. At that point, being a student of architecture was being part of a very small, select and exclusive group. In fact, the previous generations at the institution were trained with the idea of serving as draughtspeople to the English Architects. Thus, architecture as a profession was in its nascent stages and borrowed most, if not all, of its disciplinary identity from the Beaux-Art or early modern ideology. In fact the Cartesian underpinning of the training is made evident by Minnette’s design for her own kitchen, where in spite of years of lived experience, she automatically chose the ‘objective standards’ provided by the discipline. She soon realized the implications of this, and might have sub-consciously (though at a very small scale) also used the arts and craft to rebel against architecture’s unifying practices. Practicing with Koenigsberger, after her expulsion from the academy also contributed to a complicated dialectic set up between the traditional and the contemporary, understood in a modern way.

In this section, she makes the first and altogether rare allusion to a possible romantic development. It is almost as if this is an aspect of herself that she strongly denies.

The text on the academy is accompanied by photographs of Minnette and her cohort. On the
facing page, a rendered Beaux-Art drawing makes its appearance, followed by two whole pages of reproductions of her projects at school. This speaks volumes about her development of her architectural persona, where the need for text or explanation is obviated by the placing of projects. The projects try to recapitulate her experience, and weigh far more strongly. Text, when it re-appears is about her travels home, or typically, about her friends and their experiences. The book serving as a mirror of her life, starts to now show many instances of architectural drawings, along with the usual personal photographs of herself and other personae. Many discussions are mediated from an architectural point of view. Of note too, is the sudden increase in the number of photographs of herself that Minnette publishes. If the previous sections showed her as a child along with her family, this section has close-ups of her as a young woman, coming of age, in Bombay.

The ‘coming of age’ is probably the most dominant characteristic of this section. It almost seems that Minnette goes from being a present, but somewhat over-shadowed (and possibly over-protected) child to a young woman in her own right, with a nascent identity which she finds comfort and recognition in. It is an identity that she can wear like a comfortable skin and exude. Possibly emotions related to this might be: strength, conviction, rootedness as opposed to the emotional and spatial dislocation of the previous years.

The Time in London

The time spend in London marks one of the most important phases in Minnette’s life. In London, she was truly exposed to a Modernist architectural education and ideology, which she would temper and follow in her own way for the rest of her life.

The days spent at the Architectural Academy (AA) in London were bittersweet. There was immense exposure to current movements not just in architecture, but also the arts due to Soho’s proximity. The teaching itself was rigorous, and modernist. Minnette describes having a weak portfolio which was not accepted due to its predominantly Beaux-Art styles drawings. She also took some time
Figure 2.4: The Time in London: Composite of Images taken from De Silva, Minnette. The Life and Work of an Asian Woman Architect. Colombo: GEDSands Press, 1998, 1
away from school to work on the Great Indian Exhibition that was held in London in 1945. The diversion was also necessary to recuperate from a failed engagement. Charlotte Haldane, a famed feminist, was a close friend, confidant, and in many ways Minnette’s introduction to the “English life, and the music, theatre and art world.”

A sketch appended shows the view from Minnette’s Saville Row Pent house, which due to its central location, became a meeting point for many of her friends and colleagues. In particular, she mentions the Tecton Architects and Beryl Haggart.

Reverting back to stories of AA, she reproduces one of her projects which involved creating a green belt connecting Chelsea to the center of London. Here she distinguishes herself from other students, in that, unlike their tearing down of the Victoria and Albert Museum, she showed a huge degree of sensitivity, and retained it for its cultural value. One thing in particular that she says following this, needs to be mentioned here,

We’ve forgotten that the whole modern era from the 1900s was very much a closed world to the younger post war generation. Have we forgotten how much Nazism dispersed modern art and architecture- put it into hibernation for a decade- almost the diaspora of art and architecture? This was the tragedy of modernism in the post-war period, uprooted and dispersed across the world. Its logical growth was malformed, interrupted too early before maturity. The magnificent experiments, the excitement the simplicity and the honesty of it all lost- forgotten.

Minnette echoes a very modernist lament, especially on behalf of architecture, which she states has as its laboratory the building site. Curiously, she defends the ‘modern masters’ as having had to suffer “the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune.”

In the pages here, more so than her own drawings during this period, Minnette shows her diary records which have snippets of her jottings regarding architectural reviews, meetings and

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17 Ibid., 87
18 Ibid., 95.
19 Ibid., 95.
appointments with people, initiates a discussion on CIAM with the intent to introduce it to Marg. CIAM goes on to become a major feature in her life.

The winter of 1946 was an important year in Minnette’s life. During her time-off from school she travelled through Belgium and France, meeting Constantin Brancusi, Andre Bouxin and most significantly, Le Corbusier. With Corbusier, Minnette would establish a lasting bond that would be reflected in her work, and her personal ethos. Her autobiography is a mirror of this, where a lot of her work, her stories, her ideas are displayed side-by-side with Le Corbusier’s even if there is no direct co-relation between the two. Of this initial meeting, she says,

I was, I think, his first encounter with “India”, as he then called Ceylon – soon to lead to Chandigarh. My subsequent visits to his studio were always associated with traumatic or important events in his life.

I am often asked how I felt at this first meeting. I was shy and slightly intimidated by the heroic great man. I listened and observed.20

In spite of being an architectural student, Minnette realizes that during this time she had the fortune of meeting many important people such as Paul Nash, Henry Moore, Lawrence Durrell, John Craxton, August John, Jean-Louis Barrault and Ram Gopal, through whom she “learnt a lot about the verities of life, reactions to events and most importantly, artistic values and integrity.”21

Through out this time, Minnette retained and exuded a very South-Asian identity, moving around in sari, with flowers pinned to her head. She obliquely hints at being exotified, and enjoying it. Newspapers both in London and Kandy printed articles about her as the first ‘eastern’ woman to become an associate of the Royal Institute of British Architects, and later her meeting with the Queen of England. Yet this narrative moves alongside her memorabilia from le Corbusier such as his sketch of Siva at the Great Indian Exhibition (1947), who she took around the exhibition.

20 Ibid., 97
21 Ibid., 97
In 1947, both India and Burma became independent countries, followed shortly by Sri Lanka in 1948. Minnette briefly mentions attending important ceremonies for both events in London and Kandy, before digressing to an anecdote about Paris, and a possible love interest.

A full-page photograph of the first Congress Internationals D’Architectes Modernes (1947) appears, showing Minnette seated in the first row between Sigfried Giedion, Jane Drew, van Esteren and Walter Gropius. Minnette goes on to mention CIAM for the course of the book, as she continued to be the official representative from South Asia from 1946-1957. Still a student, Minnette used the opportunity to learn and absorb ideas from many of the most influential people in the profession at that time, and simultaneously introduce them to an Asian identity and Marg. Le Corbusier was present at this event as well, and rather fascinated by her being an architect, growing to associate L’Inde with her.

1948 was the last year Minnette spent outside. During this time she attended and addressed the Poland Peace Conference, where she was joined by her father and accompanied him to Prague and Paris. She travelled through Italy with Count Bandelline, Renalto Guttuso and his wife, before leaving for Ceylon.

If the time spent in India, marks the coming of age for Minnette, the time spent on her own in London, establishes in great part an identity which she would exude for the rest of her life.

Like the previous sections, there is yet again an immense sense of the intersection of many important lives with that hers. But for the first time, there is something of a realization of the opportunity this affords her, which any other student may not have received.

With the narration of certain incidents (such as the one with Haldane), Minnette portrays herself as something of a naïve character, but more importantly betrays her own socio-cultural status, in the protected life she has led so far, even during India, where she was still surrounded by an elite network which has its roots in many parts of the Asian sub-continent. The life that she continues
to enjoy is by no means an average, run-of-the mill lifestyle marked by penury and hardship, even though she at times hints at her family’s economic misfortunes. The Saville Row penthouse stands as testimony of the previous fact.

The most important facet of her London experience is naturally the training she receives at the Architectural Association. Though she reproduces pages after pages from her diary marking her schedule and appointments, there is very little actual sense of the kind of projects that she might have undertaken as part of her educational curriculum. The only one she mentions is the one concerning a proposed green-belt. This curious ‘silence’ is not just felt in her text, but also in the absence of drawings and sketches produced during that time. In fact, what seems more important in her mentioning this project, is her sensitivity over the other students. This might be interpreted in two ways. The first is that her own position as a South Asian (still) colonial subject, and a woman at that, even at that time, did actually imbue her with an instinctive, different and more nuanced understanding of the challenges of modernism. Alternatively, the second explanation might deal with her need to set herself not just apart from her cohort, but also in many ways as equal and above them, a need driven by the differences of her physical and social position.

Yet, in spite of this, there is an obvious alignment with the ethos of modern architecture. She is similar to many other young modernists of the time that rued the stiltedness of the movement, and picked up the mantle to take modernism to its fruition. One can discern in her the same idealistic and utopian principles, as in many significant modernists of the time.

Arguably, it is here that her own subjectivity as an architect is actually being developed. Whereas in India, she was keenly aware of being the only woman in a class of men, she doesn’t mention her cohort here. In her alignment with the modern movement, her identity as a woman is placed at a lower rung, than her identity as a modernist. And in a move analogous with that of Modernism, she places herself as the universal modern subject, for whom the entirety of the world is a canvas
waiting to receive the ideals of modernism.

Perhaps, her induction within this ideology is made starkly evident through her continued presence and belief in the CIAM, where she enjoys her status as the only (woman additionally) representative from South Asia. In a way she imagines her circumstances as being the possible channel or conduit between the East and the West, and this is made evident by her talking about her intent to introduce Marg to CIAM. It is obvious that these dichotomies as well as discourses and negotiations of power are entirely real and in many ways inherent for her.

In all actuality, the instance that makes the most impact on Minnette during this period is her meeting with Le Corbusier. From this point on, her narrative will often mingle and intertwine with her narrative of him. A lasting and significant relationship developed between them. On the left, are cited lines from her text about her first meeting with him. There are three issues that can be gauged from these lines. Firstly, prior to even describing there meeting, she immediately establishes their lasting relationship, often marked by ‘trauma or important events’ and her continued involvement with them. Secondly, her feelings towards him are also indicated, and suggest an almost subservient position to him. Thirdly, its also indicative of Le Corbusier’s extremely Orientalist tendencies, which will also be made apparent later when Minnette discusses how she felt exotified. However, she does not seem to find issue with it, and even seems to revel in it.

Outside of meeting people, CIAM, and Le Corbusier, there is very little hint about Minnette’s personal life except for a one line statement thrown in casually and out–of–context about a failed engagement. More so than anything, this is brings to light her developing subjectivity as a Modern Subject, wherein emotion is detached from the stating of facts.

As with previous sections, this section too is laid out more chronologically, for the most part, though there seem to be lapses and confusions at certain instances.

With the typical visual dependency that Minnette establishes through-out her book, there is a
marginally lessening of the text, which is replaced more so by diary entries. As always there are a lot of photographs of her meeting important people and being present at some landmark events. With this section, there is also an introduction and gradual incorporation of materials that relate to Le Corbusier such as sketches, notes, letter or other media that he might have sent to her. There are surprisingly few architectural representations of any kind in this section, and Minnette never does get around to discussing the architectural aspects of her experiences and travels, such as significant modernists works of the time etc. Modernism is taken as fact, then, which needs little or no explanation for its importance and presence.

The works

The period spanning 1949-1965 forms the fifth and largest sub-section, taking up (in terms of content and volume) approximately two-thirds of the book. This divide is almost suggested formally, where two full-size images of Minnette are reproduced with the caption ‘An Asian Woman Architect Returns Home to Ceylon – 1949’.

In 1949, Minnette moved back in with her parents, setting up her own studio within the house. She chose to practice independently, as against taking up a salaried position. In many ways, this decision was informed by her unusual circumstance of being the first and only woman architect in Sri Lanka. Describing this predicament, she writes,

> After returning to Ceylon, the problems of being the first and only woman architect became apparent to me. I worked independently, not with a male partner or an established firm. I had to conquer the distrust of contractors, business firms, the government and architectural patrons, for until my appearance on the scene it had been a totally male dominated sector.22

Minnette found it difficult to find other architects to work with, even younger ones returning home from studying abroad, as they were not particularly interested in a synthesis between traditional and modern architecture, which was the ethos of her work. She, again, attributes this sensibility to

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22 Ibid., 114.
her parent’s leanings towards the arts and craft, a leaning which was all the more significant due
to her parents’ patriotic commitments. She talks about a (select) generation in various arts who
were going back to the traditional forms to re-interpret them, and her singularity as the only one
attempting to do this through architecture.

In spite of the challenge presented, Minnette built up a steady stream of work. Her first commission
came via friends of her parents, the Karunaratnes, and was hugely publicized for being the first
work to be designed by a woman (much to their dismay). Multiple pages show the drawings and
images for the split-level modernist house. A letter outlines Mr. Karunaratne’s wish to not have
random rubble walls in the interior, despite Minnette’s persuasion. She describes the house in
letters to Mulk Raj Anand and other writings, as being tuned to the social conditions peculiar to
Kandy with large extended families, ceremonies that are held at home, all of which a house should
respond to spatially. The house also provided her an opportunity to experiment with local crafts.
Subsequently, craftsmen were employed to assist in the making of doors with local dumbara
mats. There are many reproductions of people’s memories of it, ending with a letter from the
Karunaratne’s daughter many years later, thanking Minnette for designing such a house, without
which looking after her ailing parents would have been impossible, and the comforts it provided
all of them through its sweeping views and Keyt murals (another feature upon which Minnette had
insisted despite the clients utter reluctance to add another expensive item to their budget).

The narrative from here on is somewhat fragmented, covering a range of works interspersed with
articles about Minnette, events that she attended, letters sent to her, photographs from her travels,
and Le Corbusier’s letters and sketches to her.

Through an extract from his address to the Ceylon National Congress, Minnette broaches the
subject of her father’s death in 1950. This marked a particularly traumatic event in her life, along
with the criticism and stress of her first building, caused her to have a fall ill, and verge on a
nervous break-down. Minnette also took a short break from architecture, learning and engaging in practices of weaving, traditional forms of making pottery.

For a short period, Minnette escaped to Europe, and found herself amongst more understanding company for her work. Here she spent time with Le Corbusier, who had recently come under attack for refusing to sign the Peace manifesto. Many of India’s (later foremost modernist) artists such as Raza, Paritosh Sen, Akbar Padamsee, Francis Souza were in Paris at that time, along with Anil, allowing for the setting up of a diasporic clique. In 1951, Minnette attended the Milan Triennale, where she met Scarpa, Wright and Alfieri.

Returning home, she resumed her practice working on the Pieris House (1952-56), Wickremaratna House (1953), Fernando house (1954), Daswani House (1952), Watapulva and the Housing Scheme (1958). Her accompanying descriptions for each of these range from getting the work to describing the design intent. She often reproduces correspondences between the clients and herself, alongside drawings and photographs.

A section that follows, breaks away from work, to describe the filming of the Elephant Walk starring Vivian Leigh and Peter Finch. Introduced through mutual friends, Minnette spent time with them and Lawrence Olivier. More on them is shown an another juncture in the book when Minnette attended performances by them in London. Brian Brake and David Lean also crops up, with his movie “The Bridge on River Kwai” which was shot in Sri Lanka. In 1953, she went back to Paris for CIAM and made a brief stop-over at Rome. Keeping up with the somewhat fragmented nature of this section, images from Le Corbusier’s Le Poeme de L’ Ange Droit have been inserted.

In 1954, Minnette designed a house for Mrs A. Amerasingh, followed by the Dr. Chandra Amerasinghe Flats (1954-1955), Wickremasinghe Flats (1954), Bunnie Molamure Flats (1955), Sri Rao House in Bangalore (1955), House for Businessman at Nawala (1952), Senayake Flats (1954-57), Amaduwa Game Reserve Lodge (1958), Ivor Fernando Flats (1956), Sachithanandam

Intermittently Minnette switches over from a cataloguing of her works during the ten year period. Minnette talks of a summer spent in London, as well as publishing correspondence and documents between her and Danish architect, Ulrik Plessner. Plessner was sponsored by Minnette and worked with her for a few years before switching over to Geoffrey Bawa. Included are a visit to Le Corbusier upon the death of his wife, the beginning of his romance with India in the 1950s with Chandigarh along with Maxwell Fry and Jane Drew.

Minnette pulls the narrative to a close with the death of her mother who had been semi-paralyzed a few years previously, with the statement, “With the death of my mother I am bringing this volume to a close – because it makes a significant divide in my life. The story of my life and work is continued in the next and final volume.”

The last section of Minnette’s narrative is also the one which highlights her journey as an architect, the particular difficulties of being a woman in a male-centered and male-dominated professions, as well as personal misfortunes which shaped her career significantly, providing her with the impetus to diversify her own practice, within what might be deemed both critical regionalist and modernist paradigms.

After moving back home, Minnette set about establishing her own practice. With this she keenly became aware of the suspicion with which a woman architect was viewed. Presumably, her feelings towards this might have been mixed. On the one hand at the larger scale of media operations, she

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23 Ibid., 345.
was lauded as the woman architect, the first for Sri Lanka. There was a projection of her at a national level, in some ways commensurate with not just her professional identity but also with the socio-cultural background that she came from. On the other hand though, the everyday experience was very different. She didn’t have other architects with similar sensibilities to work with, nor trained employees. While she did undertake training employees, they would invariably leave for other jobs in bigger cities.

Her first house, like her, came under immense public scrutiny. At points, gauging from clients’ letters, it seems as if she did pander to the media, and was equally involved in writing about it in Marg. This is illustrative of her own perception of herself as a public personae, and moreover, the unwavering belief in the dissemination of knowledge on modernist paradigms and their relevance in the South-Asian region.

This commitment to modernism is also apparent in her insistence of incorporating a mural by a modernist artist in her first project, much against the will of her clients. Being persuasive and strong-willed, Minnette did get her way, though this could not have been easy given her clients growing dismay over costs and the public scrutiny. Also, the clients were close family friends and this makes the relationship between the client and architect more delicate.

Writing on this house, Minnette skips ahead in terms of time, to provide a conclusion to the sub-section. Here she provides a narrative of the eventual love and appreciation for the house. This shows her life-long involvement and concern for her works. It is also indicative of her ‘being proved right’.

The narrative seems to fan out substantially after the description of the first house. Projects follow one after another. They are laid out chronologically, with anywhere from a double-spread to a multi-page spread dedicated to each, depending on the scale and importance of the project. Yet, except for the first one, there isn’t a sense of which might be more personally important to her.
It is almost as if she is almost equally invested and attached to each one of them. The spreads are mostly visual, with less than a paragraph written on each. The ‘write-up’ does not describe design ideas or design concerns, but usually give some information on the client, such as personal anecdotes, which creates a series of curious junctures and juxtapositions in her narrative.

The fanned-out narrative of her own works, is intertwined with memories of Le Corbusier. What is interesting about this memoir is that she doesn’t write about him. She includes him through his sketches, diagrams, pictures and letters to her. She never quite delineates the nature of their relationship, leaving the reader only with the sense that it was one of her most important attachments. That his work is positioned alongside hers, also talks of the purported influence and level plane set up by modernism. It is suggestive of an idolatory relationship that she might have shared with him.

In sub-sections, she deviates away from discussions of her work. One of these is the death of her father, which marks a significant turning point in her life. For some reason, it also marks a temporary disillusionment or anxiety about her own architectural practice. Minnette takes time away from it to move into a more hand-on involvement with crafts, and also travels to Europe. She does not quite place either one of these on a time line, and thus leaves her ‘non-architectural’ section somewhat ambiguous, as opposed to the other works.

The works she presents are mostly presented through architectural drawings, sketches, photographs and reproductions of communications between herself and her clients, though it is not necessary that all of these criteria be met for each one of the products. Of the drawings shown, there are rarely any perspective-drawings. This fits in with the general suspicion that Modernists had of this drawing style, since it lacked ‘honesty’. Plan-drawings form the most important tool in her architectural repertoire. Often, plans are placed instead of images of the work, even at a built stage. The plans also have multiple layers of communication, and like her narratives, have a sub-
text. For example, if one was to deconstruct one of the plan-images, it is possible to break it up into five individual (but related) images: lines, hatches, way-finding, foliage, and text. The text is actually a significant component, as she uses text, in my instances, as a replacement for more standard architectural information such as furniture layouts. This is almost ironic, when compared with her text on herself, which is usually, subtended by images. Also, most of her plans show a tension between the built mass and the foliage, indicating a position of some tension that she herself occupied within the modernist architectural discourse.

The other significant event which changes the course of Minnette’s life is the death of her mother. With this, Minnette abruptly finishes her narrative, with the idea of taking it up in another volume. The second volume was never published, and it is not known whether it was written. As with the death of her father, Minnette seems to have again felt a need to distance herself from architecture in Sri Lanka. She moved out of the country for five years, during which time she travelled extensively over Asia, and even taught at the Hong Kong University as the architectural Chair.

Formally, this section seems both similar and dissimilar from the ones that precede it. While there is still a chronological sense, individual sub-sections are not understood as following from one and other. They seem splayed out almost at an equal footing, and thus suggesting less of a chain-structure and more of a radial form.

Except for two moments of extreme sadness, there is less of an overt sense of emotion. The insecurity of the previous years is replaced by a stronger sense of self and identity, though even that, under incidents of great duress, one can see that Minnette questions and wants to remove herself from this.
Warli Art

Warli is a ‘tribal’ or folk art practiced by the Warli Tribe in parts of Thane, Maharashtra, India. Though it is a Neolithic art form, it went through its own stage of discovery in the early 1970s, the period of (continuing) Modernity in the South-Asian subcontinent, wherein there was a renewed vigor in understanding what the country had to offer in terms of its cultural resources, and how these might be canvassed on a global scale. Unlike other forms of folk art, the content of Warli paintings cannot be truly described as mythological or religious, which are some structures used to categorize other forms of folk art. The Warli painting, in both the act of its making, and the object thus made, would be best understood as a continuing narrative of the everyday social and communal life of the tribe. Thus, the paintings, especially those made following a traditional style, will always have certain themes that are central to them such as the rendering of the local (female) deity, the Çaukat (threshold) around her, instances of celebrations, and instances from the landscape and life of the village.

During the 1970s, the ‘discovery’ of Warli, was marked by a sense of novelty. Today, they have come to be fairly commonplace forms of representation, and are accessible to the population at large. However, the techniques and certain themes still dominate the representation. Describing a typical Warli painting, Yashodhara Dalmia writes,

[Warli Paintings] are strangely ascetic. They do not consist of myriad primary colours, so intimately associated with folk painting in India. Instead they are painted on an austere brown surface, with the use of only one colour-white. … This first impression of sobriety, however, is countered by the ebullience of themes depicted. They are remarkable in their intensely social nature. They look outwards capturing the life around, and by implication the humanness of living. Men, animals and trees form a loose rhythmic pattern across the entire sheet. This results in a light swinging and swirling movement, describing the daily lives of the Warlis. In doing so, they seem to be seeking communication amongst
themselves and with the outer world.¹

In some ways there are some interesting points of comparison to be made between the structure of architectural representation and Warli representations as will be made later in the course of this essay. The single greatest difference between the two is in their narrative structure, where one attempts to convey a multi-layered narrative of life, and the other usually gets subsumed into the meta-narrative of the architectural discipline. On the other hand, there are also some conjectural intersections that might be derived from their comparison. These intersections happen at the nodes of a monochromatic language, the understanding of two-dimensional representations, issues of framing etc. However, it would be impossible to understand these structures inherent in Warli art outside of their own specific contexts.

Warli paintings have an interesting gendered narrative, in that, they are traditionally made by women called savasinis (or women whose husbands are still alive) as lagna citra (wedding images) - thus, while they hint to a certain measure of power accorded to women, they are also simultaneously indicative of issues of purity and defilement, where the highest level of purity is accorded to married women. But given the lived experience of them and also the dissemination of knowledge, the practice of painting is also carried out by young children, and many of the Warli artists who have either gone on to gain recognition or paint as means of livelihood, have been men. Sherry Ortner would explain this as the typical nature/culture dualism, where women though certain activities are placed as being closer to nature, and men’s appropriation of the same activity falls under the purview of culture.² However, with all likelihood the this particular situation is more nuanced, in the very inversion of power accorded to women. The wedding images are embedded with an immense significance, and are indispensible to the ritual of marriage. Dalmia explains,

² Ortner, Sherry. “Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?” Feminist Studies 1 (1972): 5-31
Figure 3.1: Ritual Dance in Warli Painting, Artist Unknown. Courtesy ArtStor

Figure 3.2: Goddess Palaghata in Warli Painting, Artist Unknown. Courtesy ArtStor
Figure 3.3: Pancasiriya in Warli Painting, Artist Unknown. Courtesy ArtStor

Figure 3.4: Warli Painting, Artist Unknown. Courtesy ArtStor
[i]t fulfills the aims of the individual and the community. … In animating what is recognized as the inner truth the painting points the way to that which has yet to be achieved. In very real terms, therefore, it provides them with an order, a coherency which is needed in their lives.³

Thus, the narrative projected by and through the Warli paintings is not merely one of translation of events, but one of comprehension and introspection. Warli representation is not instructive, nor linear so as to suggest transcendence. It is for most part an immanent representation that acts as a mirror of the life of the Warlis.

**Elements of the Painting**

Traditional Warli paintings, though elastic, have some standard components which can be found across all versions of the representation: the Inhabitants, the Marriage Goddess, the Çaukat and the Flora and Fauna. A brief note is provided on the elements below:

Inhabitants – Warli paintings will often show humans depicted as two inverted triangles, appended by lines for arms, legs and neck, and a circle for the head. Though the representation of human beings is extremely geometric, it is by no means frozen or stiff. Humans are always shown engaged in a variety of activities, and their arrangements and positions either individually or in relationship to each other are done so as to always suggest movement and imbue the drawing space with frenetic activity. An important aspect about the depiction of humans is that at no time are human beings depicted with an individual character. At the very most women might be distinguished from the men, by drawing a bun at the back of their heads, but beyond this no other classifications are made.

The Marriage Goddess – The Goddess Palaghata (the marriage Goddess) is a central figure to ³ Ibid.
the painting. It is essentially around her that the whole scheme of the painting revolves, and thus may even be understood as the progenitor of the representation. Though extremely prominent, her actual form is somewhat ambiguous. She is usually drawn as either two austere of extremely decorated inverted triangles, lacking head, arms or legs. At the few places that her head is shown, it is drawn grossly out of scale in comparison to her body which continues to be the most important part. The body is often expanded so as to ensconce within it other gods or relevant depictions, thus indicating her fertility (her name literally means – pot overflowing with plants). There are instances when Palaghata’s triangular form is not even discernible, but is known through a set of parallel lines that ‘nip in at the waist’ and the elaborate Çaukat drawn around it. Palaghata is often accompanied by Pancasiriya (the five headed god) who protects her and is shown as a much smaller figure, in a separate space.

The Çaukat – The Çaukat is one of the most important spatial elements in the Warli painting. Ranging from set of simple parallel lines that enclose a square space, to an elaborate configuration of circles, triangles, cross-hatches, and other geometric shapes, they distinguish between the ‘pure’ space of the Goddess and the everyday space of the Warlis. Some people believe that the lines of the Çaukat refer to other Gods in the universe, while others claim that it represents the cosmos, the hut, the square of concentrated energy. A secondary Çaukat might be drawn in addition to the one around Palaghata, to house Pancasiriya. This Çaukat is always represented as simple lines. The ornamentation of the threshold carried out between the lines is a curious combination of mythical and ‘real’ elements. For example, the first band may consists of small half-moons repeated along its length, which is an auspicious symbol signifying the womb. The second band shows a series of diagonals which borrows its form from the bride’s jewellery, followed by a triangular pattern which might connote fauna, as subsequent layers show floral patterns.

Flora and Fauna – Trees, drawn with an incredible eye for detail, and often shown swaying in
the breeze are an important facet of Warli art. It is not unusual to find a variety of tree-depictions in the paintings. They stand for the fertility and bountiful nature of the Earth. There significance also lies in sheltering not just myriad animals and birds, but also by being drawn close to the Çaukat, Palaghata herself. Warlis often depict trees with monkeys residing on their branches, in spite of the fact that there are no monkeys in that geographic region and most Warlis have not ever encountered any (this was also true of horses traditionally, which were then shown as divine creatures). Monkeys are believed to increase the fertility of the Earth by throwing fruit and seeds from the trees onto the ground. This almost hints at some age old understandings of repletion and production.

Space and Time in Warli Paintings

In order to understand notions of spatiality and temporality and how they get constructed within a Warli painting, it is important to understand the structure of the paintings. The canvas is essentially a frame-less space, curtailed more so by the end of the background then of actual enclosing elements such as borders or margins. As mentioned before, there is a basic relationship set up between the foreground and the background through a monochromatic scheme. This relationship is made particular, through the absence of any devices that work in perspective, thus rendering the whole space of the sheet as the foreground with degree of equality. Upon this canvas, one might imagine the Goddess being the central figure. Yet, while she is indubitably important in terms of hierarchy her centrality is more connotative than denotative. It is not necessary that her depiction actually be placed at the center of the drawing space, nor is all the attention drawn towards her. The drawing space affords equal opportunities for other elements such as people, trees, animals and the landscape, each of which play a vital part in the larger narrative. What is at play most significantly is the depiction of multiple narratives. For example, looking at Figure 3.5, the following narratives can immediately be seen
- The narrative of ritual space as shown by Palaghat

- The narrative of celebration as shown through the group of figures towards the bottom left corner which seem to be dancing in a circle (typical of Warli dances)

- The narrative of interiority and exteriority depicted by a boundary/fence which further marks the separation between communal activities and agrarian activities

- Sub-narratives of various activities that the figures are engaged in which both relate and do not relate the celebratory ones.

These narratives take place in a space that is made interesting by its lack of classificatory structure that would ordinarily break the space up into different understandings. For example, there is no ground or straight line which anchors any of the elements. Though they might be technically understood as ‘floating’ in space, they do not appear so visually due to their interactivity with each other. The repetition of various elements, similar and dissimilar, across the canvas imbues it with a sense of movement and energy, which highlights the Warlis’ own understanding of simultaneously being stationery and moving.

An aspect of Warli paintings that should be noted is the geometricisation of elements and spaces. There is a seeming collapse between the normative understanding of plans and elevations, and it would be difficult to classify these representations under any one of these categories. They seem to make judicious use of both. For example, looking at Figure 3.6, which is a contemporary instance of Warli art, the craftsperson depicts the activities that take place within a household. The space or actual structure of the house is shown both in plan and in elevation\(^4\), and thus walls stack up as they would in floors shown in an elevation or section, but also have openings which would be more suitably to openings shown on plans. Similarly, the couple sleeping on a mat are shown in

\(^4\) One can not argue that understanding of architectural representations have disseminated into the Warli way of life
narrative of interiority versus exteriority, hazier demarcation between fore- and background

narrative of ritual and celebration inscribed in a particular kind of space

narrative of entrance, as well of home as a sanctified space

subnarrative of agrarian lifestyle

subnarrative of travel, exchange and participation

subnarrative of ritualistic dance drawn in simultaneous 'plan'/elevation

narrative of making, different spaces for different functions, community

Figure 3.5: Analysis of a Warli Painting, Artist Unknown. Courtesy Google Images
Figure 3.6: Mahadev, Amit. Unnamed Warli Painting Depicting Scene at Home, 2010, India. Image Source: Author
‘plan’ view, whereas similar figures in the space adjacent to them, are clearly preparing or eating food. The collapse of plan and elevation, or rather the nuanced use of it, is evident in the more traditional forms of painting as well. Examining the depiction of people engaged in the ritual dance (Figure 1.8) it is impossible to gauge whether the understanding of the depiction may be classified as a plan-view, an elevation-view or both, which seems like the more plausible explanation. While arguments have been made that both the plan and the elevation view are in reality impossible views, given that they assume the viewer at an infinite distance or the eye-of-God, it is interesting to see a Neolithic representational form, exercise the same understanding, without imagining the infinite distance.

The illustrated movement and simultaneity of events alludes to the hetero-temporal nature of Warli art. An event is not understood as a fixed moment in time which happens in isolation, outside of other events. Thus, a celebration is shown at the same time as the representation of people out working in their fields. For the same reason, the eye is not invited to stay at one point of the painting, but continuously and ceaselessly travel over and through it. There is no suggested journey, and in that there is left open an avenue for the construction of the narrative within other paradigms of socialized understanding.

Temporality is also indicated often times by the juxtaposition of the Sun and Moon, or even various depictions of seasons within the same representation to hint at the synchronicity and the repetitiveness of events. Time is never comprehended as fixed and linear, but cyclical and simultaneous.

Warli painting, thus, is an example of representation that encapsulates a spatial and temporal nature, amidst which narratives are expressed and perceived.
The proposed site for the Exhibition is at Pragati Maidan, or literally, the Grounds of Progress.

Developed in the early Nineteen Seventies, to coincide with the international Asian Games to be held in Delhi, Pragati Maidan was imagined as an urban design project which would house multiple pavilions and exhibition halls to capture and illustrate the cultural heritage of India, as well, as its socio-political ties with neighboring countries. The complex which was built by the Indian Trade Promotion Organisation (ITPO) is spread over an area of 150 acres, and has come to occupy a central position in Delhi’s cultural and social history.

An understanding of Pragati Maidan’s strategic location necessitates a basic understanding of the geography of Delhi. Delhi can be envisaged as a conclave of multiple ‘Delhis’ all of which have been built at different points in history. The earliest built environment dates back to the second millennium BC., represented by the Old Fort, which sits south of Pragati Maidan, across from the street (Fig. 1). Colonial Delhi (1912-1930), or Lutyen’s Delhi as it is popularly known (after the architect Sir Edwin Lutyens) abuts the western edge of the complex (Fig. 2). One of the most important city centers, Connaught Place, is under 4 miles away from the site. Lutyen’s Delhi is also the site of all major government institutions from the President’s Palace, Parliament, Courts, State houses and ministries, thus forming one of the most important zones in Delhi. All important cultural institutions such as National Galleries, National Archives, National Libraries are sited in this zone. Though not an immediate neighbor, Mughal or Renaissance Delhi, known as Old Delhi sits further north (Fig. 3). Post-independence neighborhoods or ‘colonies’ as they are known locally, sit towards the south.
Figure 4.1: Aerial views of Pragati Maidan, with accompany images of the immediate context. Image Courtesy: Google Earth
Pragati Maidan thus comes to represent a large and extremely important node in Delhi’s historic and built narrative. Programmatically, it a complex of various permanent and temporary exhibitions. The permanent exhibition halls are occupied by the various states of India, to display handi-craft and other artifacts from that states, ranging from the miniature to architectural scale. The temporary exhibition halls house many international and national exhibitions and fairs such as the Book fair, the Auto Expo, the Trade expon etc. Interestingly the northern portion of the site is occupied by, what till recently, was the only amusement park in Delhi, and thus forms an important part of a typical Delhi resident’s imagination. Pragati Maidan is also home to some landmark architectural projects such as the National Crafts Museum, the National Science Museum, the Hall of Nations which will be discussed in greater detail later as these have a stronger relationship and pertinence to the site chosen for the project.

The chosen site (Fig. 4) then provides for a viable exploration of an exhibiton based on her life and work for multiple reasons. Firstly, in terms of a formal context, it sits strategically between three of the iconic modernist architectural works in Delhi : The National Crafts Museum (Charles Correa) to the East, The National Science Museum (A.P Kanvinde) to the West and the Hall of Nations (Raj Rewal) to the North. Serendipitously, all three of the architects whose works form the context to this site, have had trajectories that has intersected with hers. Secondly, the siting of this project in Delhi as opposed to Bombay or Sri Lanka, is due to the nature of Indian-Sri Lankan politics and history, as explained previously. Thus, choosing a site within an urban complex, which forms the heart of Delhi’s exhibition spaces, is a nod towards the development of better relationships between the two communities. Lastly, programmatically, the exhibition complex allows for the creation of further spaces based on the same programmatic type, with the availability of ample support facilities.
Figure 4.2: Aerial view of Pragati Maidan with the site marked in red, as well as, important buildings on site
The above illustration demarcates the site along with its immediate neighbors. The site itself is fairly linear. The topography varies negligibly, with their being less than 8” of change between the highest and the lowest contour running through the site. The implication of this is that there will not be any natural level changes to utilize in the design, and any changes in levels would have to be man-made. This would then need a careful evaluation of any cut and fill work to be carried out on site. The two ‘areas’ marked show the site, with the translucent area showing area for possible expansion owing to the small size of the plot (410’ x 165’). An open air theatre sits adjacent to the northern end of the site, allowing for areas to spill-into. There is an existing restaurant on-site which will be relocated.

The following pages show various images from the site, in the form of a photo essay, stringing together a narrative of moving around the site. It begins with the entrance to the complex, and moving in a clockwise manner, till the point of origin is reached again. The left edge of the site, ramps up to the Hall of Nations as captured in the last few images.
Figure 4.4: Significant buildings on site which constitute the immediate context. (Top to Bottom): Hall of Nations, The National Science Center, and the National Crafts Museum. All images: Author’s own.
Figure 4.5: Ticket booths outside the complex, 2010. Image Source: Author’s own.

Figure 4.6: Entrance to the complex, 2010. Image Source: Author’s own.
Figure 4.7: Entrance to the complex, looking straight head. 2010. Image Source: Author’s own.

Figure 4.8: Looking to the Left and the Right upon entering the complex, 2010. Image Source: Author’s own.
Figure 4.9: Standing at the foot of the ramp to the Hall of Nations, 2010. Image Source: Author’s own.
Figure 4.10: Midway on the Ramp, 2010. Image Source: Author’s own.

Figure 4.11: Midway on the Ramp, 2010. Image Source: Author’s own.
Figure 4.12: Stepping down to site from the Midway point on the Ramp, 2010. Image Source: Author’s own.

Figure 4.13: Site, 2010. Image Source: Author’s own.
Figure 4.14: Hall of Nations at the North end of Sit, 2010. Image Source: Author’s own.

Figure 4.15: Site, 2010. Image Source: Author’s own.
Figure 4.16: Court between the site and the Hall of Nations, 2010. Image Source: Author’s own.

Figure 4.17: Vehicular Road abutting the Eastern Edge of the Site, 2010. Image Source: Author’s own.
Figure 4.18: Site, 2010. Image Source: Author’s own.
Figure 4.19: Looking North on the Site, 2010. Image Source: Author’s own.

Figure 4.20: Main axes of the Site, 2010. Image Source: Author’s own.
Figure 4.21: Looking South on the Site, 2010. Image Source: Author’s own.

Figure 4.22: Western edge of the Site, 2010. Image Source: Author’s own.
Figure 4.23: Towards the top of the ramp, 2010. Image Source: Author’s own.

Figure 4.24: At the top of the Ramp, looking towards entrance, 2010. Image Source: Author’s own.
Figure 4.25: View of the site from the ramp, 2010. Image Source: Author’s own.

Figure 4.26: View of other pavilions from the Ramp, 2010. Image Source: Author’s own.
Figure 4.27: Interior view of the Hall of Nations, 2010. Image Source: Author’s own.

Figure 4.28: Exterior view of the Hall of Nations, 2010. Image Source: Author’s own.
Figure 4.29: Site Plan, 2010. Image Source: Author’s own.

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Figure 4.30: Means of Access to the site.
Figure 4.31: Pedestrian and Vehicular Routes pertinent to the site. Image Source: Author’s own.


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