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IMHOTEF PHIDIAS ANTONIO LE CORRIDOR  
**D** An interpretation of the work of Russell Hall **D**

PhD. THESES

**Q**

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**J**

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*Yes, I believe it is possible to understand those different from me by means of sympathy and imagination, just as I understand a character in a novel or at the theatre or a real friend who is different from me. Moreover, I understand without repeating, portray without reliving, make myself different while remaining myself. To be a man is to be capable of this projection into another centre of perspective.*

Paul Ricoeur

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# IMHOTEP PHIDIAS ANTONIO LE CORRIDOR

## **D An interpretation of the work of Russell Hall D**

The thesis focuses on creativity and its significance, a rarely mentioned phenomenon in present day intellectual climate preoccupied with the threat of loosing cultural heritage and diversity. The unfolded arguments are centred on the contemporary Australian architect Russell Hall whose work is a remarkable example of adventurous architecture. Hall indicates the architectural lineage he wishes to identify with as follows: "It would be great to sign drawings Imhotep Phidias Antonio [Gaudi] Le Corridor". The distortion of 'Corbusier' to 'Corridor' refers to his own family name, 'Hall'. This pun has been borrowed as the title of this thesis.

### **Background**

The main criteria of scientific thinking are that it be an independent intellectual product and objective in its inquiry. Architectural theory therefore expresses possible ways for architecture in order to operate as a progressive cultural force in generalized theories which are then supported by examples of individuals' practical work. It is thus achieved that the theoretician's intellectual product is in closer correspondence with the criterion of academic thinking than a biographical study of an artist merely put in chronological order. The disadvantage of this practice is that by indenting to prove the researcher's hypothesis the actual subject of research becomes marginal and the criterion of objectivity falls short.

### **Research objective and method**

It may well be possible to invent a method of inquiry which surpasses a general biography but is capable of revealing the artists' philosophy and approach objectively. It could be achieved by an application of analogical thinking instead of concluding analysis in a thorough study of the oeuvre of already acknowledged artists, focusing on similar phenomena in their accomplished life and work. In so doing, instead of supposing a general spirit of age that manifests itself through individuals' work, the creative individual gets into the centre of inquiry, as the source of all ages' spirit, and as such, essentially constant and unchanged, varying only superficially.

The shift to emphasise on the individual instead of the general is basically an exchange of Western scientific thinking for the strategies and motives of Classical Oriental thinking. The aim of Classical Oriental thought is not the accumulation of factual data about the physical world, but to achieve a high state of consciousness and to acquaint with values beyond morality. The greatest act of man as a human being is considered to be his identification with Universe and the role of philosophy is to assist humans in this endeavour. Therefore in the Orient, philosophising is not considered to be as a professional activity exercised as a mere intellectual game, according to rules that were previously decided by a specialized group, but, as Y. L. Chin states:

*The philosophy of the Chinese sage required that he lived according to it; it was part of his philosophy that he has to live according to it. He considered it to be his mission that he works constantly and consequently on his self-development thus reaching pure experience, when,*

*surpassing selfishness and egoism he unites with Universe... He was not a dusty and musty scientist, who was sitting in the depth of his study slide at the fringe of life. Through his person philosophy was not only a construction of thinking put together for human comprehension, but a system of teachings, which manifested in his philosophic behaviour, which he deeply experienced. In some extreme cases, the philosophy of the Chinese sage is his life itself.*

The thesis considers the biography of artists in these terms. A critical analysis of architectural theory's widely applied method of creating generalized philosophies and the introduction of an individual-centred research method is demonstrated on a specific example, the work of an idiosyncratic figure of contemporary Australian architecture, Russell Hall and the connecting commentaries. The thus studied 'official' theoretical background: **I** a widely employed approach to modern Australian architecture interpreted as the creative output of regional schools, **I** concepts on a local domestic building type, the Queensland House and **I** Kenneth Frampton's Critical Regionalism, a theory that dominated architectural discourse during the 1980s and 90s and its Australian application, the identification of the South-east Queensland Critical Regionalist School.

The philosophical underpinning of the Critical Regionalist theory and that of this thesis is Paul Ricoeur's essay 'Universal civilization and national cultures' **Q1961Q**, though the present author bases her concept of the 'creative individual' on Ricoeur's theory of the "tragic law of the creation of a culture", an argument overlooked by Kenneth Frampton. According to Ricoeur creativity as an undefinable, unexplainable and unchangeable force is the source of the renewal of a culture, which manifests itself through artists who live in constant conflict with their receptive society and are respected only by posterity as "the authentic expression of his people". The present author reveals this aspect in the oeuvre of Russell Hall's personal heroes – Antoni Gaudí **Q1852-1926Q**, Constantin Brancusi **Q1876-1957Q**, Le Corbusier **Q1887-1965Q** and Richard Buckminster Fuller **Q1895-1983Q** – which then are demonstrated in Hall's life and work.

The present author pursued postgraduate studies at the University of Tasmania under the supervision of the architect-historian Rory Spence **Q1947-2004Q** during the years of 1997 and 1998. She studied the publications on Hall and other related material on Australian architecture, as well as the cultural context in general. An outsider's view with no preconceived ideas was useful in exploring Hall's own philosophy and forming a detached assessment of the intellectual climate that surrounds him. The present author spent 6 months in Brisbane in 1998, researching in Hall's office. In the company of the architect she visited the Fassifern Valley, his buildings of the South-East Queensland area and met his clients and colleagues. She had access to Hall's collection of slides, photographs, plans, sketches and newspaper clippings. She gained firsthand experience about the Queensland house while living in a two-roomed Queenslander in West End, one of Brisbane's oldest suburbs. As a guest of the Faculty of Architecture at the University of Queensland she studied material of the local architecture and contacted researchers and institutions involved in this field.

## **Theses**

J1. The method of thinking commonly applied in architectural theory is to consider creative output as the embodiment of a progressive or palatable spirit of age. Paradoxically, the hypotheses to be proved of a generalized theory turn out to be the source of its shortcomings, while overlooked aspects of the argument provide its significance in the wider realm of culture.

J2. The established view in Australian architectural history interprets architectural excellence as the given age's current architectural thought manifested in various regions: the 1950s' functionalism in Melbourne and the 1960s' regionalist - new brutalist aesthetic in Sydney generated the formation of the notions of the Melbourne- and Sydney Schools. Three decades later an adoption of Critical Regionalism, the dominating theory of 1980's architectural discourse, the concept of the South-East Queensland Critical Regionalist School joined up to the generally accepted theoretical stream.

JJ3. The common characteristic of these three 'schools' is in the prime motive of their formulations: to prove the architectural excellence of the constituencies they represent. The theoreticians involved in this stream of thought, as contemporaries and participants of their subject matter, base their arguments on personal impressions rather than factual research. An objective analysis of these theories undermines their scientific value but also highlights their merit: the creation of the lacking myth of a young culture.

J4. The contradictory accounts on the history and origins of the building type dominating Queensland's domestic architecture from mid-19th century until the Second World War, the Queensland House, are a result of the different motives of their formulators. Present author established two categories to separate them accordingly: the research method applied by the 'objective camp' fulfils the criteria of present academic thought, thus these arguments are acceptable for further scientific inquiry, while the 'emotional camp' driven by the desire to identify a unique regional feature supplied Queensland with an architectural myth.

J5. The architect-ideal of Critical Regionalist theory works towards reversing the material and spiritual destruction of modernism by implementing physical and cultural characteristics of his region into his built work. Frampton's ideal does not comply with what he claims to be the source of his theory, Paul Ricoeur's essay *Universal civilizations and national cultures* published in French in 1961. In his writings Frampton seem to order architects to maintain their architectural heritage while he omits to present his views on creativity, which Ricoeur identifies as the prime force manifested through individuals who thus contribute to the renewal and survival of their culture.

J6. Frampton's further significant departure from Ricoeur's arguments is that he interprets them as an applicable philosophy, whereas Ricoeur considered his writing to be a record of mid-20<sup>th</sup> century cultural climate, when the idea of the "single truth" had to be abandoned in favour for the individual's personal conviction, whose self-expression cannot be subject of manipulation or impediment, and which is the only force that can save humanity from an irreversible loss of its higher potentials.

**J7.** Despite its shortcomings the theory of Critical Regionalism plays an important role in the development of our ways of thinking, supporting processes that abandon the idea of superior cultural centres surrounded by inferior peripheries, a ranking based on the degree of presence of western civilization's values. Thus Critical Regionalist thought contributes to the realisation of a harmonious co-existence of cross-fertilising, communicating cultures, an ideal yet to come true in Ricoeur's time.

**J8.** A side-product of Frampton's theory is the development of creative self-confidence in the South-east Queensland region, with its architectural aspect laid down by Peter Skinner in his concept of the South-east Queensland Critical Regionalist School. In this, Skinner supposes the early existence of a unique architectural merit manifested in the form of the Queensland House, in which he also discovers the embodiment of the basic tenets of modern architecture. He bases this thesis on an 'emotional' view of the Queensland House and on his misinterpretation of Ricoeur, that the source of a region's identity is to be found in its symbols.

**J9.** According to an academic point of view Skinner does not argue sufficiently for the existence of a Critical Regional School, not only due to the shortcomings of the arguments he uses to support his thesis. He cannot reveal the 'unique' features of the Queensland House and does not establish a convincing connection between traditional and contemporary Queensland residential architecture so that the latter could constitute a Critical Regionalist School. The real significance of Skinner's research, which he overlooks, is the introduction of several contemporary Queensland architects, including Russell Hall, who are capable to produce a diverse, rich in variety, indigenous and daring in self-expression architecture and thus contribute to the survival of their culture.

**J10.** Present author bases her own method of inquiry on a till now overlooked thesis of Ricoeur: "a culture dies as soon as it is no longer renewed or recreated" and with the concept of the 'creative individual' brings examples to prove it. These are the artists and architects influencing the work of Russell Hall, the subject of present thesis. The oeuvres under consideration are organised mainly according to characteristics of a creative individual defined by Paul Ricoeur as follows: early and constant conflicts with institutional systems, the evolution of a personal philosophy based on a study of nature and its generalized principles expressible through geometrical concepts, life and personal environment as the most complete embodiment of ideals, which is respected only by posterity.

**J11.** The above themes are identifiable in the work of Russell Hall thus providing further example for present author's individual-centred method of inquiry. A self-evident modification of the method occurs when applied to a contemporary, as no account can be given about his evaluation by posterity. The essence of present author's method is not to establish a "right-thinking image" against which her subject matter is to be weighted. Her goal is to present diverse ways of self-expression manifested through the work of creative individuals and thus highlighting the individuals' responsibility in an age of no single truth. It is the task of the individual to develop her own creative potential and to assist others in this endeavour. Humanity's future depends whether its members are able to meet "at the level of authentic dialogue" and we all have to "take part in this formidable debate" individually, in order to conquer our instinct of conformism.

## Outlook

The concept of the creative individual may be extended not only to the oeuvre of further artists but to other individuals bringing remarkable changes into other fields of our culture: scientists, religious men or political reformers. Galileo Galilei spending the last decade of his life in házi Őrizetben forced to deny his views on the world publicly; Albert Einstein, fuelled by a belief in the harmony ruling not only in the fields of science led him to political claims that attracted harsh criticism or **merénylet** victim Mahatma Gandhi who played a crucial role in India's independence movement. They all represent a life dedicated to humanity's prosperity, a tireless work exercised from a high moral stance.

An understanding of the individual's efforts introduced through her own values is more than an easily forgettable intellectual game, but a moral example that becomes a guide for the observer in every aspect of her life. For humanity that reached a state of technological progress when she is able to determine her own future, a firm philosophical stance about life and world is crucial. The survival of humanity is an ethical question, whether we are able to think of ourselves as an acting force of a universal system and think and behave accordingly, without harming our own or others' individual and cultural identity.

Tradition becomes a vivid part of our present, if we interpret it as the creativity of the past. Thus it becomes unnecessary to reinvent its values or repeat its failures. Feeding spontaneity and creativity and the cultivation of the higher mental abilities of humans are especially important in the work of educators. A population that is not able to satisfy her spontaneous needs and limited in her self-expression is easy to manipulate. A generation thus deprived irreversibly from its creative potential will be unable to surpass values that she has lost herself.

## Publications

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Russell Hall Architects QH Hall in the middle