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NEGOTIATING THE STATIC AND KINETIC CITIES

THE EMERGENT URBANISM OF MUMBAI

Cities in India, characterized by physical and visual contradictions that coalesce in a landscape of incredible pluralism, are anticipated to be the largest urban conglomerates of the twenty-first century. Historically, particularly during the period of British colonization, the different worlds—whether economic, social, or cultural—that were contained within these cities occupied different spaces and operated under different rules, the aim being to maximize control and minimize conflict between opposing worlds. Today, although these worlds have come to share the same space, they understand and use it differently. Massive waves of distressed rural migration during the latter half of the 1900s triggered the convergence of these worlds into a singular but multifaceted entity. This, coupled with an inadequate supply of urban land and a failure to create new urban centers, resulted in extremely high population densities. Furthermore, in the 1990s, with the emergence of a postindustrial, service-based economy, the intertwining of these worlds within the same space became even more intense.

In this postindustrial scenario, cities in India have become critical sites for negotiation between elite and subaltern cultures. The
new relationships between social classes in a postindustrial economy are quite different from those that existed in state-controlled economies and the welfare state. The fragmentation of service and production locations has resulted in a new, bazaar-like urbanism, which has woven its presence through the entire urban landscape. It is an urbanism created by those outside the elite domains of the formal modernity of the state and is thus a “pirate” modernity that slips under the laws of the city simply to survive, without any conscious attempt at constructing a counterculture. This contrasts with the many historic legacies of modernity in India where instruments such as the State Plan (referred to as the Development Plan), borrowed from Soviet socialist planning paradigms, controlled, determined, and orchestrated the built landscape. With the dramatic retreat of the state through the 1980s and 1990s, the space of the “everyday” has become the space where economic and cultural struggles are articulated. These common spaces have been largely excluded from the cultural discourses on globalization, which focus on elite domains of production and their spatial implications.

Today, Indian cities comprise two components that occupy the same physical space. The first is the formal or Static City. Built of more permanent materials such as concrete, steel, and brick, it is comprehended as a two-dimensional entity on conventional city maps and is monumental in its presence. The second is the informal or Kinetic City. Incomprehensible as a two-dimensional entity, it is perceived as a city in motion — a three-dimensional construct of incremental development. The Kinetic City is temporary in nature and often built with recycled materials: plastic sheets, scrap metal, canvas, and waste wood. It constantly modifies and reinvents itself. The Kinetic City is perceived not as architecture, but in terms of spaces which hold associative values and supportive lives. Patterns of occupation determine its form and perception. It is an indigenous urbanism that has its particular “local” logic. It is not necessarily the city of the poor, as most images might suggest; rather, it is a temporal articulation and occupation of space which not only creates a richer sensibility of spatial occupation but also suggests how spatial limits are expanded to include formally unimagined situations in dense urban conditions.

The Kinetic City presents a compelling vision that potentially allows one to better understand the blurred lines of contemporary urbanism and the
changing roles of people and spaces in urban society. The increasing concentrations of global flows have exacerbated the inequalities and spatial divisions of social classes. In this context, an architecture or urbanism of equality in an increasingly inequitable economic condition requires looking deeper to find a wide range of places in which to mark and commemorate the cultures of those excluded from the spaces of global flows. These don’t necessarily lie in the formal production of architecture, but they often challenge it. Here, the idea of a city points to an elastic urban condition—not a grand vision, but a grand adjustment.

The Kinetic City, bazaar-like in form, can be seen as the symbolic image of the emerging urban Indian condition. The processions, weddings, festivals, hawkers, street vendors, and slum dwellers all create an ever-transforming streetscape—a city in constant motion, where the very physical fabric is characterized by the kinetic. The Static City, on the other hand, dependent on architecture for its representation, is no longer the single image by which the city is read. Thus, architecture is not the “spectacle” of the city, nor does it even comprise the single dominant image of the city. In contrast, festivals such as Diwali, Dussera, Navrathri, Muharram, Durga Puja, Ganesh Chathurthi, and many more have emerged as the spectacles of the Kinetic City. Their presence on the everyday landscape pervades and dominates the
popular visual culture of Indian cities. Festivals create a forum through which the fantasies of the subalterns are articulated and even organized into political action. In Mumbai, for example, the popularity and growth of the Ganesh festival has been phenomenal. During the festival, which occurs in August or September, numerous neighborhoods transform themselves temporarily with lights and decoration. New public spaces are created to house the idols of Ganesh for ten days. During the festival period, family, neighborhood, and city events mark the celebrations. On the last day a large part of the city’s population carries the idols in long processions to the sea, where they are ultimately to be immersed.

Each procession carries tableaux depicting images of both local and global concerns, with Lord Ganesh mediating the outcomes. These representations are not based on formal scriptures or predetermined rules; instead, human ingenuity breaches the boundaries between the local and the global, the historic and contemporary. The images convey the hybrid urgencies of metropolitan India. The neighborhood processions weave through predetermined routes in the city, each vying with other neighborhood processions to showcase the intensity of their followers. Set against the backdrop of the Static City, the processions culminate with the immersion of the idols, which the followers bid farewell amid chants inviting Ganesh to resurrect his presence the following year.

Immersion becomes a metaphor for the spectacle of the city. As the clay idol dissolves in the water of the bay, the spectacle comes to a close. There are no static or permanent mechanisms to encode this spectacle. The memory of the city is in this instance an “enacted” process, a temporal moment, as opposed to a static or permanent entity in the form of buildings that contain the public memory. The city and its architecture are not synonymous and cannot contain a single meaning. Within the Kinetic City, meanings are not stable; spaces get consumed, reinterpreted, and recycled. The Kinetic City recycles the Static City to create a new spectacle.

This transformative ability of the Kinetic City becomes even more vivid in the events that play out at Mumbai’s town hall every year on 15 August, India’s Independence Day. The Public Works Department (PWD) subverts the meaning and symbolism of the architecture of this classical building by reconfiguring it for an annual ceremony when the governor of the state addresses the
citizens. To ensure the ceremony is protected from the monsoon rains, the PWD builds a structure, a sort of large porch built overnight in bamboo and cloth, which attaches itself to the building. The decorative trim and other ornamental highlights graft on to this classical building a local and perhaps traditional sensibility that momentarily transforms the architecture. The conservationists in the city protest each year, decrying such construction as an abuse of the legislation that protects heritage buildings, but they ignore the fact that this is a reversible action, well within the bounds of even the holiest of preservationists’ canons. The intended image of this symbol of colonial power, a celebrated asset of the Static City, is subverted and recolonized by the Kinetic City. The PWД alters the significance of this building momentarily to expand the margins of the Kinetic City.

This notion of cultural preservation takes on a critical dimension when applied to the preservation of the built environment in these contexts. Debates about the conservation of the Static City have often revolved around the idea of “cultural significance,” an all-encompassing concept that emerged clearly in the 1980s. To be more precise, it first emerged in what is referred to as the Burra Charter, one of the many resolutions made by the International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites to define and guide conservation practice. Adopted in Burra, South Australia, in
Town hall of Mumbai, with its thirty-four steps. Photo by Rahul Mehrotra.

Town hall of Mumbai transformed on Independence Day. Photo by Rahul Mehrotra.
1979, the Burra Charter defined cultural significance as the aesthetic, historic, scientific or social value for past, present, and future generations. Implicit in this definition is the belief that "significance" is static. It is a definition that is "object"-centric (devoid of life) with its roots in the debate propagated by the antiquarians of the Renaissance.\textsuperscript{13} What is the validity of a notion where cultural memory is often an enacted process, as in the Kinetic City? Or where meanings are fluid like the Kinetic City itself and often complicated in post-colonial conditions by the fact that the creators and custodians of historic environments in the Static City are different cultures from those that created them?

What, then, might be one's cultural reading of the Kinetic City, which now forms a greater part of urban reality? In this dynamic context, if the production or preservation of architecture or urban form has to be informed by one's reading of cultural significance, it will necessarily have to include the notion of "constructing significance" in both architectural and conservation debates.\textsuperscript{14} In fact, an understanding that cultural significance evolves will challenge as well as clarify the role of the architect as an advocate of change (versus a preservationist who opposes change)—one who can engage with
both the Kinetic City and the Static City on equal terms. Under such conditions, a draining of the symbolic import of the architectural landscape leads to a deepening of ties between architecture and contemporary realities and experiences. This understanding allows architecture and urban typologies to be transformed through intervention and placed in the service of contemporary life, realities, and emerging aspirations. The Static City can thus embrace the Kinetic City and be informed and remade by its logic.

The phenomenon of bazaars in the Victorian arcades of the Fort Area, Mumbai's historic district, is emblematic of this potential negotiation between the Static City and the Kinetic City. The original use of the arcades was twofold: first, they provided spatial mediation between building and street; second, they were a perfect response to Bombay's climate, serving to protect pedestrians from both harsh sun and lashing rains. Today, with the informal bazaar occupying the arcades, the original intent of the area has been challenged. The emergent relationship between the arcade and the bazaar not only forces a confrontation of uses and interest groups but also demands new preservation approaches. For the average Mumbai resident, the hawker provides a wide range of goods at prices considerably lower than those found in local shops, and the bazaars that characterize the Fort Area arcades are therefore thriving. For the elite and for conservationists, the Victorian core represents the old city center, complete with monumental icons. In fact, as the city sprawls, dissipating the clarity of its form, these images, places, and icons acquire even greater meaning, for preservationists, as critical symbols of the city's historic image. Consequently, hawking is deemed illegal by city authorities that are constantly attempting to relocate the bazaars.

The challenge in Bombay is to cope with the city's transformation, not by inducing or polarizing its dualism, but by attempting to reconcile these opposite conditions as being simultaneously valid. The existence of two worlds in the same space implies that one must accommodate and overlap varying uses, perceptions, and physical forms. For example, the Fort Area arcades are a special urban component that inherently possesses a capacity for reinterpretation. As an architectural or urban-design solution, the arcades display incredible resilience; they can accommodate new uses while keeping the illusion of their architecture intact.

One design solution might be to readapt the functioning of the arcades.
restructuring them to allow for easy pedestrian movement and to accommodate hawkers at the same time. Restructured arcades, providing an illusion of the disciplined Victorian arcade or the exterior façade, could contain the amorphous bazaar within. With this sort of planning, components of the city would have a greater ability to survive because they could be more adaptable to changing economic and social conditions. There are no total solutions in an urban landscape charged with the duality between permanence and rapid transformation. At best, the city could constantly evolve and invent solutions for the present through safeguarding the crucial components of historically important "urban hardware." Could "Bazaars in Victorian Arcades" become a symbol of an emergent reality of temporary adjustment?

Clearly the Static and Kinetic Cities go beyond their obvious differences to establish a much richer relationship both spatially and metaphorically than their physical manifestations would suggest. Here, affinity and rejection are simultaneously played out, maintaining a state of equilibrium via a seemingly irresolvable tension. The informal economy of the city vividly illustrates the collapsed and intertwined existence of the Static and Kinetic Cities. Dabbawalas (literally, "tiffin men") exemplify the relationship between the formal and informal, the static and kinetic. The tiffin-delivery service, which relies on the train system for transportation, costs about 200 rupees (four dollars) per month, with an annual turnover that amounts to roughly 50 million rupees (around a million dollars). Approximately 4,500 dabbawalas deliver an estimated 200,000 lunchboxes every day. A dabbawala picks up a lunch tiffin from a house anywhere in the city. He then, through a complex network, helps deliver the tiffin by lunchtime and return it to the house later in the day. The network involves the dabba, or tiffin, being exchanged up to four or five times between pickup and return, with the average box traveling about thirty kilometers each way. The efficiency of Mumbai's train system, the spine of the linear city, enables this complex informal system to work. The dabbawalas have thus innovatively set up a network that enables an informal system to take advantage of a formal infrastructure.15

Entrepreneurship in the Kinetic City is an autonomous and oral process that requires the ability to fold the formal and informal into a symbiotic relationship. The dabbawala service—like other informal services, which range from banking to money transfers to couriers to electronic bazaars—lever-
ages community relationships and networks and deftly uses the Static City and its infrastructure beyond its intended margins. These networks create a synergy that depends on mutual integration without the obsession of formalized structures. The Kinetic City is where the intersection of need (often at the level of survival) and of the unexploited potentials of existing infrastructure engenders innovative services. The trains in Mumbai are emblematic of a kinetic space that supports and blurs the formal and the informal, slicing through these worlds while momentarily collapsing them into a singular entity. In this space the self-consciousness about modernity and the regulations imposed by the Static City are suspended and redundant. The Kinetic City carries local wisdom into the contemporary world without fear of the modern, while the Static City aspires to erase the local and recodify it in a written “macro-moral” order. Inspired by modernist urban-design tenets, the Static City periodically remakes the Kinetic City in its own image.

The issue of housing most vividly demonstrates the process by which the Static City reorders and remakes the Kinetic City. In Mumbai, for example, approximately 60 percent of the city’s population does not have access to formal housing. This population lives on approximately 10 percent of the city’s land in settlements that are locally referred to as slums. It is estimated that about 70 percent of the city’s population works in the informal sector. This number has risen with the new liberal economy, which curtails bargaining capacity by fragmenting labor. Despite its informal nature, the subaltern population’s productivity allows Mumbai to be competitive on a global scale. This population lives in the interstitial spaces of the cities—road edges, drainage channels (nalla spaces), edges of railway lines—and must engage in innovative means of negotiating everyday life. Dish antennas and a web of electrical wire and cables are juxtaposed with homes covered by plastic sheets or with walls made of empty drums—a kaleidoscope of the past, present, and future compressed into an organic fabric of alleys, dead ends, and a labyrinthine, mysterious streetscape that constantly modifies and reinvents itself. The Kinetic City, like a twitching organism, locates and relocates itself through perpetual motion. Flow, instability, and indeterminacy are basic to the Kinetic City. Regular demolitions exacerbate the tenuous occupation of land by the inhabitants of these settlements, inhibiting any investment the occupants might make in their physical living conditions.
Thus, the Kinetic City is fluid and dynamic, mobile and temporal (often as a strategy to defeat eviction), and leaves no ruins. It constantly recycles its resources, leveraging great effect and presence with very little means.

The expansion of the Kinetic City only heightens the growing contradictions evident in the islands of concentrated wealth that are increasingly manifest in gated communities throughout the city and the edge-city suburbs. The popular metaphorical reference to “making Bombay Shanghai” is emblematic of the one-dimensional imagination that planners and politicians bring to bear on decisions about the city’s development. An obvious extension of the Shanghai metaphor is the notion of remaking the city in a singular image and using architecture as the spectacle to represent a global aspiration. The radical transformation of the physical nature of the city is seen as the most immediate method to make the city viable for integration in a global network of cities and economies. New highways, flyovers, airports, corporate hotels, and convention centers (followed by the secondary development of museums, galleries, parks, and progressive urban regulations to demonstrate further compliance with international urban standards) are all critical elements for the Static City to achieve this perceived integration. Such global implications also raise political questions that challenge the democratic processes of city governance.

Ambiguity regarding the urban form of Mumbai and the dominant image of the city prompts the question “Whose city is it anyway?” This question goes beyond the politics of occupation and challenges the processes by which the city is made. The making of the city is perhaps most critical when negotiating between the Static and Kinetic Cities, for it is also an effective point of intervention. Through the city-making process, globalization and its particular transgressions in the urban landscape are realized, but that process is also how the Kinetic City can resist or participate in globalization as well as reconfigure itself socially, culturally, and spatially.

The growing movement of slum associations and networks in Mumbai is a potent illustration of effective intervention. These associations engage with the formal world of the Static City while mediating the contradictions inherent in issues of legality, informality, and the mobile and temporal strategies of the Kinetic City. One such successful movement is the alliance between the nongovernmental organization Society for the Promotion of Area Re-
sources, the community-benefit organization National Slum Dwellers Federation, and the Mahila Milan, an organization of poor women. This alliance is essentially united around concerns for securing land and access to urban infrastructure. It has successfully negotiated between the formal and informal worlds in the city, as well as across national boundaries through a network of alliances working with slum dwellers around the world. Besides representing efforts to reconstitute citizenship in cities, these alliances form what Arjun Appadurai calls a "deep democracy," referring to "[a] model that produces poor communities able to engage in partnership with more powerful agencies—urban, regional, national and multilateral—that purport to be concerned with poverty and citizenship. . . . [V]ertical collaborations and partnerships with more powerful persons and organizations together form a mutually sustaining cycle of process. This is where depth and laterality become joint circuits along which pro-poor strategies can flow." It is through this restructuring of the city-making process that the Kinetic and Static Cities can be intertwined beyond the physical and thus better engage the inhabitants of the city.

In such conditions, the urbanism of Mumbai represents a fascinating intersection where the Kinetic City—a landscape of dystopia, yet a symbol of optimism—challenges the Static City—encoded in architecture—to reposition and remake the city as a whole. The Kinetic City forces the Static City to re-engage itself in present conditions by dissolving its utopian project to fabricate multiple dialogues with its context. Could this become the basis for a rational discussion about coexistence? Or is the emergent urbanism of Mumbai inherently paradoxical such that the coexistence of the Static and Kinetic Cities and their particular states of utopia and dystopia are inevitable? Can the spatial configuration for how this simultaneity occurs actually be formally imagined?

In spite of these many potential disjunctures, what this reading of the city does celebrate is the dynamic and pluralist processes that create the urban Indian landscape. Within this urbanism, the Static and Kinetic Cities necessarily coexist and blur into an integral entity, even if momentarily, to create the margins for adjustment that their simultaneous existences demand.
NOTES


2. This unprecedented demographic shift has not only transformed the social make-up of Indian cities but has perpetuated an incomprehensible landscape charged with intense dualities—which are cultural and social, as well as economic. This new demography comprises mainly rural migrants, who form the urban poor, bringing with them new skills, social values, and cultural attitudes that not only determine their ability to survive in an urban environment but are also, in the process, altering the very structure of the city. The different attitudes of rural migrants that influence the way the city is used and perceived are also emblematic of the more universal phenomenon of global flows that are transforming cities across the world and of local resistances which emerge in landscapes characterized by uneven development. Furthermore, the presence of the urban poor makes explicit another crucial divide—that between those who have access to the formal city and the infrastructure that goes with it, and those who do not have this access and therefore lack the basic amenities in the urban system.

3. Distinct manufacturing zones and segregations have now shifted spatially to services and manufacturing occurring in fragmented areas in the city, which are networked through the efficient transportation system the city offers. Similarly, the markets on which these economies are dependent have been fractured, giving rise to adjacencies of use and urban form previously not experienced in the city. See Shetty 2005.


5. The fragmented nature of the new economy in Mumbai was well documented by Prasad Shetty (2005). One interesting observation had to do with the changing patterns of mobility in public transportation, particularly with regard to trains. While the city’s population between 1991 and 2001 grew by 22.40 percent, train travel increased by 42.37 percent (from 4.95 million to 6.4 million passengers). This was largely due to significant changes in work and production patterns. Small-scale operations and individual agents now connect manufacturing nodes that are fragmented across landscape of the city.


8. Weddings are an example of how the rich, too, are engaged in the making of the Kinetic City. The lack of formal spaces for weddings as the cultural outlet for ostentation has resulted in public open space being temporarily colonized for consumption by the rich as spaces for the spectacle of elaborate weddings. Complex wedding sets are often constructed and removed within twelve hours—a transitory spectacle set up by the rich in the public domain for private consumption. Again, the margin of the urban system is momentarily expanded.

9. In its present form the Ganeshotsava, as the festival is referred to locally, was re-
invented in the late nineteenth century, by Lokamanya Tilak, as a symbol of resistance to the British colonial regime. Tilak took a domestic and private idiom of worship and translated it into a collective and public rite of self-assertion.


12. Conservation legislation was first introduced in Mumbai in 1995 and was the first of its kind in India. Over the last ten years of the legislation’s existence, the debate about historic preservation—or conservation, as it is more commonly referred to in Mumbai—has become a well-articulated one. A number of nongovernmental organizations are involved in activism and advocacy to lobby for the protection of the listed buildings. Unfortunately, most of these debates are biased toward British conservation practices because a large number of Indian architects trained in conservation were educated at universities in the U.K. and thus tend to bring a British-centric view to the protection of colonial buildings, a view that is largely out of sync with contemporary Indian urban realities. The benchmarks for these architects are British and European standards, which often steers conservation practice into the realm of the elite patrons (banks, government agencies, etc.), which is seen as an exclusionary activity.

13. These ideas were first presented at the “Cultural Significance: Construct or Criterion?” seminar held at the Center for Architecture and Middle Eastern Studies, University of Adelaide, in July 2000. I am grateful to Peter Scrivner for his help in developing these ideas.
14. For examples of works or projects that have attempted to translate these ideas, see Mehrotra 2004.

17. As organized manufacturing left the city of Mumbai, skilled laborers were left no choice but fend for themselves. Small manufacturing centers with agents working to network them have become the emergent paradigm. This system allows for an incredible web of distribution, with the slums serving as centers of production.

18. Before Shanghai—that is, until the late 1990s—Singapore was the metaphor for a successful city, as implicit in the question politicians asked: “Why can’t Mumbai become like Singapore?” Singapore’s levels of hygiene, cleanliness, efficient functioning, all set in a tropical landscape—Mumbai and its citizens could easily imagine these things for their city. Their imaginings were fueled by big businesses, as represented through organizations like Bombay First, to prepare the city to participate in the global economy.

20. Charles Correa, the eminent Indian architect, has described Mumbai as “a Great City, Terrible Place.” As I understand it, utopia is the cultural and economic landscape of the city, and dystopia the physical landscape.