The word ‘historiography’ is commonly referred to as the writing of history - written history. Its earliest known occurrence in English language dates from 1569, whereas its older Greek roots are from history [narrative], and to write, which makes the phrase understandable that ‘historians recreate the course of history’. While passing from Latin into Italian, French and German, its use has remained analogous. In recent years, its meaning has developed along two complimentary lines: historiographer the person, and historiography the object i.e. the work of history. Since 19th century, the word has been used to refer to both the writing of history and, more importantly, the corpus of written history i.e. describing fully constituted sets of historical works: the historiography of a particular period [Byzantium, Renaissance or Gothic] for instance, the historiography of the reign of monarchs, or the historiography of modern architecture. Thus, it could be inferred that historiography denotes the total number of the histories written about a specific period or thematic unit, and, by extension, it is applied to knowledge about or the broader study of such set of works. In
other words, historiography makes history itself as a corpus for investigation, analysis and developing ‘theory’—a way of thinking, a set of point of views and normative reflections. It is this particular sense of historiography that relates to theory building, and becomes relevant for the architectural academe as an important tool for the field of architecture and its development, which forms the point of departure for formulating my reflections. My reflections are mainly concerned with the role of ‘design’ and the capacity of the ‘context’ in [re]writing historiography, which implies using history as a corpus for designerly way of thinking to construct theory.

On one side, if architectural history is about narrating the transformation of space and time, imagining its historiography has largely been conditioned by what I call ‘the myth of the Indus’. From Sir Mortimeer Wheeler’s ‘5000 years of Pakistan’ [1948] to Kamil Khan Mumtaz’s ‘Architecture in Pakistan’ [1985] and ‘Modernity & tradition: Contemporary Architecture in Pakistan’ [1999], and Aitzaz Ahsan’s ‘The Indus Saga and the making of Pakistan’ [1996] are just few cases to illuminate that conditioning. What ‘the myth of the Indus’ does remarkably is that it creates ambivalence; suspending history in a tension and creates polarities, such as between ‘new state and old nation’, ‘modernity and tradition’, ‘historical and progressive’, and so on. However, such ambivalence is subsumed by attempts at periodisation [ancient to sultanate, Mughal to post-colonial, etc.], stylization and a chronological account of history. The role or autonomy of ‘design’ and the capacity of the ‘context’ in mitigating the ambivalence hardly surfaces in these ways of writing history.

On the other side, the building-up of post-colonial architecture & urban theory in an international context has been based on challenging and contesting the simplistic notions of viewing the exchange [of ideas] through analytical categories, such as export - import, planting, core – periphery etc. Discernable from such categories of theorizing is the notion of reducing the ‘context’ and ‘design’ to passive / inactive recipients and mere application of theories, respectively. Moreover, there has been an emerging scholarly line of enquiry that attempts to [re-]theorize the cultural dimension of architectural conception in post-colonial discourse through
local-global, east-west, tradition-modern polarities. Furthermore, formulations, such as Orientalism as the image of the west [Edward Said], Englishness invented abroad [Panayioti Pyla], the ‘subaltern’ as a space of difference and ‘subaltern studies’ as an intervention in South Asian historiography [Gramsci, Spivak and Bhabha, etc.] have provided the intellectual ferment for unfolding a new era of historiographical developments. They have yielded discourses, such as alternative modernities to indigenous and multiple modernities, and another and hybrid modernities, which characterize the range from the continuation of reactionary attitude to apologetic formulations. They are formulations of the other, by the other and for the other as hyper-texts, which run the danger of reducing both the design and the context as de-contextualised patterns. My reflections are based on an attempt to transcend these formulations through the framework of ‘re-visioning / re-inventing history by deconstructing the process of making’ as a way of historiography for building theory. This framework implies that both the context [the culture of the place, time and geography] and design [the culture of making] plays an active role in [re]writing historiography for building theory. This framework is to facilitate a designerly way of research on history [using it as a corpus], and a testimony to the concern for avoiding the use of historical buildings [projects, cities, etc.] as de-contextualized patterns.

The framework of ‘re-visioning / re-inventing through making’ for historiography of architecture, with the active role of design and the context, implies specific meanings, which needs to be elaborated. In this framework, Design is not simply application of theory rather it is rethinking and reformulation of theory. In this sense, the autonomy of design is in the reformulation of agendas – reflection happens in design – and not in the application of agendas and theories, rather the reformulation unfolds new [reinvented / revisioned] theories and agendas in the process of design. Such a process of design is one part of constituting the ‘making’. Moreover, design in the sense of making [a continuous process of making, unmaking and re-making] is the articulation of a framework for change. Such a notion of design is to deal with the incompleteness of the work of architecture; the life of the building and designed urban space beyond the completion of building works.
– the inhabitation, adaptation, alteration in response to changing cultural & technological conditions – when architecture begins to respond to change, people and place over time i.e. it becomes a cultural construct. Thus, through such a notion of design in the sense of making, we do not only discern through historiography the moments of incompleteness, appropriateness and change, but we also endow the theory of design as always in the process of making and an ongoing concern from one generation to the next.

Theorizing design as a framework for change is meaningless without the complementary capacity of the context in constructing a cultural process of making. Context creates conditions that allow dealing with the real process of building a house, garden or a city, and dealing with individual, economic, political, ideological and developmental agendas. Re-visioning the process of making in a particular context implies a designerly way of thinking about reformulating development and other agendas. Context is shaped by culture and geography as the chief elements. Including agendas in a designerly way of thinking is what constitutes reinventing / revisioning in a particular context. Thus, context defines the modalities for unfolding the process of making.

In order to operationalize the framework of ‘revisioning / reinventing through making’ for architectural historiography, we seek the cultural method of studying history as a corpus through the specifically defined concepts of design and the context. On one side, this approach aims to transcend the canonical theory & methods of history – the antiquarian, the archeological and the orientalist - and embraces the cultural method with architecture as its freshly realized old home i.e. as architecture culture. On the other side, it is part of the three patterns of social organization that are studyable: psychological, social and cultural. Thus, to complement the ‘revisioning / reinventing through making’ as a dynamic historical framework for architectural historiography, the ‘multicultural quality’ and the ‘dialogic dimension’ as the analytical apparatus are necessary to shift the focus from passive to dynamic exchange [of ideas over time]. Transcending the reactionary and apologetic attitudes in theory building, such an approach makes a plea for ‘dispassionate rationality’. It makes a case for opening
up the field of historiography for the development of architectural theory, and thereby, the field of architecture in Pakistan and the region. Rigorous efforts at enlarging the scope of historiography are necessary for unfolding a Pakistani architecture-culture that is an active [in reformulation of its trajectory] and contributive part of world architecture.
Endnotes

