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Of Analysis and Analogy

A Critical Investigation of Design Pedagogy in Pakistan

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# Of Analysis and Analogy: A Critical Investigation of Design Pedagogy in Pakistan

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*Abstract: With the social landscape changing and needs altering, the First World War brought with it a new world of complex identities. This world engaged the machine as the basis to form its very nature. The shift from manual to machine, from cutting down of space and steps to accommodate more efficiency, started to build up a new way of thinking and progressing; hence, entering the world of the modern. Bauhaus in Germany catered to such inspiration. Gropius' idea for the Bauhaus aimed at facing the requirements of the age. This paper intends to investigate the role of memory and the manipulation of preconceived ideas to explore design pedagogy that brings forward the "new way of thinking." It is an attempt to establish a certain ground, aiming to suggest improvements in the interdisciplinary benefits of combining talents that reciprocate to communal will. Given the history and colonial context of the sub-continent Pakistan has adapted to the very system of design instruction, which presents a very interesting case of comparison and juxtaposition between the new and old, the prevalent and the borrowed and the native and the other. Teaching formal design in the context of Pakistan and especially a suburban city like Islamabad raises questions of balance and negotiation between the vernacular, regional and global design language as an experience of collective memory.*

*Keywords: Creative Learning, Critical Analysis, Studio Pedagogy, Collective Memory*

## Pakistan: A Cultural and Historical Identity

Pakistan has a wide cultural diversity across the length of the country; geographically and historically the land has been disputed and invaded repeatedly by the intervention of the Central Asian, Afghan, Persian and Arab people. The topography of the region includes mountain ranges in the north and the ocean in the south. The climatic, geographical and historic traces have given birth to very rich indigenous practices in art and craft. But the political climate of the country dating back to her emancipation from the colonial era has been in unrest and even violent. Due to the lack of attention to the finer areas of progress, the craft of Pakistan has continued to sustain and depend on its cottage industry. And no meaningful platforms have been provided by the efforts of the state to promote and help evolve these industries by "modern" means. Regarding the functional application of the local craft, the indigenous design has continued to hold a marked place in the cultural, ritualistic and decorative practices surrounding lower and middle-income domestic sphere. It has also served a perfunctory purpose of cultural identification for a global audience much like the practices of indigenous cultures, historically. Many small products of kitchenware such as mortar and pestle, rolling pin and board etc. are usually made locally and even by hand without any significant change to the quality of the material or the design of the product over the decades. Similarly the cane furniture initially developed, as a village industry seems to make a frequent come back every now and then in the urban and middleclass homes usage. These items and many more become metaphors for the over-all artistic, cultural and economic identity of Pakistan and serve as a representation of our collective memory. The representation of the Pakistani identity and a constant reaffirmation of the nation's collective memory is not only restricted to objects but also nationalistic and historical sites dating the colonial and pre-colonial period. One such example is the choice of the Shahi' Qila, (Lahore fort) fenestration as a large size replica for the Pakistan pavilion in the 2010 Expo in Shanghai China. The fort is a legacy of the Mughal dynasty's rule in the subcontinent from before the British colonization and it serves as the emblem of the cultural, religious and romantic glory associated with Pakistan's selective yet collective memory. Locally and globally,

these objects, art works, architectural sites and generalized identities substitute the representation of the “real” (common) people and their voice. The voice of Pakistani culture finds its expression through the art and design.



Figure 1: Lahore Cottage Industry and Handcrafted Designed Items  
Source: *ULain 2014*

It would not be possible to speak about the art and design industry in Pakistan without referring to the importance of National College of Arts, Lahore. It has been the foremost foundation for the creative disciplines in the Western Subcontinent, that piece of land now known as Pakistan. The history of the National College of Arts is older to that of Pakistan; the, then known as Mayo school of Art, among others, was set up by the British in 1875 in Lahore.

Lockwood Kipling was the Principal of the Mayo school and the curator of the Lahore Museum; the two institutions established next to each other as part of the same compound. Together these institutes would preserve, promote and patronize the folk culture, the craft of the region and represent the heritage of the colonized sub-continent, with special emphasis on Punjab. The “...aim should be to seek out what is beautiful in the indigenous design art of this country, and use and develop the geometric and arabesque design forms that are so often to be met with in wood-carving in stone and in embroideries”<sup>1</sup> (Tarrar 2003, 17). The indigenous craft would, therefore, gradually begin to separate and evolve on its own terms as art and design; eventually laying the foundations of an industry in Pakistan. The introduction to formal design and application of academic understanding to the handed down skill of the craftspeople and practitioners of the region would result in a discipline that could survive independently and resonate with the global language of art.

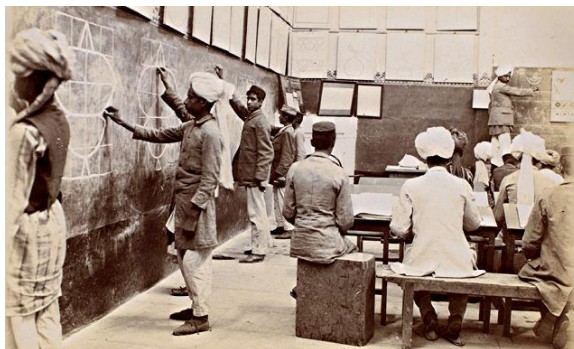


Figure 2: Elementary Drawing Class Mayo School of Art  
Source: *Fisher 2004*

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<sup>1</sup> Tarrar, Nadeem Omar. 2003. “Introduction” *Official Chronicle of Mayo School of Art: Formative Years under J.L. Kipling*. edited by Samina Choonara. Lahore: NCA Publications.

Much later, Gropius talked about handicrafts and new type-forms for mass production, which may be seen similar to our case study.

“Handicrafts and industry may be regarded as opposite poles that are gradually approaching each other. The former have already begun to change their traditional nature. In the future the field of handicrafts will be found to lie mainly in the preparatory stages of evolving experimental new type-forms for mass-production.” (Gropius 1965, 54)

Post the “Great Exhibition” of 1851 in London, the ongoing debate about the place of handicraft and cottage industry in the industrialized world has posed many questions for the designers, practitioners and researchers of the time. In the face of a similar dilemma, the program at Mayo School ultimately made a shift from an industrial bent to an academic one when it was moved from the Department of Industries to the education sector. Three departments were established namely, Fine Arts, Design, and Architecture. This shift in status is noteworthy because it marks a shift in the socio-cultural priorities of the young state of Pakistan in the early 1960s. When we speak of culture, we cannot ignore the role of social, political, traditional, geographical events that inhabit the aesthetics of our collective memory. NCA has held a crucial place in establishing the parameters of taught design and applied arts in Pakistan but the interest of this paper lies in the spheres of the curriculum and especially in the introduction to the aesthetics. For example, the National College of arts to this day follows a set first-year program that rotates a group of students in the following studios on a daily basis such, that the same group of students will return to the studio once every week. The four studios are divided on the basis of applied skill; free-hand drawing, sculpture, technical drafting by hand and manual design and form the pioneering bases for the aforementioned three disciplines of the college.

### **Issues in Design Practice/Pedagogy/Both**

Around ten other programs in the entire country offer an accredited Design program and with the exception of one other, all programs follow the same model of initiating design education in the foundation year. NCA has established its reputation as the craft school that became a bearer of Bauhaus values of formal and modern design in the late 1900s and presently wings the banner of a Contemporary Art school. It has set the footprint of the aesthetical norm of the art and design industry in Pakistan. It is the status quo in art academia and has helped shape the visual and creative bias of the country’s expression in architecture, art, media, industrial design, music, film, critical thought and so on. In short, it has created, influenced and developed the collective identity and hence memory of the Pakistani nation for over a 100 years.

When it comes to design education, however, there is a rift between the academic design and the needs of the market. There seems to be some stagnation in the application of the academic design in the market. In the classroom or the studio, these ideas might be avant-garde and revolutionary, but when it comes to practical application, the industry wants to promote only technically sound, socially safe and tried ideas. The once radical but now dated and outmoded colonial system of design pedagogy falls short to evolve itself with the contemporary, technological and capitalist needs of the world. The adopted curriculum of the School of Design at South Kensington (now Royal College of Art) for the Mayo School of Art needs reform and revision to meet the needs of the contemporary times. The new design schools, minus the legacy of the National College of Arts, need to redefine their manifestos mindfully. The romance of the previous century’s art is no longer sufficient to address the commercial and economical needs of today. The crop graduating from these colleges rarely shows entrepreneurial capacity and lacks sight to connect her acquired skill in the context of the spirit of the time. The challenge is to communicate. It is critical for design to communicate, to be part of its time and to characterize its culture. So how does a design course prepare a student to understand the different tiers of

commercial and social design? In Pakistan, formal design dictates the subject to achieve the basics similar to that of a skilled labor; thus, there is not much given to critical thought or challenge.

The social and political landscape of Pakistan requires “good-design” for the masses. But the question is how do we define good-design for us? Robert Pirsig in his philosophical fiction, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, is engrossed in the question of the measure good and of “quality” in art. “By returning our attention to Quality it is hoped that we can get technological work out of the non caring subject-object dualism and back into craftsman like self-involved reality again, which will reveal to us the facts we need when we are stuck”<sup>2</sup> (Pirsig 1999, 288). There are rare examples to be found among practiced design that successfully bridge the gap between the academic approach (in this case referring to experimental and not safe) and that of the needs of the commercial market. What sets these successful design houses and independent design styles apart from the rest is that they tend to become part of a movement of sorts that are borrowing from and are aesthetically charged by the indigenous craft itself instead of simply replicating the craft itself. A popular design house *Khaadi* as the word refers to the handloom or hand-woven, derive their identity from the practice of weaving cotton fabric on a loom, which is not a factual quality of all their products but an identity building reference to the cottage industry of the region of origin. Shamon Sultan of Khaadi shares his design intent, that of fusing a traditional practice with a modern approach. This cleverness can be observed in Khaadi’s approach of vibrant and “exotic” color palette introduced in its Khaadi Home collection; however, the emphasis is on the surface treatment alone. Nevertheless, upon a single glance of any given product of the brand, one may be able to incur the design association the brand wants to make with the indigenous textiles; technique of weave, color palette and pattern. Such a delicate approach to functional, aesthetically pleasing, smartly manufactured design that boldly captures the essence of the regional craft yet adopts it for effective mass production sounds deceptively simple. Unfortunately, the design schools have been able to furnish the market with successful example like Khaadi only infrequently.



Figure 3: Khaadi Hand-woven Cushion Cover  
Source: [khaadionline.com](http://khaadionline.com) 2014

## Transformation of Design Pedagogy

Design is political to its core, and plays a crucial role in forming the outsider’s perception of Pakistan. As seen in the example of the Pakistan Pavilion, discussed earlier, the identity building for the people inside the country could change if the outward representation to the rest of the world could be more flexible and less politically and pro-nationalistically controlled. We may

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<sup>3</sup> Pirsig, Robert M. 1999. *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance: An inquiry into Values*, New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers.

then probe into the collective pool of memory for it is the repositories of the new pedagogy of design that may help us define improved and more evolved standards of cultural identity. If the shared pool, which is a set of dispositions that construct the thought process, can be influenced, considering the spirit of the time, we could thus suggest new ways of thinking (good design) that prove meaningful for the collective and the society. However, what continued to be debated in official circles in British India was the direction of state patronage; whether art instruction was to be directed toward education or toward industry. Chief among these debates was the question whether training in design through teaching drawing in art schools was part of the general education to cultivate the minds and improve popular tastes, or if design education were to be made part of technical education to promote design manufacture and industry (Tarrar 2003).

It is the resistance of extinction that we as people, as living beings, in our nature, feel the need to collect and influence, consciously or unconsciously. A similar idea was presented as the Two Nation Theory, which resulted in the division of the sub-continent and the birth of Pakistan; that idea is the only justification to the existence of this nation, which could otherwise be identical to the India. Many Pakistani food restaurants around the world sell by calling themselves Indian. The same is true for other export products. But over the years the resilience of the state border and political maneuvers has resulted in some sense of a cultural identity and this inhabiting is getting shaped in a more organic manner. It is conscious only in its foundation, and not structure. Foundation being the composition of the collective (shared), taking from Bourdieu's concept of Habitus; investigating the social characteristics of individuals orienting human behavior without defining it, "it relates to our perceptions of the positions [or 'place'] of ourselves and other people in the world in which we live and how these perceptions affect our actions and interactions with places and people"<sup>3</sup> (Hillier 2005, n.p.). It is neither a result of free will, nor suggested by a plan, nevertheless developed through a sort of interplay between the two over time; characteristics that are shaped by past practices and that form current events, and in doing so influence our perceptions. Present along with history and human memory is what builds the idea of habitus. We can understand this by looking at certain behaviors and attitudes that become part of the social structure of a society; nevertheless, we are unable to distinguish its actual origin. This set of behavior or belief is marked as a custom or pattern when the original aim of this set can no longer be recalled, becoming socialized into the everyday of that culture. Hence, becoming the individual.

Seeking to approach this rather complex problem in microcosms, we at the School of Art Design and Architecture, National University of Sciences and Technology (NUST) have set out to design a studio program that aims to achieve the objectives of a foundation year level course through different means than the conventional skill based studio. In academics, the understanding of the cultural environment serves as case studies in the studio. We look at the studio as a culmination of conceptual and technical ideas across image and form. Instead of offering various avenues of skill and learning to a design studio in separate medium based studios, we use the Basic of Design studio has an all-inclusive laboratory of concept based learning across mediums, skills, and complexities. The improved pedagogy rejects linear trajectory of mediums and skills [ref: Bauhaus curricula Diagram] but builds itself in a matrix; horizontally achieving conceptual benchmarks and vertically exploring tools and techniques. It is dependent on confidence that is derived from profound critical thinking and self-awareness.

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<sup>3</sup> Hillier, Jean, and Emma Rooksby. 2005. *Habitus: A Sense of Place* Second Edition. Melbourne: Ashgate Publishing Company.

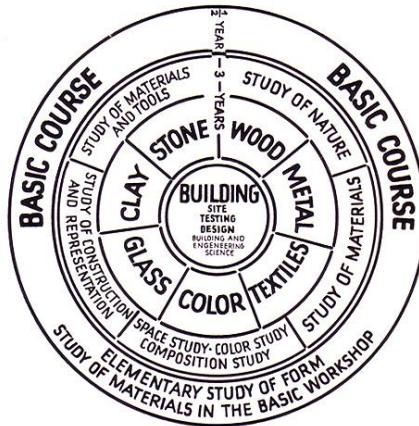


Figure 2: Bauhaus School Curriculum Diagram  
 Source: Itten 1923

It can be understood as a foundation course for all branches of visual and applied aesthetics. With each year we are developing the existing structure to facilitate the requirements of the studio and school. Through self-critique, analysis and external feedback, leaving the fundamental composition of the course untouched, the shell of the course is adjusted every now and then.

The structure of the workings of the studio behaves in a dual capacity. One being the shared pool, which is a construct of habitus, automatically brought to the studio, and the other being the collaboration that takes place between the artist and the designer conducting the studio. To further explain the approach we are acquiring in analyzing the environment and establishing analogy that can assist in building the design studio, we are looking at unlearning, learning, and relearning as an approach to understanding design pedagogy that takes from memory and environment (i.e. the collective pool), and re-structures the shared pool. We rely on the case studies recognized and presented by the collective memory pool and use formal design structures to dissect, deconstruct and redesign solutions for them. Hence applying unlearning to create space for new ideas and using observation to build a case, to brainstorming and assessing; learning the focus and mapping the process. Then, relearning process and scenarios to rebuild situations.

This collaboration has analyzed and incorporated the above structure as part of the design pedagogy to rebuild ideas that shape the collective pool, specifically targeting unlearning. The projects to be discussed below engage students on various technical and conceptual fronts but primarily they are designed as form-making exercises. But for the argument of this paper, these projects are being mentioned for their capacity to reforming and transforming thought and understanding about the object and environment with the man at the center of it. They are designed with a socio-cultural sensitivity and touch concerns of the vernacular through their themes.

Mapping the Route (one of the initial exercises conducted in the design-studio) that works toward visual thinking by voluntarily recalling the route from home to a specific place. The exercise demands to mark out five to six sites that act as a landmark for the route. It is important to note that except for Islamabad, no other city has been planned on a grid and the urban development of Pakistan has more or less evolved organically, creating very interesting case studies for our project. Collage as a technique exposes the students to use references to build their visual thinking. This technique can behave much like fiction, one can relate to the subject, more so, because in one's mind one aims at associating it with the real. The exercise is taking from memory an already acquired visual of the landmark and route and appropriating found images to visualize it. Reimaging becomes a necessary step for remembrance and hence, in



sustenance of the narrative. The discovery of overlaps in the individual’s narrative builds an interesting discourse about the role of memory, imagination and impressions of myth in the minds of the collective. This exercise enhances familiarization and builds a sense of community among the participants.



Figure 3: Mapping the Route Student Work (from memory and addition of fiction)  
 Source: Nawaz 2014

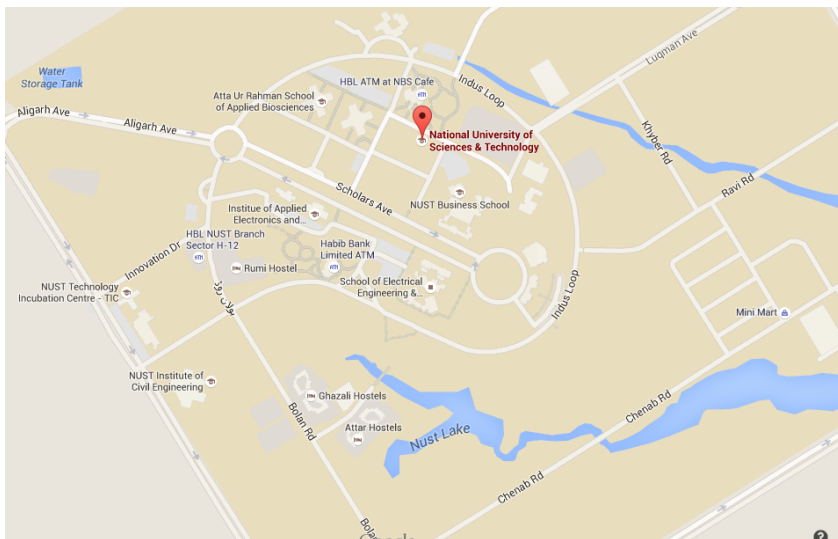


Figure 4: Screen-shot of Actual Map of Referred Material for the Above Assignments  
 Source: Google Map 2015

Frankenstein Project and Differently Abled project, both behave in a similar fashion unto the fact that they rely on the association of a certain object to its use, function and hence form. In both of them the body to object relationship is exploited in favor of unlearning what is familiar and learning to experience the object in a new or unaccustomed fashion. The remembrance and reenactment of the gestures and activities associated with object are recorded as the poetics of the object and then revisited. This process is reverse engineered into un-building and unthinking what we know and take for granted about everyday and mundane objects. The attachment of meaning to object and image is a constructed capacity of the mind and to work with the challenge of removing biases and working with the constraints of excluding information opens interesting avenues for *relearning*. There have been academic associations made previously between Oliver Sack’s *The Man who Mistook His Wife for a Hat*<sup>4</sup>, where a curious medical condition is

<sup>4</sup> Sacks, Oliver. 1998. *Man Who Mistook his Wife for a Hat and Other Clinical Tales*. New York, NY: Touchstone.

explained of a patient who could no longer make the necessary object-subject relationships taken for granted in the everyday. This case has been used as an academic study to deconstruct the object into its formal aspects and to perceive the object not intuitively but “objectively.” This unique way of introducing the ordinary as extraordinary raises heightened awareness towards the narrative of the object. And find its place globally and cultural-specifically. For example, a student’s response about an egg whisker ranges from a very broad idea of a kitchen tool to a metaphoric reference of “whipping a tale.” Here again, we notice the interplay of real and imagined in the subject-object relationship. These projects are aimed at unlearning the norm and critically evaluating the structure of the ordinary to open possibilities for socially responsible creativity.



Figure 7: Frankenstein Project Student work  
Source: Nawaz 2011



Figure 8: Charpoy making (weaved beds) selected object for the project Frankenstein  
Source: [thelongtriphome.wordpress.com](http://thelongtriphome.wordpress.com)

## Conclusion

It would seem insipid to abandon collective-memory, the shared pool that behaves as the core source of information. We may assume referring to the shared pool that its need in building a new way of thinking is unnecessary—unnecessary, as it has no endurance to go on without altering itself.

The art of building is contingent on the coordinated team-work of a band of active collaborators whose orchestral cooperation symbolizes the cooperative organism we call

society. Architectural and design in general sense are consequently matters of paramount concern to the nation at large. There is a widespread heresy they art is just a useless luxury. This is one of our fatal legacies from a generation which arbitrarily elevated some of its branches above the rest as the “Fine Arts,” and in so doing robbed all of their basic identity and common life. (Gropius 1965, 57–58)

However, that is one of the factors that give meaning to building the new way of thinking (good design). The awareness of economic situation and/or understanding of socio-economic and politically charged environment of Pakistan are key to building sensitivity in design pedagogy.

Responsible design is a political and cultural message to recode the gene pool of the collective understanding and behavior of the nation. It sends a message of reformed and progressive identity and of rebranding cultural connotations. By altering the shared pool in a pre-decisive pattern, it is a greater challenge, and the conclusion will only be revealed in time but the current direction is delicate in its approach and rigorous in its application. Hence, we believe that it should result in a more informed design sensibility. The new designer or a good designer will be responsible and aware. She is the negotiator of our existential condition of the present. She is critical and intelligent instead of romantic. And her interests are aligned with the medium and the market but having socio-cultural ties with history and a vision for the future. Only a holistic approach to solving this problem of misinformed and disinterested design could lead to a more effective tomorrow.

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