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AN EXAMINATION OF TRANSACTIONISM AS A DESIGN
ATTITUDE WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO
HOUSING IN SRI LANKA

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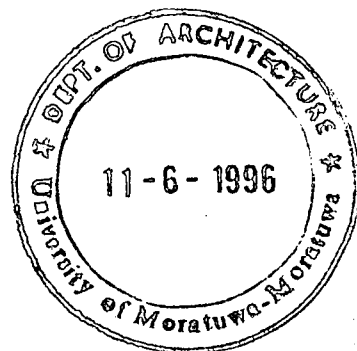
A DISSERTATION PRESENTED TO THE
UNIVERSITY OF MORATUWA, SRI LANKA, FOR THE
FINAL EXAMINATION IN M.Sc (ARCHITECTURE) AND
TO THE R.I.B.A. PART II

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coll.

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My Parents

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Mrs. Suhood, Mrs. Tharik Mrs. Ahamadeen

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ABSTRACT

Architecture is a user oriented art. Therefore how user -building interaction takes place is important to practising architects. This interest in user-building interaction came into being with the modern movement as an interpretation of the term "function" which was, one of the basic concepts of the Modern Movement, giving architecture which was upto this time mainly interested in aesthetics a new dimension. Different schools of thought on user-building interaction emerged with this concept. Environmental psychology played an important role in the evolution of these schools of thought. Determinism, Interactionism and Transactionism are three such popular schools of thought emerging from the above concept.

Determinism is an attitude among architects that architecture or the built environment plays a determinate role in shaping human behaviour. This attitude was popular among architects for many reasons such as the power the profession of architecture gained from the concept, of being able to do more than just provide beautiful buildings and being able to provide value for money. However the practise of determinism came in for criticism mainly due to the passive nature of the user it implied. This resulted in the emergence of design attitudes such as. Interactionism and Transactionism.

Interactionism is an attitude among architects that the built environment has little impact on human behaviour and that human behaviour is mainly dependent on past experiences.



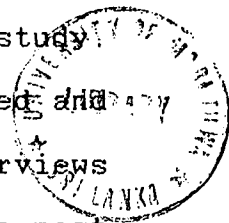
and knowledge. This attitude although popular among architects mainly interested with the aesthetics it came in for criticism due to the truism that architecture has an impact on human behaviour.

Transactionism on the other hand acknowledged the fact that Architecture had an impact on human behaviour as well as the fact that human behaviour had a modifying impact on Architecture. This was based on the theory of psychology that humans are active organisms. Human environmental transactions are a manifestation of this theory. Human environmental transactions are manifested in two ways. One is environmental behaviour while the other is environmental modification. Ziesler lists out several factors important when observing environmental behaviour such as the actor, the action, significant others, relationships, the context and the setting and factors that influence them. Furthermore Environmental modifications are classified by Ziesler as by products of use, including erosions, leftovers and missing traces. Adaptation for use including connections, separations and props. However he fails to include extensions into this category, which is a very common adaptation for use and displays of self and public messages both legal and illegal. There are several factors limiting Human - environmental transactions. All these factors involve the amount of control the user has over the environment which regulates the occurrence of Human-Environmental transactions. These factors

are Role, Resources including finances, Time and Technology and Personality of the user.

The practise of Transactionism is looked into next. Transactionism is an attitude popular among Architects engaged in design of buildings used by a large number of users of varying backgrounds, social classes and sub-cultures such as mass housing and student and worker accommodation, educational facilities etc. Transactionism is popularly practised by Architects in three forms namely participatory design, "Loose fit" design and Incremental design. These methods have their pros and cons but are widely employed by architects and planners the world over.

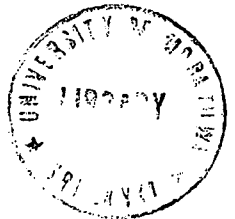
The case study deals with housing in the Sri Lankan context to examine whether and upto what extent transactionism has been practised by architects. Housing has been selected as the subject for the case study as transactionism is considered a design attitude which is considered suitable when designing for users belonging to diverse backgrounds as found in these housing schemes. Two housing schemes namely the Keels Housing scheme Katubedda and the Mattegoda Housing Scheme designed by Ms. Mihindu Keertiratne Associates and the National Housing Development Authority respectively have been selected for the case study. The user-environmental transactions which have occurred and their implications were observed in addition to interviews assessing the user needs. The case study showed that the most common transactions occurring were adaptation for use



including connections separations and extensions and that these adapted spaces underwent a change of use. Another common form of transactions were personalisation of the front facade and interior finishes and details.

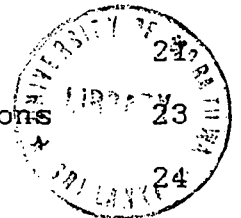
An interesting fact emerging from the case study was that Sri Lankan Architects involved in housing did not adopt a transactionist attitude consciously in the design of housing thereby causing problems related to circulation, natural light, ventilation and safety.

Therefore in concluding it was decided that user-environment transactions manifest themselves physically in the form of modifications or environments become neglected and obsolete when they are restricted. Thus the conscious practice of transactionism was advocated in housing design by architects. Guidelines such as flexibility in design, encouraging user participation, allowing room for extension provision of solid structural systems, and leaving details unfinished were derived from the above observations to guide architects practising transactionism in housing in the Sri Lankan context.



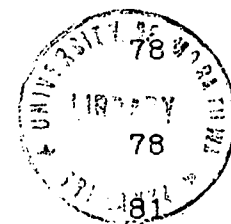
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