

Politicised Territory: Nek Chand's Rock Garden in Chandigarh.

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Abstract

This paper is commenting on the Indian condition since 1947 and the establishment of a new identity that was to be represented architecturally, through the Modernist agenda of Le Corbusier, and his team of European architects. The politics linked to Chandigarh have always been heated and it continues to test and play with territories and dynamic law, as well as maintaining a strong sense of style and an artistic flank. Constructed as a series of episodes, the paper commentates on the how the city of Chandigarh was designed and how it has developed in relation to the strict procedure's the architects employed. The aim of the paper is to examine how one man's illegal artistic endeavour undermined, and assaulted, the city's layout and guidelines prepared for its future development, whilst becoming its most important asset in the process. Nek Chand systematically collected and re-assembled discarded household rubbish to form a series of sculptures. The scale of his production was prolific and covered a considerable area of land adjacent to the Government buildings. The politic of his act was crucial and the polemical decision to allow 'Nek Chand's Rock Garden' to remain upon discovery of it, was indicative of a change in the political and cultural mindset of India. The post-independence identity of India was never given the opportunity to establish itself, being firmly repressed within the Modernist quest for internationalism and its 'context-free' stance and utopian overtones. India, represented by Nehru, expressed a belief that the Modernist ideals, expressed through the built environment, would signal the freedom of India without resorting to past forms. Despite this, Le Corbusier used the antiquated device of an edict to instil his ideas upon the city. The paper contests the implications of the edict and the indiscriminate use of the 'Modular Man' to scale and proportion all elements of the new city, whilst examining the contrasting approach of Nek Chand's 'hu-man' response, using sculpture and architectural devices to depict folklore. The notion of 'ruin and transformation' is raised in the penultimate episode. The city is in the process of becoming a ruin, its Modernist origins merely provide a framework for a different city growing within. Chand works with the notion of the ruin transforming 'the ruined' into artefacts. Chand represents and forms part of a different mindset to Modernity, whilst living and working within it, using it as a raw material to reassess and redefine the new. The story terminates as it attempts to traverse 'the wall' that now surrounds the Rock Garden. The implications of the wall affect both City and the Rock Garden. The definition of 'self' and the identification of the 'other' are investigated, relating to previous sections and a wider perspective on Indian culture through a spacio-political lens.



SURREPTITIOUS BEGINNINGS

This tale begins in 1965, when Nek Chand, a resident of Chandigarh neglected his duties as city road inspector. A small forest in the greenbelt periphery surrounds the Capitol Complex. Without making anybody aware, it was in this forest - almost under the shadow of the best buildings in Chandigarh - Nek Chand began his covert operation of illicit production. He had developed a passion for collecting unusual shaped rocks formed in the Himalayas, as well as, discarded household objects that he salvaged from the city rubbish dumps. As Walter Benjamin so succinctly puts,

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Every passion borders on the chaotic, but the collector's passion borders on the chaos of memories. More than that: the chance, the fate that suffuse the past before my eyes are conspicuously present in the accustomed confusion of [the collection] . . . Naturally [the collectors] existence is tied to many other things as well: to a mysterious relationship to ownership, to a relationship to objects that does not emphasise their functional, utilitarian value – that is, their usefulness – but studies and loves them as the scene, the stage, of their fate.¹ [Benjamin, p.65, 1999]

His aim was to collect objects that he found interesting in some way, with a view to remoulding the 'raw materials' into a series of sculptures. After several months of reclaiming and rediscovering, he began to labour on the sculptures, working secretly after nightfall by the light of burning tyres. Initially it was just a way of recreation, a therapeutic activity of creating forms out of other peoples discarded refuse. However, Chand had always dreamt about a kingdom that he wanted to recreate. When he saw the patch of land, that is now the Garden, it reminded him of a derelict kingdom and he started to slowly assemble his dream. Without any apparent pragmatic reason behind the production, his creative endeavour continued unabated, making use of broken ceramic tiles, old toilet and basin units, bike saddles, electrical components and dumped hardcore rubble, combining such found material with energy and satiric wit.

As the years passed the statues, which by now had gained some local notoriety, spilt over a greater area and small, concrete podiums were constructed for their display. The critical politic of his creative act, however, must be noted in this occupation of private land and in the illegal development of the greenbelt zone that coupled with the innocent enthusiasm of the pioneer explorer. Despite the land falling within the remit of the city boundaries, it was unused – effectively abandoned scrubland at the periphery of the city. This territorial void, an uncharted wilderness nestling under the shadows of the famous buildings of Sector-1, was both a product of its proximity to the city dumping ground, as well as, of developmental restrictions.² Chand used the dumping ground as an open quarry from which his precious base materials could be carefully extracted and refined. From Chand's point of view the space was ideal, he could work undisturbed and with little chance of being caught, his materials were located close by and in regular constant supply. On a local level, his act was exposing the inadequacies of the master plan and its disability to prevent such acts taking place.

However the production of the sculptures was indicative of a fundamental shift in the development of India's political youth and a craving throughout the nation to take the future into their own hands. The adoption of Modernism was essential in creating an immediate physical representation of the Nehruvian concept of independence that expressed an aesthetic that was truly of its time and dreamt of a future free from the shackles of the past.³ As well as developing the master plan, Le Corbusier ensured that extensive visual controls were in place to nurture a homogenous aesthetic and visual standardisation. This ocular control obsession extended to include materials, textures, boundary gates and even manhole covers. Nehru's enthusiastic participation and active role in the aesthetic decision making process was unusual for a politician but showed how important India viewed the need to establish the correct visual manifestation of the new order, and the capacity image was to play in acting out politician's visions. However, like

many other ideological transfers, Modernism proved to be a restrictive and unforgiving importation, working in effect to extend colonial hegemony under the mask of post-independence 'freedom', stifling the development of India's own notion of identity under its vacuous, content-eroded constrictor-like grip. The visual controls that were in place attempted to nurture a homogenous aesthetic and visual standardisation. This ocular control obsession extended to include materials, textures, boundary gates and even manhole covers. Such a notion was given added complexity by the changing attitudes towards development, characterised by the strong presence and continuation of diverse traditions and histories on the one hand and the forces attempting to break away from those precise traditions on the other. It was therefore critical that questions were asked regarding Modernism's true nature, potential, role, contribution and future in post-independence India. It was also imperative that clarifications be sought through a careful understanding of Modernism's close connection with post-independence politics and power.

This is where Nek Chand's work is of fundamental importance. Emerging stealthily out of a context entirely configured and produced by Modernism and Independence, his Rock Garden an ever extending collection of bizarre sculptures, in a very unselfconscious way, began to question and overturn the very conceptual tool employed in the making of Chandigarh - the Modulor - only to re-form the notions of Modernity on the subcontinent, but also tradition, in a 'post-colonial' context. Again, by violating fundamental laws guiding the planning and development of the city, the edict, of which working as a city road inspector he would surely have been aware of, Nek Chand pushed his creation further into this political act of questioning. Without overtly stating a political agenda, Nek Chand's garden, as this paper will argue, can be viewed as a critique of Chandigarh, and by extension, of the Modernist agenda expounded by Le Corbusier. It is the 'other' Chandigarh, as we shall see, that emerges, not so much in total 'opposition' to the host through an utter negation of the dominant city themes, but employing, in Saidian parlance, a 'contrapuntal' relationship with the city, that is by establishing precise 'counterpoints'.⁴ Nek Chand cleverly constructs these counterpoints by carefully inverting or subverting the rules underlying the various city themes. The Rock Garden acts like litmus paper, responding to its environment and constantly testing the city, using its wreckage as apparatus.

POLITICS OF ACCEPTANCE

By the time the authorities accidentally discovered the garden in 1972, two thousand sculptures inhabited the under-growth linked via intertwining paths. The 'discovery' could have heralded the bulldozers to return the site back to its status as a conveniently and deliberately maintained wilderness.⁵ According to the planning rules development in a 'forbidden area' should be demolished, however news about the garden spread throughout the city and hundreds of visitors came to witness the spectacle. The exodus to the garden had a profound effect on the city bureaucrats and politicians, and probably influenced the views of the planning committee. If they gave the order to demolish the garden they faced widespread public outcry and the serious risk of losing public support.

This garden, the authorities realised, had the potential to abruptly end the political careers of many people and had to be handled sensitively. Nek Chand was no longer Nek Chand passing the time forging his sculptures; he was the city's most famous road inspector who defied the Authority without really intending to, whilst still remaining just another resident of the city. Chand's role became one like Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde's: existing within 'the system' during the day, then vividly and actively defying it under the cover of darkness.

His only weapon was recycled rubbish transported to the site on the back of his bicycle. The 'discovery' was significant as it thrust Chand into the city lime-light and enabled further development on a scale that Chand could not have envisaged nor undertaken by himself. Production was subsequently accelerated and he continued to occupy the site, still working illegally whilst the future of the garden was under debate next door in Sector-1. The pocket of resistance and support developed, as people wanted an association with Chand's success and risk. The home is often viewed as an extension of the self and therefore, the residents of Chandigarh could see themselves present in Chand's production. Pieces of their homes and dispossessed possessions were present and still clearly visible in the Garden, increasing the affinity people felt towards the scheme. It was this attachment through the familiar in which they saw a celebration of their 'mundane' existence in stark contrast to the abstracted and isolated ideas presented in the city and emulated by the authorities with amazing precision in their attitude in dealing with life in the city.

The future of the Garden was debated for a further four years until 1976 when the government officials realised the potency of the situation, its economic possibilities and perhaps the individual merit of the sculptures. The inauguration of the Rock Garden in 1976 was as much an indication of a changing consciousness with regard to Modernist thoughts, as it was the authorities' realisation that the destruction of the Garden was a potential political quick-sand. The 'international art scene' was beginning to take an interest in the 'work', and the garden was to feature in folk art magazines and documentaries. An Indian piece built outside of direct European influence but on the spoils of Modernity. It was almost as if external validation was necessary for the Garden to be taken seriously by the Indian authorities.⁶

The debate would have undoubtedly included the planning issues and the implications of letting such a development remain. The abandonment or flexing of the planning rules to this degree is an oddity for any city to entertain, especially in Chandigarh which had nurtured and insisted on the Modernist principles instilled at its conception – up until this point. Permitting an exception of this scale and setting a precedent for the city in terms of planning could have had serious legal implications for the future of the city; however, the political advantages foreseen in formalising the 'garden' must have far outweighed those. Despite reservations, therefore, the site was officially inaugurated as 'Nek Chand's Rock Garden'.

The high moral planning ground and precise city layout gave way to Nek Chand's unplanned bric-à-brac garden. An official order, presented by Dr. Randhawa, the Chairman of Chandigarh Landscape Advisory Committee, was passed, 'to preserve the

garden in its original form, free from the interference of architects and town planners'. This statement almost inverts the agendas of the previous decades after independence, but echoes the same pompous tones. One can detect a shift away from the rigid rules governing the planned city, while a diminishing modernism-instigated faith in the paramount leadership of planners and architects is clear from this statement that was originally made in support of the garden as early as 1973.

NON-MODULOR-MODULOR

The city of Chandigarh was to be designed according to specific proportions. The chosen system was called The Modulor Man and was devised by Le Corbusier as a, 'harmonious measure of human scale, universally applicable to architecture and mechanics'⁷ [Curtis p.163, 1999]. It consists of a six-foot man with his arm out-stretched inscribed into a square. The square is subdivided to coincide with the parts of the body. His feet, his solar plexus, his head and fingertips provide the intervals for the production of the Golden Section. An inter-spiralling 'red and blue series' is formed using the over-all height of the man and again with his arm outstretched. The intention behind the idea was to help architects adapt their designs to human requirements based on dimensions taken directly from an imaginary, but nevertheless, *human* body.

The Modulor Man was a singular universal entity, to be applied indiscriminately and universally to all forms of design, irrespective of any other peculiarities that may be part of the conditions. The Corbusian Modernist strategy, recognising the potential in the 'anonymity and standardisation based on human dimensions',⁸ (Jencks, p.79, 1987) argued for a transformation of the house as a machine to live in. In Chandigarh this was extended into many aspects of the city plan and especially into the buildings of the Capitol complex, but also through more overt representations. It had found its way into the collection of cosmic symbols assembled in the design of the enamelled ceremonial door. The Modulor's central role in making the city was elevated to near mythical status by the celebrated story of how Corbusier lost his hand-made Modulor scroll on one of his many site visits, never to be found again, suggesting that the seed of Modulor was sown into the ground.⁹ The Modulor was, and still is, present everywhere.

Working as an administrator but with a difference, Chand became the non-modular man living in the Modulor Man City. The Rock Garden is clearly not formed or governed by set mathematical formulae such as the Modulor Man or any other proportioning device. The process Chand employs relishes on circumstance and chance, as opposed to proportional precision, resulting in thousands of variations on several themes. The formal and technical details are not his main concern; Chand is more concerned with the 'panorama of visual rhythms created by varying forms, colours and textures'¹⁰ (Raw Vision Magazine p. 36,1997).

Curiously, Chand inverts the implied role of the Modulor in mass-producing artefacts [a house is both a machine and an artefact of everyday use, they are "the slaves, the valets and servants"] (Jencks, p.79, 1987)¹¹ for the use of the liberated man of the industrial

age. He takes the debris of mass production – its molecularised fragments - and turns it into the mass; they are almost always presented as a mass - not faceless, standardised and universal, however - but individuals who form a collective through shared anthropological and socio-cultural characteristics, as it were. Their shadows and silhouettes resemble the outline of the Modulor Man; however, no two are the same and each one is in a constant state of flux as it morphs according to the sun path during the course of the day.

In the fashion of the true cosmic tyrant, trying desperately to hold on to its cosmic and universal claim, the Modulor Man broadcasts a set of instructions for all occasions, resulting in a monologue. The system by its very nature can be extended indefinitely and is a one way process from the Modulor to the built form. Its purity and continual abstraction attempts to preserve and remove the Modulor Man from any contamination through its accidental contact with human activities and rituals, consigning it to a soulless existence. As a result, it managed to produce the Capitol Complex; in spite of the heroic gestures, they are a group of buildings with their life sapped off. The sculptures, on the other hand, are not condemned to a set system, they are not destined to issue a set of instructions to society, but are a product or reflection of and a response to the society from which they originated. They are not overtly cosmic, but very much down to earth, however their constellations transcend their earthy nature. The sculptures provoke interest, inquiry and interpretation; consequently, as we shall see later, they set up dialogues with the viewer in terms of their origin and the present, to which they are perpetually linked.

The Modulor was also presenting problems for the Design team. Edwin Maxwell Fry refused to blindly accept the Modulor system in some of his designs¹², and for Corbusier, because such a system was in place,¹³ he declared that he could design the scheme from his Parisian studio rather than on site with the other three European architects, which they resented. The implications of denying the supremacy of the abstraction of human proportions were severe and the penalties extended into the spatio-political field. Fry and Drew, it was decided, would design the less eminent buildings and the majority of the housing schemes. Le Corbusier, on the other hand, directly correlating prestigious buildings with self-importance, was to take the more prominent buildings and the Capitol complex.

By inverting the claims, intended roles and qualities of the Modulor, Chand manages to slot in his humanistic, but also possibly political, agendas into the uncharted void left on the periphery of Sector-I. For Le Corbusier, the Modulor was an inanimate tool, or more appropriately a mute slave, to build a city he always wanted to build. In the twilight of his career, he was not willing to allow the specificity of humanistic and programmatic complexity to upset that smooth passage. As a result, Chandigarh is an abstraction taken to the infinite, Le Corbusier's creation is vacuous and lifeless - a giant maquette - notwithstanding the qualities for which it has been held in high regard. In rejecting the Modulor by playing with the Modulor Chand was protesting against the lack of the humanistic spirit and the anthropological content in Corbusier's programme, and by extension, against Le Corbusier. On a wider level the garden seems to be questioning the undue importance often apportioned within certain schools of architectural thought to

abstract mathematical logic over a much needed anthropological content. Chand was using the refuse and collected items to provide a commentary on the city, and on the (often denied) past of the city through the debris-lens.

EDICT

Chandigarh has a city 'Edict' designed and erected to ensure that future planning of the city remains true to the original concepts instilled by Le Corbusier. This, in Corbusier's mind, ensured the city's historic continuity within the Indian tradition. Throughout the long history of India edicts have been established by reigning authorities (e.g., Emperor Ashoka), physically manifested through grand stone carvings or through the erection of pillars positioned at the far corners of their kingdoms to demonstrate their power, role and significance. By their very nature edicts were proclamatory and universalising in their content.

The Edict of Chandigarh is on display in the leisure valley on a plaque and its object is ' . . . to enlighten the present and future citizens of Chandigarh about the basic concepts of planning of the city so that they become its guardians and save it from the whims of individuals.'¹⁴

The edict adopts a simplistic approach to a planning guideline, choosing (thankfully) to disregard many rules that burden the construction process today. It only asks for certain areas of the city to be reserved for certain tasks and that materials and scale follow a 'truthfulness [and] human scale . . . that puts us in touch with the infinite cosmos.' The extent and limits of this edict were designed to span the globe, universalised in its intention for being applicable to all cities; the proclamation, understandably, did not extend to the appropriateness of building types, densities nor to the demands of future market forces.

One can argue that, overtly consumed with waging arguments and implementing the CIAM manifesto, the views and opinions held by Le Corbusier and others at the time chose, to a great extent, to blindly ignore the realities gripping cities. The dream of the CIAM was to implement the Utopian City and to forge a New Age of Optimism. On the other hand, showing its reluctance, as we have already seen, to address the Indian reality, the authorship of the edict displays an 'imaginative poverty', that carelessly side steps the riches this new city could have potentially reaped. The edict is a static relic based on a naïveté that passes rules with very little impact on the real qualities of a city. It is based solely, as would appear, on a 'moral discourse of straight lines, right angles a figurative appeal to nature with the worst kind of abstraction (Lefebvre, p.144, 1997)'¹⁵.

From its proclamation to link with the cosmic, the edict takes an abrupt leap to make an important announcement; stating that the 'city is planned to breathe the new sublimated spirit of art', a surprising reminder of the totalising and exclusionary approach to designing human environment often adopted by the early Modernists,¹⁶ the edict bans the erection of statues in the city or parks of Chandigarh. Although the edict refers to the prohibition on erection of monuments of people in the form of statues within the city parks, it also applies to Chand's production that, by the time of its discovery, had already

reached monumental status. Sitting on the edge of Sector-I, on a site designated to remain empty - precariously positioned at the intersection of wilderness, parkland and trenching ground - Chand appropriated the site's ambiguity that questioned the applicability of such rules.

The edict and Chand's actions truly reminds us of Loos' attack on the Modernist 'completeness' in his parable 'The Poor Little Rich Man', where the talented architect had 'forgotten nothing, absolutely nothing'. To the suggestion of displaying gifts by the client, the vexed and annoyed architect thundered, 'Did I not consider everything? You don't need anything more. You are complete'. (Dodds, G., & Tavernor, p.273, 2002)¹⁷. A self-build monument that has consistently violated the city plan layout, it is riddled with statues and goes against the nature of the city and such abstract Modernist preferences. In this sense, the slums that emerged from the early days in Chandigarh and the Rock Garden have similar, yet complementary roles to play. While the unplanned housing developments respond to a basic need for shelter and somewhere to call, 'home',¹⁸ the Rock Garden in contrast, has no utilitarian purpose, it transcends all necessity, but has developed in response to the forbidding lack of art and spontaneous expression. The city does now breathe the sublimated spirit of art only as a result of the Rock Garden and the tourists it teases into the city¹⁹.

'FETTERED' BY ARCHAEOLOGY'

Chand makes use of discarded objects and, through a change of context and assemblage, brings them back from the brink of their useful existence into his resurrected collection of Rock Garden artefacts, which take on different meanings as a result of this transformation. The sculptures are the product of the ruins and the ruined objects that undergo subtle but profound transformations into artefacts whilst still retaining evidence of their previous incarnation. Twenty-four villages that stood on the site before the city project began were demolished to make way for the city, the residents were offered no financial recompense and the remains of their belongings and homes were discarded in the rubbish dump. It was this rubbish dump that Chand quarried and obtained the initial pieces for his venture,²⁰ salvaging in the process, many of the ruined objects and structures that occupied the site before Chandigarh. This process has continued, recycling the debris from the contemporary city, with Chand acting as a commentator, narrator and translator of the city and its inhabitants, whilst simultaneously retelling historical folklore into physical daydreams. Nehru wanted Chandigarh to be the new Indian City unfettered by the past - a-historic, to some extent, and definitely un-archaeological. Yet Chand's Chandigarh precisely depends on the past - on the physical debris that resulted from, what can be termed a catastrophic erasure – and alludes to mythological and popular themes re-contextualised in historical debris. The mythological content underpins the resurrection and elevates the otherwise unremarkable fragments.

Chand judges the object on its aesthetic and material properties, generating new readings based on its revised context and form. Chand makes the entire sculpture from one type of object, intensifying its qualities and making direct connections with the occupants of the city through this repetition of the familiar and the mundane, thereby trapping the lifestyles, and by extension, the peoples within the sculptures. Curiously enough,

concrete is employed to bind the fragments together, which is also the material preferred by Corbusier in the Capitol complex. However, there is the difference: the concrete used here is the connector (the binder) and not the principal component, relegating it to a secondary status. An important element of Chand's work is that the original function and 'history' of the object is never dismissed or lost; the small inexpensive fashion accessory becomes the portrayal of something much more significant.

A group of the sculptures is clad in thousands of coloured glass and plastic bangles that have been salvaged. The bangles relate to the huge multitude of the girls who once lived, and are possibly still living, in Chandigarh. Broken bangles retained carry misfortune prompting owner discards them forthright. To Chand those are the final and most important materials in completing the sculptures.

The object is stripped of its function and from its conventional reality as a product; its original function as bangle is replaced with something else, as a drape or colourful clothing on an anthropomorphic sculpture. The tragedy attached to most of the discarded materials is in this way reversed as Chand transforms the objects whilst retaining the aesthetic qualities. The bangle that was once worn on a girl's arm is now part of a sculpture of a girl. The bangle as symbolic of puberty and femininity has been writ large: the bangle becomes the girl! Moreover, they confront the audience - an audience, primarily Indian, hailing from the strictures of the male-dominated society. They face the audience in their multitude, as seldom these sculptures are on their own. They ask questions.

THE WALL

With the inauguration of the Garden in 1976 came the construction of the perimeter wall, further promoting the 'difference' and acting as a clear sign of established identity, but also as a political device to frame this anomaly. Earlier, the city defined its limits by the extents of its grid, which polarised the city from the greenbelt. The rigidity and finality of the city plan that came to an abrupt end with the grid was now being feathered by the Garden; softened around its edges.

Initially, the Rock Garden occupied an interstitial space. It is these 'in-between' spaces that always, as Bhabha points out, 'provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood...that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself.' (Bhabha, p.1-2, 1994) ²¹. The development of the Rock Garden gradually enhanced the polarity; however, 'pre-wall', as we have already seen, it was still clearly apart from the city.

The technique of wall building has been used repeatedly throughout history to establish physical and psychological detachment, but also to incorporate; however the city is normally passive in encircling itself rather than proactively ensnaring its attacker.

Of course, the wall must also perform the mundane duties expected of it, such as fortifying the Garden, making it economically viable and raising the expectations of the visitor by hiding premature glimpses. In addition to this it also encloses and forms a

barrier between the sculpture's illegitimacy and the pronounced purity of the modernist city. In an attempt to retain the modernist ideology, to preserve the edict and to demonstrate the city's domination and powers to confine, it was absolutely necessary to alienate and dissociate the garden from the city.

The 'other' was instantly distinguished from the city and in a postcursor to the old American freak-shows, voyeurs can pay to see the transformed household objects.

The visitors have their backs fearfully turned on the city when they pass through the threshold of the wall to enter the cage where the misfit and his narrative of the city are impounded.

The wall marks the spot where the city is left behind and the non-Modulor human has inverted and re-presented parts of the discarded Modulor city, reassuring their differences. The wall specifies the volume that contains difference. In order for the city to recognise its own being, to define its 'self', it must differentiate and highlight what it is not; the 'other' must be clearly prescribed in order to confirm, reassure and validate the existence of self. The construction of the wall was also the construction of an identity. The construction of identity establishes 'others' and opposites; this fashioning of identity is under continuous interpretation and then re-interpretation of its differences from 'us'. Edward Said argues that, "the identity of self or 'other' is a . . . social, intellectual and political process that takes place as a contest involving individuals and institutions in all societies."²² [Said, p.332, 1995 reprint, emphasis added]

This was the case in 1947 with the Independence and also with the city of Chandigarh vs. the Rock Garden debate. The contest for identity is essential and leads to recognition as well as exclusion. Said's words puts the idea across succinctly, ' . . . the construction of identity is bound up with the disposition of power and powerlessness in each society.' (Said, p.332, 1995 reprint)²³

The Garden also needs the duality of the wall to locate its ever-increasing boundaries and to establish an identity that is not Chandigarh, despite existing solely from its excrement. It is pertinent that the Garden only contains the discarded objects from the city; it can only contain what the city throws away and therefore what the city no longer is, or wants to be associated with.

The wall has enabled the Garden to distance itself from the city, of which it is a part, creating a separate faction within a relatively affluent and consumer-dominated city. By setting up this threshold, the city, rather than taking on the Garden, has surrendered this territory to it. Threshold was never a part of the initial garden; it had no frontier that explicitly stated the extents of its boundaries and this made the 'creation' hard to define, impossible to control and therefore volatile. The Garden is now recognisable as being separated from the City but is connected to it as a result of its legitimacy and bona fide operations, as well as the city profiting from its success directly and indirectly, as the city's fame rotates about the garden.

THE KNOWING AND SUBVERTING AMATEUR

The success of the Garden is dependent on the recognition of its difference from the city, in which it resides, however it is the city that is at most risk of dilution, a city that has struggled to preserve its idiolect in the changing approach to design, planning and discourse. It is through this difference created by the sculptures and their settings, which is also a means of re-appraising Nehru and Corbusier's dream city Chandigarh, that Chand has managed to introduce a popular and critical modernity, independent from revivalist or Modernist doctrines.



1. The top of the Secretariat building.



2. Side elevation of the Assembly building and reflection pool.



3. Front elevation of Secretariat Building.



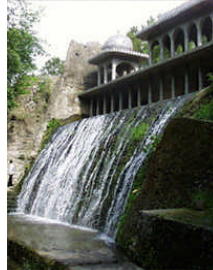
4. Tribute to the modular man. A sculpture of the modular in Sector-10.



5. A man hole cover displaying the city grid layout.



6. Waterfall located within the Rock Garden with sculptures at the bottom



7. A second waterfall with a folly and colonnade construction at the top. The Rock Garden is an artefact itself and extends into the field landscape architecture and minor civil engineering



8. Le Corbusiers enamel door to the Assembly Building. This contains a painting of the Modular man along side other symbols and representations of India.



9. An army of sculptures clad in bangles and displayed on a concrete podium.



10. A simple concrete sculpture and more abstract examples to the rear.



11. Early examples of the sculptures clad in broken crockery

All photographs authors own except 'manhole cover' used by the kind permission of Dr. Soumyen Bandyopadhyay.

The Rock Garden does not dismiss these patterns, to do so would have amounted to a negation of history and its lessons, but also would have been impossible, as these have already impacted, influenced and contributed to the Indian culture. Instead, the Rock Garden has added the syntax into its own rulebook, posing questions by holding up a mirror, as it were, by reflecting, refracting and manipulating through what has been discarded. It has not claimed to be the new 'ism', but through subtle subversions of the Corbusian city-grammar meditates on the city whose boundary it straddles. By doing so, Chand's art does not merely recall the past as social cause or aesthetic precedent; it renews the past, reconfiguring it as a contingent 'in between' space, that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present (Bhabha, p.7, 1994)²⁴.

However much Corbusier tried to convince the world of architects and city designers, Chandigarh's imposed city grid and architecture was clearly not a translation of the culture. It was a demonstration of Modernism, an exhibition trick-shot in a game that was rapidly approaching its twilight years. Its stubborn pomposity [edict multiplied by the universal Modulor man] was more akin to the Colonial mindset [organisation and efficiency to abet the modes of production] than the liberated and partisan mentality that battled for Independence. The whimsical fantasy that Chand began existed only as a result of Modernity; but as its polar opposite, renewing modernity and disrupting its apparently clean and predetermined course.

The Garden appropriated, developed and defined an 'in-between' territory, its liminal terrain providing the appropriate conditions for unfolding its strategies of selfhood and thereby initiating new signs of identity. The notion of the Indian identity was left undeveloped, possibly untouched by modernity, and was craving attention, to be brought to light by the work of Chand. Chand's work could be described as existing within Modernity but 'otherwise' than modernity, (Bhabha, p.1-7, 1994)²⁵, reclaiming not only territory but also power, cleverly turning discarded 'modernism' against its source. Chand's polyphony and his 'D-I-Y' approach was amateur in its outlook and more suited to the 'make do and mend' approach of a by-gone era than slick internationalism. Taking Said's notion of amateurism,²⁶ which involves calling for a rejection of the professional specialisation's contentment in producing their own vocabulary, and speaking only to other specialists. In his essay, 'The Knowing and Subverting Reader', Ben Godber follows in a similar vein to Said substituting the professional :: amateur with the author :: reader. 'The "architect" is established by the representation of his or her works as an author within the institution. All other such works, coming from outside the institution are, by extension, established as being those of a reader (Godber, p.192 1998).²⁷

The creative process can of course be distorted when the 'reader' blindly follows the author at the expense of their own process, however between the two can emerge a 'knowing and subverting reader', being at once within, [road inspector] and without [maverick artist] the institution [the city/architecture & planning]. It is by the virtue of his/her knowledge of the convention, rituals, codes and means of authorship that a number of challenges and provocative interpretations are offered to the viewer. Godber goes as far to suggest that the knowing and subverting reader may suggest more, 'responsive, inclusive, richer, more diverse and potentially more divergent methods of

production and representation for both international diplomacy and conventional architecture. (Godber, p.192 1998).²⁸,

For Ramanujan, it is through the amateur and the 'little traditions' they narrated - through folk-tales and non-literate modes of expression - that helped India define an important part of her identity, putting culture into motion, developing a counter system dependent on other systems to which they responded (Ramanujan p.348 1999).²⁹ The rubbish lies dormant, like words on a page or music on a score. To read those means to read out aloud, to act as an orator. Chand is the orator, transforming space already laden with politics and uncertainty. Chand is 'travelling' in one direction but his field of view is firmly fixed in the opposite direction, he can only see and use what has gone before him.

The Rock Garden has set an encouraging and daring challenge to India to firmly establish an identity in conjunction with, but distinctly separate from modernity and the west whilst repressing any desire to resort to sole-less by-gone façadism. The post-colonial/post-independence labels must have surely served their purpose and are in danger of stagnation, if not losing their meaning altogether through/ over prolonged use. The term post-colonial can possibly no longer describe the current condition and is used a/pathetically to conveniently cage a contentious issue. The Independence was slow to take effect and of course the implications take time to gradually spread throughout the country; however, to continuously refer back to 1947 rather than building from it, is a tragedy for the future creative development of the nation. The modernist interventions were essential for India to break the mould of imperialism and to commence 'self government' with an architecture that was appropriate. This resulted in a shift, a complete dismissal of the past and perhaps the repression of a more conservative identity, in favour of 'the machine age' and 'utopia'.

A Klee painting named 'Angelus Novas' shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, and his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe that keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken

the dead and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from paradise; it has caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future towards which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress (Benjamin, p.249, 1999).³⁰ Chand continues to demonstrate that the city can prevent itself from becoming a ruin and although the modernist determinism is unacceptable, the framework that it set up with the intention to introduce the spirit of art has, in a curious and circumvented way, been successful. The debate over the city boundaries and the neighbouring states continues, and keeps the city in flux, the Union Territory and neighbouring states have simultaneously built up an arsenal of villages and industrial territories that contribute to its density and maintain Chandigarh as a significant city in northern India. Modernism was the substratum and sustenance for Chand, who has

displayed his work all over the world and provides subtle indicators about the changing culture and identity of India.

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¹ Benjamin, W., *Illuminations*, (Pimlico, 1999), 65.

² Construction was not permitted north of Sector-I. The space only existed because of Chandigarh's rigid plan that had clearly identifiable limits. The city is very 'clean cut' with the gridiron plan coming to an abrupt end. The Garden nestles at the intersection of the 'fixed' grid (and the sought after plots of the city) and the 'virgin' territory that is uncharted and undesirable because it cannot be officially developed.

³ Chandigarh, for Nehru, was his new India in microcosm, in both philosophical and practical terms, as he declared, "Let this be a new town symbolic of the freedom of India, unfettered by the traditions of the past... an expression of the nations faith in the future." Nehru, J., *Hindustan Times*, New Delhi, July 8, 1950.

⁴ This is a view expounded in his influential work, *Culture and Imperialism*, Chatto & Windus, 1993. For a discussion on 'contrapuntal' and 'oppositional' criticism, see, Arac, Jonathan, "Criticism Between Opposition and Counterpoint", *Boundary 2*, Vol. 25/2, 1998, pp. 55-69.

⁵ Since any development in these territories would have decidedly lessened the grand architectural impact of the Capitol Complex.

⁶ This is not unusual in India. The poet Rabindranath Tagore and the filmmaker Satyajit Ray had aroused international acclaim before being taken seriously in India.

⁷ Curtis, William JR, *Le Corbusier: Ideas and Forms*, (Phaidon, 1999), 163.

⁸ Jencks, Charles, *Le Corbusier and the Tragic View of Architecture*, (Penguin, 1987) 79.

⁹ Yosizaka, T., "Chandigarh: A few thoughts on how Corbusier tackled his work", in *GA (Global Architecture): Le Corbusier: Chandigarh, The New capital of Punjab, India, 1951-* , Vol. 30, introductory text with no pagination.

¹⁰ "Nek Chand Shows the Way", booklet produced by Raw Vision Magazine 1997 p. 36.

¹¹ Jencks, Charles, op. Cit 79.

¹² When Fry heard that Le Corbusier was to be employed on the project as well as himself he said, "Honour and glory for him, and an unpredictable portion of misery for me. ANQ Document, Chandigarh: Forty Years after Le Corbusier, *Architectura & Natura*, 1993, p. 15.

¹³ It was Le Corbusier's intention for manufacturing industries to adopt the Modulor to standardise all production methods. If this idea was accepted, even the discarded products that Chand uses would be Modulor, however the rejection of the idea by most manufacturers should have been a revelation to Le Corbusier.

¹⁴ The Edict was a simplified edition of Le Corbusier's document entitled, "For the Establishment Statute of the Land" which contained three sections and was presented to the High Level Committee.

¹⁵ Lefebvre, H., 'The Production of Space', in Leach, Neil, (Ed), *Rethinking Architecture*, Routledge, 1997 p. 144.

¹⁶ For a lucid discussion of this issue and Adolf Loos' criticism of this attitude see, Leatherbarrow, David, 'Sitting in the City or the Body in the World', in., Dodds, G., & Tavernor (ed.), *Body and Building: Essays on the Changing Relation of Body and Architecture*, MIT Press, Cambridge (Mass) & London, 2002, pp. 268-89.

¹⁷ Dodds, G., & Tavernor, 273.

¹⁸ Rather than paying extortionate amounts for a small unhealthy but legal apartment within the city (far removed from their place of work and access to markets, and so on) most labourers have been forced to construct small settlements on vacant land. This enables greater room area, the structure is more suited to the climate and there is no rent to pay. The farming of livestock is also not permitted in rented

accommodation, which renders it unsuitable for the lifestyle of many families who rely on the livestock despite living within a city environment.

¹⁹ Tourism is a very significant part of India's GDP (10% according to the Indian Tourist Board 2000), and the Rock Garden is India's second biggest tourist attraction after the Taj Mahal in Agra.

²⁰ 'Nek Chand Shows the Way', exhibition publication by Raw Vision Magazine, 1997.

²¹ Bhabha, Homi, *The Location of Culture*, (Routledge, 1994), 1-2.

²² Said, Edward W., *Orientalism*, (Penguin, 1995 reprint) 332.

²³ Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*, (Penguin, 1995 reprint) .332.

²⁴ Bhabha, Homi, *op. cit.*, 1994, p. 7.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 1-7.

²⁶ The literal meaning of the French word amateur is to develop a love of something without being a professional.

²⁷ Godber, Ben. *Occupying Architecture*, (Routledge 1998). 192.

²⁸ Godber, Ben, 192.

²⁹ Ramanujan A.K., *The Collected Essays of Ramanujan*, (Oxford University Press, 1999), 348.

³⁰ Benjamin, Walter, *Illuminations: Theses on the Philosophy of History*, (Pimlico, 1999), 249.

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