CRISIS IN REPRESENTATION AND READING: 'IT'S ALL RHEYDT', KOLKATA, 2011

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A B S T R A C T

The Hindu religious festival of Durga Puja has emerged as a significant socio-cultural event in the city of Kolkata, India, presenting dynamic urban transformations with instances of transitory architecture in the form of pandals (marquees typically found in India). Borrowing Roland Barthes' concept of 'readerly/writerly texts', this research paper argues that the particular modes of representation employed in the design of pandals involve characteristically 'readerly texts' for communicating with the audience, and identifies Gregor Shcneider's design of the Ekdalia Evergreen Club pandal, 2011, as a point of crisis, which forces the engaged observer to inscribe his own meaning in the face of uncertainty of representational content, giving rise to 'writerly texts'. In the process, it reflects on how meaning may be inscribed in architecture, both by the architect and the audience, especially in a post-modern milieu.

Keywords: Crisis in representation, Gregor Schneider, Kolkata Durga Puja, Readerly/writerly text, Roland Barthes, Post-modern architecture and urban design.

INTRODUCTION

The autumn festival of *Durga Puja* is arguably the single-most significant socio-cultural event in contemporary Bengal, and especially so in the city of Kolkata. The Bengali word *Puja* means worship, and this particular annual event essentially involves the worship of the Hindu mother-goddess *Durga.* However, the five-day[i] long festival marks a period of carnivalesque social celebration in the city, which goes way beyond religious rites and rituals. With enthusiastic participation of a vast majority of the citizens – irrespective of gender, age, class, creed, caste, or ethnicity[ii] – the city busies itself in continual merry-making, with a near-complete suspension of regular business and professional services. It is a time for feasting and shopping, a time for music and dancing to drum-beats, a time of rendezvous and excursions, and most of all, a time to roam the streets of the metropolis, which are thronging with crowds, as if the entire city has suddenly decided to live out-of-doors.

AnjanMitra (2003) documented his research on the origin and development of the festival in the city in a

Bengali book titled 'Kolkata O Durgapujo'. He identified it as an important expression of Kolkata's urbanism,[iii] considering the orchestration of activities of a variety of stake-holders (viz. the organizers, the designers, the craftsmen, the visitors and the ancillary businesspersons), the economic linkages of the event with the hinterland of the city, and the reception of the event across various socio-economic classes. Mitra (2003) analysed the socio-cultural history of the event – in line with (a) the rise of the bourgeoisie in the late eighteenth century and their expression of affluence, (b) the agenda of social cohesion during the Indian freedom struggle, (c) the cultural decadence of late 1960's and early 1970's, (d) the resurgence of the Bengali identity in the early 1980's, and (e) the present age of competition and consumerism since the 1990's.

Presently, a few hundred *pujas* are organised in Kolkata. Apart from the *pujas* conducted in *Durgabaris*[iv] and individual residences (mostly, the *Rajbaris*, or palaces of erstwhile land aristocrats), a sizeable amount of community *pujas(Baroyari* or *Sarbojaninpujas)*[v] are organized by local clubs and committees, by installing idols within pandals erected in community open spaces, or public spaces like roads, pavements, and street-corners. Thus, as an impact of the event, the cityscape of

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Kolkata is temporarily (but significantly) altered. AnjanMitra (2013, personal communication) considers this as a notable instance of dynamic urban design, where parts of the city are radically transformed, for a few days, through instances of transitory architecture.

However, it would be wrong to think of the individual *puja*-pandals as spatially contained, isolated architectural instances, which constitute a city-wide festival only by virtue of their synchronicity. In fact, they participate in, and produce, a complex, holistic urban fabric, and in the mind of the observer, the image of the event is one of interconnectedness. More so because a predominant activity for the majority of revellers is pandal-hopping: visiting multiple venues, one after another, for noting and enjoying the variety in their presentations. There is invariably considerable debate on the comparative aesthetic values of the representations of the idol, the pandal design, the illumination, various devices of entertainment and ambience – indicating an engaged audience. Thus, for the individual pandals, it becomes an occasion for innovating and experimenting with visual presentations, but in a manner compatible with the broader context of the city-wide festival. The *puja*-pandal of Ekdalia Evergreen Club, from 2011, was one such instance of presentation, which, this paper argues, marks a point of crisis in the mode of communication.

In order to understand this, it is necessary to first review the representations usually encountered, as is briefly outlined hereafter, followed by a discussion of the various contrasting dimensions of the particular case of Ekdalia,

2011. Through the comparison, and a qualitative interpretation, the research tries to identify how visual communication may be antithetically embedded in architecture – with indeterminate intent and content, as opposed to the usual overt and obvious narratives – marking a crisis in representation (and reading).

REPRESENTATIONS IN VOGUE: READERLY TEXTS

Mitra (2003) noted three predominant strains of representation in the Kolkata *pujas*. The first strain involves representation of crafts – be it revaluation of disappearing craft traditions, investigating new possibilities of contemporary crafts and materials, or innovative, artistic presentation of craft objects. The second strain involves representation of subjects or themes – be it particular ideas/events/persons of history, myth, folk-lore, or abstract constructs and ideologies. The third strain involves ambience,[vi] with presentation of physical, cultural or fantastic landscapes. At one level, the crafts-oriented strain is essentially decorative, focussing on potential of various materials like jute or bamboo for texture, ornamentation and stylistic renditions, and often adopting and showcasing particular vernacular craft traditions for thematic cohesion (Figure1). At another level, it is emotional and kitsch: invoking nostalgia for the evanescing traditional arts and crafts like *KalighatPatachitra* or *Madhubani*paintings*,* or fostering an immediate association with the familiar and the trivial – be it objects of utility decontextualized and presented as items of ornamentation, or 'low' art that comprises popular visual culture (Figure2).
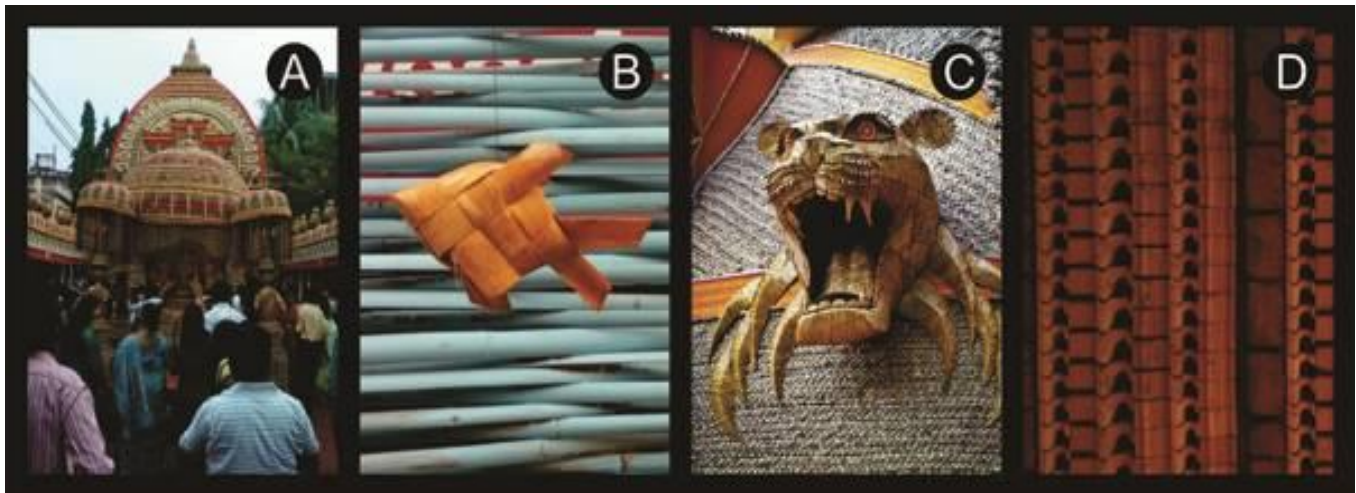

Figure 1. Crafts-oriented strain exploring decorative potential of materials. A&B: Bamboo and bamboo crafts. Dum Dum Park Bharat Chakra, 2009. C: Jute and reed crafts. SuruchiSangha, 2013. D: Bricks and terracotta tiles. RajdangaNabaUdaySangha, 2013.
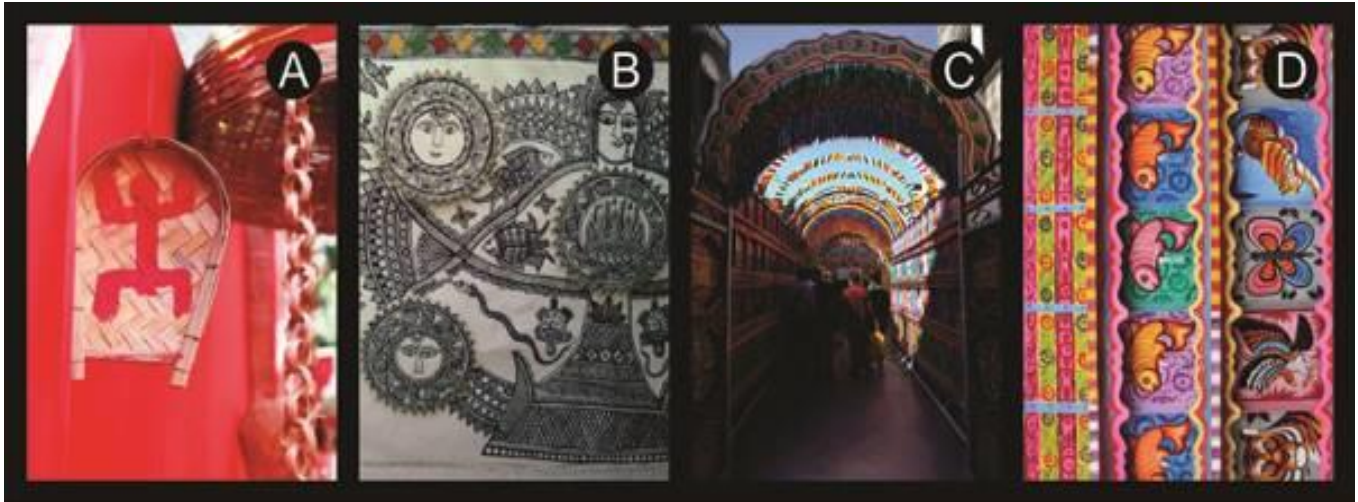
Figure 2. Crafts-oriented strain involving nostalgia and kitsch. A: *Kulo* and *jhuri*, familiarobjects of utility made of bamboo, as ornaments. Dum Dum Park Bharat Chakra, 2009. B: Madhubani painting. Netaji Sporting Club, 2011. C&D: Graffiti characteristic of truck decorations. Hatibagan Nabin Pally, 2013.

Mitra noted, the popularity and appreciation of the craft-oriented strain is the most because, to the majority, it is an easily accessible and associable (and thus, acceptable) mode of expression. However, it gradually becomes repetitive, and it is difficult to meet the continual demand for novelty.

The subject-oriented strain is narrative: recounting associated stories and ideas through visual presentations. The content may be derived from familiar and popular sources like myths, epics, folk narratives, historic and biographic accounts, or even literature (Figure 3). Alternatively, they may develop original narratives intending to communicate particular ideas or social messages (Figure 4).Mitra noted that this strain does not suffer the eventual tedium of the crafts-oriented strain because even though the content of the narratives may be familiar, they continue to remain acceptable to the observers when represented in various ways over and over again. However, the success of the representation obviously relies on the familiarity of the audience with the content, as well as comprehensible, articulated communication. Comprehension is mostly aided by explaining the content to the observers through supplementary narrative devices (textual and audio).

Figure 3. Subject-oriented strain involving familiar narratives. A: Folk wisdom about agriculture in Bengal. Hatibagan Nabin Pally, 2010. B: Tableaux depicting Bengali nursery rhymes. 102 Adhibasi Brinda, 2012. C: The mythical tale of the demon *Raktabeej*. Nepal Bhattacharjee Street, 2013.
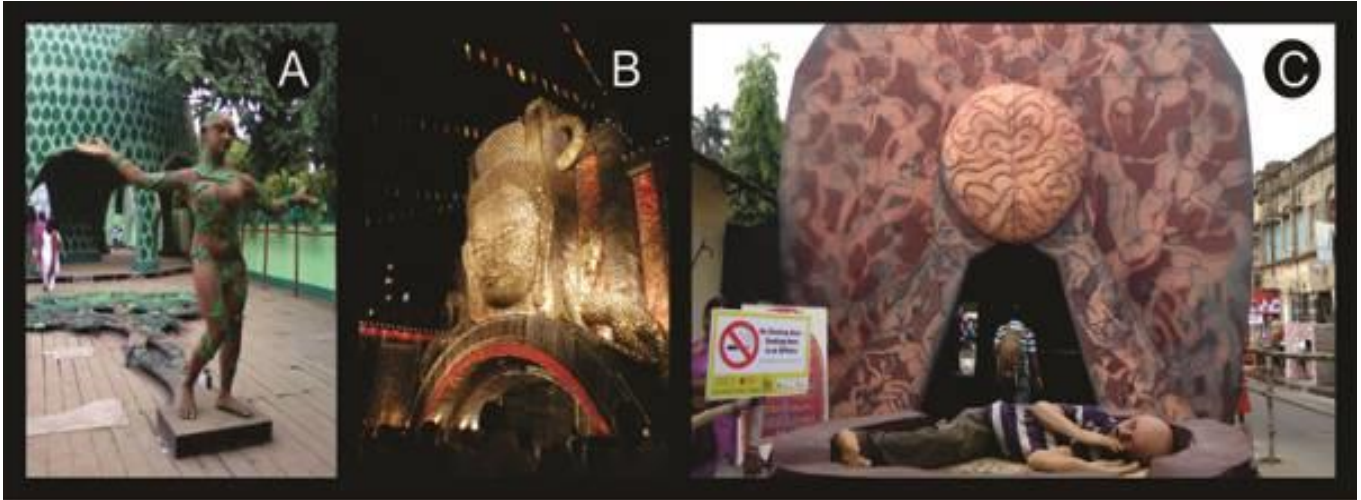
Figure 4. Subject-oriented strain involving messages. A: Man-nature harmony. Lake Town Adhibasi Brinda, 2011. B: Peace, invoked through the Buddha. Tridhara Sammilani, 2012. C: The ills of smoking. Kidderpore Udayan, 2013.

The ambience-oriented strain is experiential, and attempts to create an overall environment, related to a core theme, offering a holistic sensory appeal. This involves fantastic recreations of physical landscapes, like a mountain, or significant cultural landscapes, usually from different cities or states of India (Figure 5). Also, there may be creation of a milieu conveying more abstract themes (Figure 6). Mitra called this thematic underpinning as 'total concept', and noted that this involved much more experimentation than the others. Though not essentially representing narratives, the mode of expression often relies on supportive narrative devices to better explain the theme to the observers.
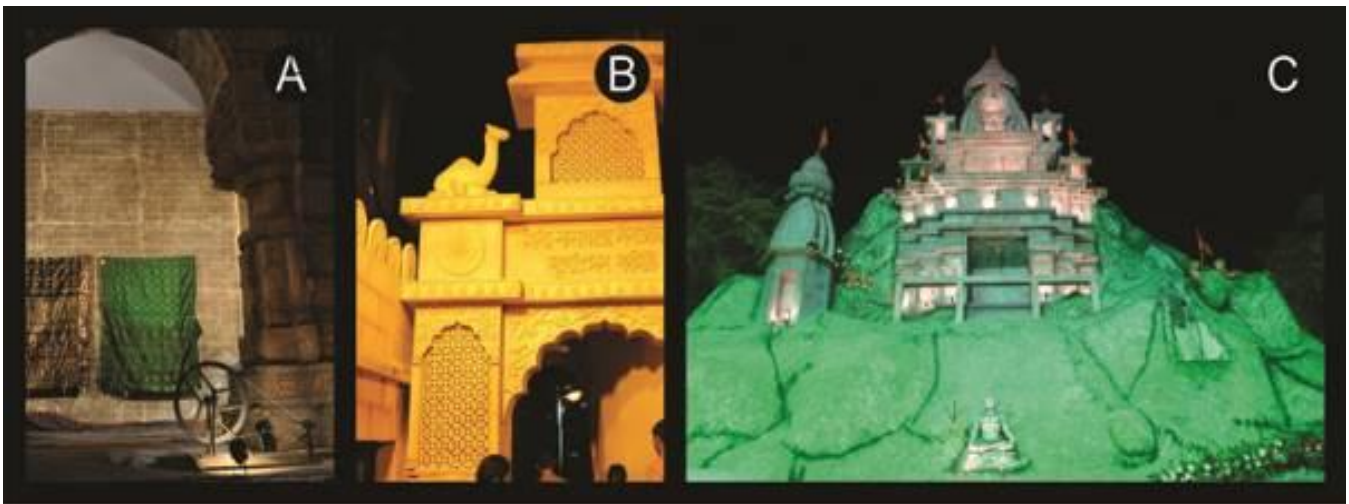

Figure 5. Ambience-oriented strain invoking particular landscapes. A: Bishnupur, with its characteristic temple architecture and *Baluchari* textile tradition. Ballygunge Cultural Association, 2011. B: Jaisalmer, the desert city of Rajasthan. Central Kolkata Durgotsav Committee, 2012. C: A mountain pilgrimage. Shandhani, Sovabazar, 2013.

A fourth strain of representation is also evidenced, which is purely formal. It may involve representation of prominent monuments (Figure 7), more commonplace architectural forms (the pandal as a nondescript house), or even chariots, ships and vessels. These are mostly appreciated due to their monumental scale and skilful rendition of details.Of course, for an individual design, there may be various combinations and layering of the different strains of representation, like a formal representation combined with an emphasis on crafts, or an ambience-oriented representation involving narratives. Together, the different strains and their combinations offer an immense potential of variety in representation. However, a singular unity of intention may be identified in all such representations – that of communication.

Figure 6. Ambience-oriented strain conveying themes. A&B: *Tantra* and the cult of *Yoginis.* Telengabagan Sarbjnin, 2010. C: Colours. Dum Dum Park TarunSangha, 2012.
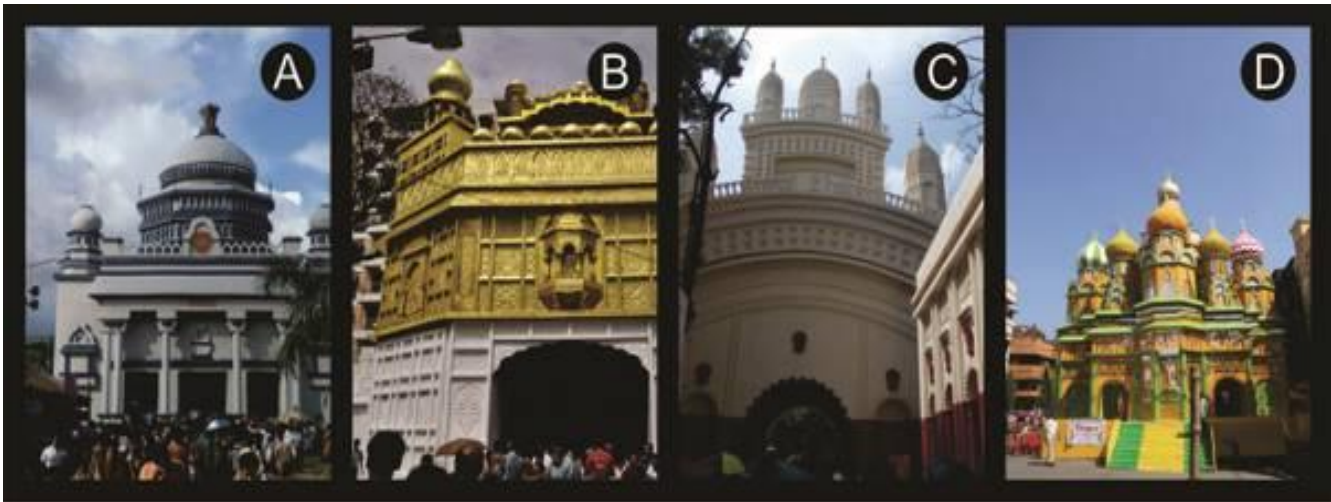

Figure 7. Formal strain. A: VidhanBhawan, Bangalore. BaghbazarSarbojaninDurgotsav, 2009. B: Golden Temple, Amritsar. Singhi Park, 2010. C: Dakshineswar Temple. Singhi Park, 2011. D: St. Basil's Cathedral, Moscow. BeleghataSandhani, 2013.

If we reflect on the nature of communication, it becomesevident that the strategies and devices employed by the designers try to make the content overt and obvious and aid comprehension of the intended meaning. These strains of representation may be identified with Roland Barthes' (1973/1974) concept of a 'readerly text' – which is explained by Ironstone et al. (n.d.) as: '[readerly texts] are presented in a familiar, linear, traditional manner, adhering to the status quo in style and content. Meaning is fixed and pre-determined so that the reader is a site merely to receive information. These texts attempt, through the use of standard representations and dominant signifying practices, to hide any elements that would open up the text to multiple meaning.'

The works try to clearly communicate to the observer (the reader) what it represents (the text): a single intended meaning of its contents and purpose, by eliminating the possibility of multiple, alternative meanings.

At this point, it is relevant to consider who the 'reader' of such text is. It is problematic to think of a universal, coherent and stable subject, considering the multi-cultural, multi-ethnic populace of a metropolis like Kolkata. However, if we consider subjects of Bengali Hindu origin, who understandably comprise the majority[vii] of the revellers and pandal-goers, it is reasonable to expect a more or less uniform reception of tradition, and an ability of reading the 'semantic', 'symbolic', and 'cultural' codes of

the text, as well as the 'hermeneutic' and 'proairetic' codes(Barthes, 1973/1974).viii

Now, the following case study shall consider a radically different expression, presented by the Ekdalia Evergree Club pandal, in the year 2011.

EKDALIA 2011: 'IT'S ALL RHEYDT'

It was a much hyped and much discussed event of the year: a Kolkata pandal was to be designed by a foreign artist for the first time. A news piece in The Statesman, Kolkata, dated 27 September 2011, reported how the German artist Gregor Schneider had been charmed by the pandals, bright lights and enthusiasm of the people he had witnessed during the *pujas* at Kolkata, and thought 'it would be a real joy and privilege to be associated with Durga Puja'. Schneider proposed to design for the Ekdalia Evergreen Club, who in turn thought of it as an ideal opportunity to 'celebrate the 60th year of Indo-German friendship', and the project was approved, in collaboration with the Goethe-Institute/Max Mueller Bhavan. The report also quoted the club president, from a press conference, stating: '[i]n the pandal there will be a blend of traditional art of both the countries. The pandal will reflect interior architecture in Rheydt, a village in Germany, where Mr Schneider was born [...]. An artificial road will be constructed on the lines of the roads in Germany.' On 28 September 2011, The Telegraph, Kolkata, reported, '[a] little bit of Germany is being built, bamboo pole by bamboo pole, at the Ekdalia Evergreen Club Puja pandal this year', and quoted Schneider as: 'It is an organic process. I brought a road to Calcutta but the road is changing. It will enter some part of my house in Germany but the happiness, colour and the puja part of the festival will also be incorporated.' The event was considered important enough to be inaugurated by the Chief Minister of West Bengal and the German Ambassador to India. And after the *pujas*, the structures and the deity were to be transported to Rheydt, and later, to some place in Spain as well, as an exhibit. The invitation card read:

Germany and India 2011-2012: Infinite Opportunities
proudly presents "Itsall Rheydt": Kolkata 2011,
a constructed artwork by German artist Gregor Schneider
serving as the Durga Puja pandal of Ekdalia Evergreen Club
and fabricated by the local artisans.

Speculations were rife as to what fantastic, never-before-seen design was to be revealed, and what immense footfall the venue would receive. After inauguration, on 1 October 2011, the artwork certainly proved to be never-before-seen, but in ways unexpected (and our contradictions start, for surely, the never-before-seen is

expected to be unexpectable!). The towering, rigidly oblong façade of the pandal represented an asphalt carriageway vertically shooting off from the ground towards the sky, and then abruptly ending. There were familiar manhole covers on this vertical road surface; familiar elevated pavements ran on both the vertical edges, with three familiar light-posts horizontally projecting off them; an almost familiar wall and fencing appeared on the far edge of one of the pavements, followed by a small structure with a pyramidal roof, which was evidently a roadside shrine so familiar in the streets of Kolkata (Figure 8). However, what all of this upturned reality meant in the context of the *puja* was uncertain – an uncertainty which was deeply troubling. First, the German artist did not present the citizens with novel structures, materials, craftsmanship, or milieus from Germany, and instead represented the mundane Kolkata road. Second, he complicated its familiarity with distortion and surrealism,ix making even the mundane strangely alien. The usually elaborate entrance portal to the pandal, marking the entry to the auspicious precinct of the *puja*, was substituted by a rectilinear gaping hole – almost as if construction was incomplete for parts of the represented road and pavement. The immediate personal reaction – in the role of an individual subject at site – was of discomfort, disbelief, and disappointment.

Inside, the unadorned flat surfaces were merely (and quite obviously) painted to look like old, unplastered brick walls – again upturned. A flight of stairs ran along the ceiling, supposedly for ascending from the left vertical surface to the equally precarious position of a landing hanging down from the ceiling (Figure 9). It was vaguely like Ariadne's distorted dreamscapes from the Christopher Nolan film 'Inception'. It was also reminiscent of the works of Maurits Cornelis Escher. However, Escher was Dutch, not German. The elements in the pandal were Indian in all their details, not German. How was this artwork supposed to be all about Rheydt? Ironically, their Indianness too seemed an inappropriate kind of Indianness to be represented in the particular context of the *Durga Puja*.

It was soon learnt that the uncertainty and displeasure were shared by many, if not most observers. Responses of acquaintances, who were generally engaged subjects, (as well as unknown commentators on the internet) ranged from 'the less said, the better', to 'dull', 'bad' and 'atrocious'. Apparently, the dissent started long back, as

reflected in Schneider's remark quoted by The Telegraph, on 28 September 2011: 'We are now in the middle of an interesting conflict about the use of colours.

Figure 8.Ekdalia Evergreen Club pandal, 2011. Exterior views.

Figure 9: Ekdalia Evergreen Club pandal, 2011. Interior views.

The artisans want more colour while I want less.' It seemed Schneider understood little of the cultural context, and the expectations of his audience. The idol, rendered by popular artist SanatanRudra Pal in his signature style, was the only saving grace for some visitors, but in fact, the stylistic difference further heightened the incongruity of the pandal design. Fortunately, there were too many other synchronous attractions and distractions, which kept the observers from being too preoccupied with their negativity towards Schneider's work, and the instance was wilfully overlooked.

The media did not report the fate of the planned international exhibitions, and since Schneider's biography[x] also revealed no such event, it would be safe to presume that 'It's all Rheydt' ceased to make an appearance beyond the few days of the *puja* that year.

However, it is to be noted, that the creation of the mother goddess' idol from clay, and its subsequent dissolution in the river, is of singular symbolic significance: that of the never-ending cycles of nature – of birth, death and replenishment. To plan any other outcome which disrupts this symbolic recycling – even an international exhibition – would indicate apathy and disrespect towards cultural and philosophical ideas.

Having said all of this, and in spite of the disappointment of unmet expectations, it must be admitted that, from a detached academic standpoint, it is possible to identify several interesting theoretical aspects of Schneider's design and the incident of its creation. As the initial shock and uncertainty subsided, the possible interpretations started revealing themselves in retrospect.

AN INTERPRETATION IN RETROSPECT: READERLY TO WRITERLY

In the context of the Kolkata *Durga Puja*, the existence of a 'schizophrenic'[xi] (Jameson, 1984/1991), 'multiphrenic' (Gergen, 1991, as cited by Allan and Turner, 2000) observer is apparent – one who is immersing himself in a multiplicity of temporally disjointed experiences, sourced from a variety of cultures. This marks the increasing intrusion of the hand of globalization into hitherto protected cultural fortresses, which is only a logical outcome in the era of a networked world and the dominance of the image (Baudrillard, 1994, as cited by Allan & Turner, 2000). Also, the rise of consumerism is obvious in the hefty sponsorships and the multiplicity of monetary awards for 'best *puja*', 'best pandal', 'best idol' etc, which is in line with Jameson's (1984/1991) commentary on the rise of late capitalism and the transformation of culture as commodity. Especially for Ekdalia 2011, we observe how the foreign connection was highlighted in media, ensuring higher footfalls of intrigued visitors at the venue, which could surely be capitalised by the organisers in terms of more advertisements and sponsorships from multinational companies, vastly benefiting the *puja* fund. Further, the idea to display it all back at Germany, reveals a tendency towards decontextualization and exoticism, and Baudrillard's (1983) concept of the 'simulacrum' – the signifier which acquires a life of its own quite detached from the signified. Overall, the milieu of the event appears strikingly post-modern. This then was an aptly post-modern creation: full of indeterminacy, silence, play, antithesis, and anti-narrative – to quote a few characteristic attributes, as identified by Ihab Hassan (1987/1998). The philosophic position may also be identified by the post-modern architectural strategies of surrealism, distortion, and juxtaposition evidenced in Schneider's design.

However, as Mary McLeod (1989) noted, the territory of debate in post-modern architecture revolved around 'meaning and its dissolution', and this aspect needs to be inspected. It was difficult to perceive 'It's all Rheydt' as a proposition for dissolution of meaning: its strategy was definitely not formal hermeticism – the representation was figurative, with obvious references to familiar objects, though their significance with reference to the context was uncertain. It possibly aimed at deconstructing the meaning associated with a *puja*pandal in favour of new interpretations, but

Schneider did not provide a supportive narrative as explanation, as is usual with the thematic strain. What then could be the meaning inscribed in it? That this question arises, and remains unanswered, is an indication that a 'writerlytext' (Barthes, 1973/1974) may exist, which is open to multiple meanings – to be inscribed by the reader of the text. As Ironstone et al. (n.d.) explained: '[W]riterly texts reveal those elements that the readerly attempts to conceal. The reader, now in a position of control, takes an active role in the construction of meaning. The stable meaning, or meta narratives, of readerly texts is replaced by a proliferation of meanings and a disregard of narrative structure. There is a multiplicity of cultural and other ideological indicators (codes) for the reader to uncover. What Barthes describes as 'ourselves writing' is a self-conscious expression aware of the discrepancy between artifice and reality. The writerly text destabilizes the reader's expectations. The reader approaches the text from an external position of subjectivity.'

Interestingly, the very idea of the pandal was of a collaborative project of shared authorship between Schneider and the local artisans – each literally trying to construct their own version of it. Again, on completion, we find a writerly text awaiting the observers to create their own meanings out of it. Recognising this, as particular readers of the text, we realised we could indeed interpret several pertinent points, as follows:

- During the *puja*, many pandals are erected directly on the roads and pavements of Kolkata, claiming public space as their own, apathetic to the disruption of conveyance and mobility. Ekdalia Evergreen Club has continually been one such delinquent. Ironically, in 2011, the road seems to have gained its grasp over the pandal, symbolically reclaiming its existence.

- However, a small temple again gains control over the pavement along this defiant road: a situation almost self-reflexive and paradoxical. There seems to be no possible resolution of hierarchy of road and place of worship.

- Now, to where does this road lead? Nowhere. That seems to question the very nature and purpose of a road: the hermeneutic code leading to a destination. In fact, in spite of the chaotic situation of Kolkata *pujas*, with all the road blocks and digressions, the citizens do find alternative ways of

reaching their destination, thereby undermining the singular importance of a 'road to somewhere'.

- The artificial manholes depicted on the road surface may be understood as a strategy for rendering texture to the surface and increasing realism. However, the semantic code embedded in this – that of a sewer beneath the road – creates a strange juxtaposition and antitheses in the auspicious context of the *puja*.

- In light of the above, one may reflect: for a foreigner, the *pujas* are more readily identifiable as an event of temporary urban transformation – a physical event of great interest. The spiritual-cultural dimension is apparent to him, but not necessarily decipherable. That, we believe, is quite succinctly written (or can be one of the 'readings'). On the other hand, for the Bengali observer, the annual transformation of urban space is a matter of familiarity and secondary importance, while the spiritual-cultural dimension of the event becomes the prime focus. That is how, the significantly different perception and its representation is 'all Rheydt', and not local at all.

- The pandal designer's modes of expression utilise artifice: simulating a built environment, which represents some reality (or idea), but is not that reality itself. Through its distorted presentation of familiar architectural elements like the stair-flight, Ekdalia 2011 offers self-reflexive rhetoric emphasising the unreality of the realistic representations.

- Also, the presentations most often belie the actual physical conditions of the neighbourhoods – deplorable slums are covered up behind façades of stately palaces, and lanes full of squalor are dressed up with pretensions of ornamented boulevards. Though the artifice conceals and distorts truth, the phenomenon is not bad in itself, as Mitra (2003) noted – it gives much needed respite, hope and cause for celebration to the less-fortunate citizens. The impulse of covering existing architecture with constructed layers finds strategic resonance in Schneider's earlier works of reconstructed rooms, like 'Haus u r' (Rheydt, 1985-present), and the 'Golden Lion'-winning 'Totes Haus u r' (Venice Biennale, 2001).

- However, the shabbiness of the painted brick-work

adopted by Schneider is in opposition to the usual impulse of rendering superficial glory. It seems to covertly indicate to the reality of living conditions of a large section of the populace, and chooses to make the abode of the goddess no better than theirs.[xii]

Overall, the design continually confounds the observer, representing paradoxes, deconstructing hierarchies, complicating perceptions and connotations of the real and unreal, and inciting several simultaneous interpretations.

However, as Barthes (1973/1974) noted: '[t]o interpret a text is not to give it a (more or less justified, more or less free) meaning but on the contrary to appreciate what plural constitutes it.' The present reading involves only a selection of lexias indicating some possible interpretations; there shall always be a plurality of meanings – meanings quite different, and even contrary to these.

WHITHER CRISIS?

Seeger, Sellnow, and Ulmer (1998) defined crises as 'specific, unexpected, and non-routine […] event or series of events which creates high levels of uncertainty and threat or perceived threat to […] high priority goals'. However, Venette (2003) argued that 'crisis is a process of transformation where the old system can no longer be maintained.' Thus a crisis is an unexpected event which eventually – but essentially – establishes a need for change through creating disruptive situations of uncertainty and threat. Without an eventual change in the *status quo*, such an event should be deemed just as a failure at meeting expected goals, and not as a crisis.

So, did Schneider's design mark a point of crisis, or was it just an instance of failure? By and large, it seemed to have failed at offering the pleasure and enjoyment the visitors were expecting of their visit. One may argue that it failed to relate to a Bengali Hindu subject's perception of what *Durga puja* is: a failure of the communicative role of architecture, and thereby dissociated itself from the complex fabric of interconnectedness that constitutes the festival. Also, one may predict, as a result of the loss of popularity, the future sponsorship and funds for Ekdalia Evergreen Club potentially suffered losses. All of these involved high priority goals being threatened, without an apparent, associated process of transformation and resolution, which changed the status quo. However, when it came to representation and

reading, it eventually forced a significant change, and proved to be a crisis.

By abandoning all attempts at certain and familiar representation, the design posed a threat to the readerly text in vogue, and forced the reading of a writerly text (at least out of the authors). However, it is not that it involved the creation of a writerly text, which was completely absent from the presentations in vogue. As Richard Howard (1973) noted: '[O]nly what is authentically writerly can become readerly. If we were to set out to write a readerly text, we should be no more than hacks in bad faith; yet, as readers, how hard it is to face the open text, the plurality of signification, the suspension of meaning. [...] How often we need to be assured of what we know in the old ways of knowing. [...] Why we read in this repressed and repressive way; what it is, in the very nature of reading, which fences us in, which closes us off?'

This indicates the absence of any fundamental, structuralist, binary opposition involving readerly and writerly texts. It is best to think of texts not as fundamentally readerly or writerly, but having possibilities of being either or both, in various degrees.Schneider's work simply forced the observer to abandon the 'old system' of 'repressive way' of reading, in favour of a new way of co-authoring a plurality of meaning(s) – that is, as long as the observer was interested in reading anything at all.

Though, by definition, a crisis does not necessitate an effect beyond an individual instance/subject or for any subsequent occasion, it would be pertinent to ask how pervasive is the effect of 'It's all Rheydt'? First, the crisis involved an engaged subject or reader, which may not be readily expected due to the distracted, schizophrenic modes of viewing more common in the context of the festival. In fact, that is what makes the overt communication of readerly texts and supportive narrative devices the usual and preferred mode of representation of content. Again, the subjects, who usually show a degree of engagement with readerly representations, showed a marked disengagement in their response to Ekdalia 2011 – beyond the initial curiosity which resulted in the considerable footfall. Second, it is not expected that any number of pandal designs at Kolkata would suddenly start adopting radical expressions and espouse more writerly texts owing to the singular occurrence of this design. Thus, predicting a more pervasive crisis seems untenable.

However, Ekdalia 2011 does initiate a possible strain of representation hitherto uncommon, and disrupts the very understanding of representation and reading in the context of the Kolkata pandals. Also, it indicates new ways of looking at the very event of Durga Puja. It may be observed that several instances of recent pandal designs do illustrate a blending of complex and uncertain imagery with the usual representation of crafts, narratives and identifiable themes (Figure 10). Unlike Ekdalia 2011, the intended meanings are being articulated by their creators with elaborate explanations, as yet. Future research can study whether the observers are developing a habit of inscribing their own meanings in the face of uncertainty, marking a trend of significant change from the old system of reading and knowing.
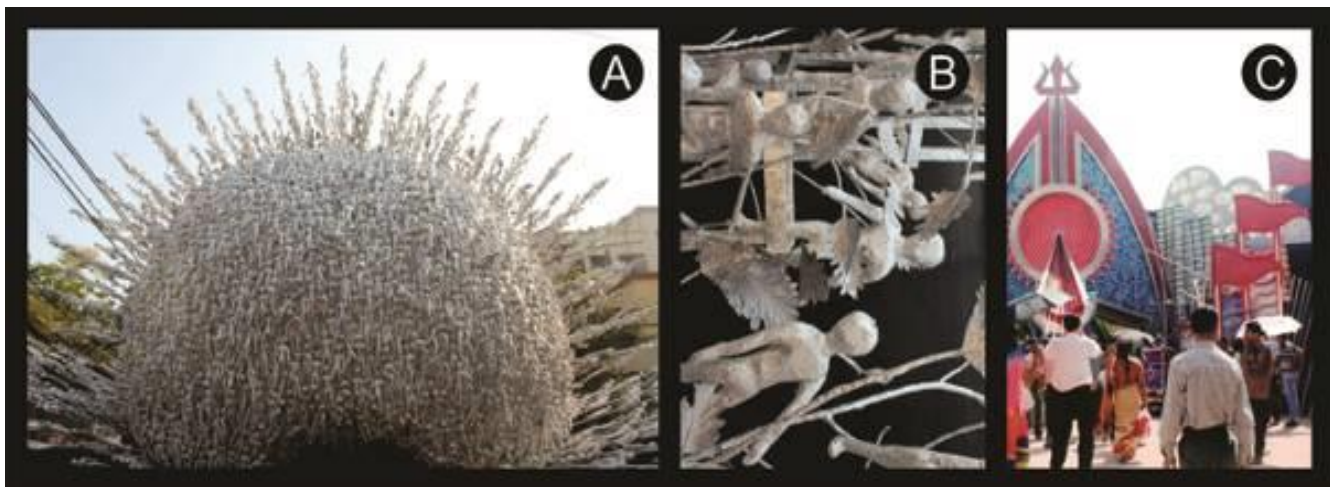

Figure 10. Recent representations blending uncertain elements. A&B: Multivalent narrative on 'light'. Dum Dum Park Bharat Chakra, 2012. C: Message for conservation of water. Dum Dum Park TarunSangha, 2013.

CONCLUSION

Barthes' ideas of text are not conventionally used to analyse architecture, but it offers useful insights about how meaning may be constructed and communicated through architecture.

One of the inadequacies of Modernist architecture – as perceived by the post-modernists – was its 'fetishism' involving rationality, universality, tectonic form etc, and 'sublimation' of issues of meaning and context to these central concerns (Jencks, 2002/2011). The post-modernist architectural agenda of 'return to communication' (Szacka, 2011) was to ameliorate this deficiency, and, as already noted, the post-modern architectural debate focused on meaning (McLeod, 1989). To establish communication, post-modern architects employ a variety of strategies like narratives, contextual references, symbolism, quotation, or kitsch – articulating the intended meaning to the subject. The strains of representation usually adopted for the durga puja pandals at Kolkata offer suitable examples of such communication strategies. So to say, in such cases, the architect is the author employing readerly texts, the content of which is passively received by the subject, whose ability to comprehend is conditioned by his culture and context. However, sometimes, the meaning embodied in such 'communicative' architecture may appear to be uncertain or abstruse, and they are often criticized as being too academic for engaging in any meaningful communication with the common man. This leads us to reflect on how meaning may be constructed in such evasive cases and the associated roles of the architect, the subject, and the context.

An important case of construction of meaning in architecture would be Le Corbusier's architectural marvel: Notre Dame du Haut, Ronchamp. The iconoclastic abstract form of this cathedral reveals no overt reference or meaning, but has prompted the reading of multiple metaphors (Jencks, 2011). This may be identified as a striking example of a writerly text involving the inscription of meaning(s) by spectators at a site where none may be intended (nor expected, following architectural attitudes of Modernism). Again, Schneider's design for Ekdalia went one step further, as it first confounded and negated the usual expectation of a readerly text in a figurative work, and then, to an engaged subject, forced the inscription of meaning at the very site of negation. These corroborate Barthe's idea of the existence of a plurality of meaning – not as a fundamental attribute of a work, but due to its reading. When the work involves a less readerly text, it may appear abstruse, but is more open to multiple interpretations.

Interestingly, neither Schneider, nor Corbusier had any control on what meaning(s) emerged. Thus, in such cases, the role of the architect seems to be of an inscriptor, rather than an author. Also, that the subject is required to co-create meaning indicates that communication has to be understood as a participatory activity in relation to such architecture.

Notably, the particular readings of Ekdalia 2011 presented in this paper are not beyond the context of the city and the pujas – though they may offer a perspective quite different than usually witnessed. As Jencks (2011) noted, the reading of metaphors in architecture is 'dependent on local codes' and 'local context guides the reading, limits the metaphors to travel along certain routes, although very wide ones'. Apparently, his observation is applicable in general to the process of construction of meaning – beyond the particular act of reading metaphors – and the context continues to play an important role in facilitating/guiding the inscription of meaning in a writerly text.

However, the construction of meaning is contingent on an engaged subject, in whose absence communication ceases. What ensures engagement and to what extent is the architect responsible to ensure it is debatable. Barthes' theory does not offer any resolution of this, and it is difficult to conclude whether the collapse of communication should be deemed a failure of representation or of reading. However, when the absence of overt meanings is paired with uncertain/evasive yet familiar/suggestive signifiers intimating existence of covert meanings, it may initiate the crisis towards alternative ways of reading, as in the case of Ekdalia 2011.

Mr. Deepnath Majumder Figure 1C, Figure 2C, Figure 4B, Figure 7C.

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[i] The sixth to tenth days of the *Devipaksha* (fortnight of the Goddess) are considered the most auspicious, though the initiation actually happens on the first day of the fortnight. Since the festival follows the Hindu lunar calendar, the exact number of the most auspicious days may vary from three to five.

[ii] Mitra (2003, p.52) identified the universal appeal of *Durga Puja* across religious and social divisions, especially in the way such occasions were utilized to inculcate social unity with the rise of Indian nationalism during India's freedom struggle. Though the social inclusion is quite apparent even in the present day, the universality of appeal and associability is unverified by scholarly research, and a degree of complexity may be expected with the rise of religious fundamentalism being witnessed across India. For the purpose of this research, we consider it prudent to include only the original intended audience of Bengali Hindu origin in the position of the subject or 'reader'. This is further clarified in section 2.

[iii] Mitra (2003) used the Bengali term '*saharatwa*' (p.17), which would translate to 'city-ness' or 'urbanism', characterizing general patterns of urban life. The socio-economic and spatial dimensions he explored, in the context of the *Puja*, relates to such urbanism. However, he also explained the term as meaning an epitome of the individual qualities of a particular city – a specific expression of its urbanity, related to its culture. He identified the Kolkata

Durga Puja as a '*nagarikuttor*' (p.27), which may be translated to both 'citizen answer' and 'urban answer', which offers freedom from the drudgery of city life.

iv *Durgabari* translates to 'House of Durga'. These are permanent structures serving as temples of the goddess, but function only during festivals, unlike other Hindu temples which operate continuously.

v *Baroyari* translates to 'of the twelve friends', and indicates events having a social collective as patrons, rather than particular aristocratic families. *Sarbajanin*means 'of everyone' or 'for everyone', and refers to events organized by collecting funds from the public. However, both varieties of community *pujas* currently rely heavily on corporate sponsorships.

vi Mitra (2003, p.106) used the term '*bhavakendrik*', which translates to 'centred on *bhava*'. The term '*bhava*' has various connotations, and may be loosely translated to mood/emotion/ feeling, while none of those terms comprehensively capture the essence of the concept of '*bhava*'. However, for the present context, the term 'ambience' seemed appropriate since it conveys a sense of mood evoked by the atmosphere of physical surroundings.

vii The population of Kolkata comprises of 77.68% Hindu (Bureau of Applied Economics and Statistics, 2004, p.38). The official language of West Bengal, and the capital city Kolkata, is Bengali, which is spoken by a 'Majority of citizens' (Kolkata Municipal Corporation, n.d.). Though this includes non-Bengali citizens with bilingualism/trilingualism, the predominance of the languge is a reasonable proxy indicator of the predominance of a Bengali culture.

viii Barthes (1973/1974, pp.16-20) differentiated semiotic elements of a text into five codes. Of these, the 'hermeneutic' – which 'constitute an enigma and lead to its solution', and the 'proairetic' – which articulate an action and its effect 'implying a logic in human behavior', can be reasonably read by any subject without necessitating a particular cultural background. However, a subject's reading of the remaining three codes, viz. the semantic – which constitute 'connotative' signifiers, the symbolic – which refer to an 'immense province' of organized system of connotative elements, and the cultural– which are 'gnomic' codes referring to 'knowledge or wisdom' external to the text, may be expected to be influenced by the subject's grounding in a particular cultural context.

ix 'Surreal' as in having the disorienting, hallucinatory quality of a dream: a mixture of realism and the bizarreness of fantasy.

x In Schneider's project profile, available in the 'biography' section of his website, the only other project titled 'It's all Rheydt', Kassel, Germany, is listed as 'not realised'. Retrieved from Gregor Schneider Web site:www.gregorschneider.de/biography.htm#currently

xi Jameson explained, in the context of his commentary on post-modernism, 'schizophrenia' was not to be understood as a clinical usage of the term, but a descriptive one.

xii As of 2003, '[a]bout one third of the population of the CMC lives in the slums. There are 2,011 registered and 3,500 unregistered slums in Kolkata.' (Kundu, 2003, p.4)