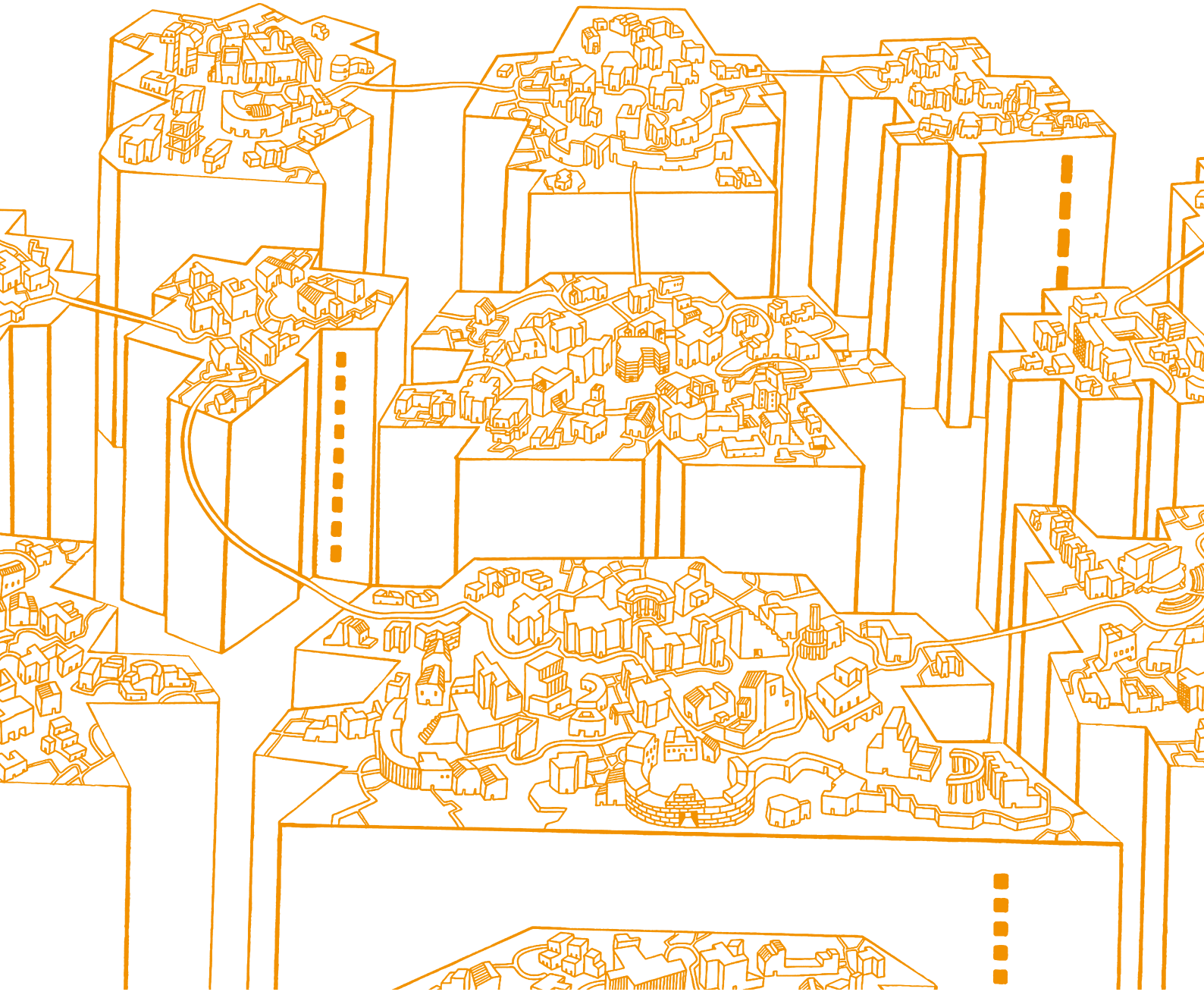
archplus 185

URBAN AGE

India's Insular Urbanism



The issue of the German architectural journal archplus on India's Insular Urbanism is published in the context of the Urban Age conference in Mumbai in November 2007 with the support of Alfred Herrhausen Society and in collaboration with Urban Age. As the print issue is only available in German please find attached the English translation of the editorial on the following pages. Selected contributions are provided in English and can be downloaded from our website through the following link: http://www.archplus.net/index.php?s=newsletter&c=161

India's Insular Urbanism

"I'm coming from where you're going – and it's not worth going there." Packaged as a parable, Charles Correa reports in his book The New Landscape of the mutual incomprehension separating Western hippies from prosperous Indians in the India of the 1960s and 1970s. The hippies, having left the material wealth of the West behind them, now wandering disheveled and barefoot through India's streets in search of life's deeper meaning. Their Asian counterparts, enjoying their newly acquired affluence with ostentatious pride, experienced the gazes of their interlocutors as a direct attack. Each signaled that the lifestyle chosen by the other – characterized respectively by supposed progress and the purported authenticity of a pre-modern way of life – was not worth the effort, that sadly, neither path promised fulfillment. "I'm coming from where you're going – and it's not worth going there." By means of this apt formula, Correa – a long-time authority on Indian architecture – focuses the ambivalence of the process of modernization (cf. Reinhold Martin and Kadambari Baxi, archplus, no 185, November 2007, p. 58 ff.).

Encountering one another in this parable – albeit with the usual roles reversed – are the beneficiaries and the underdogs of modernization. This encounter demystifies the image of India that has prevailed in the West since the late 18th century, especially in the German speaking countries, one that has allowed India to serve as an intellectual projection surface. The myth of India – which flourished all the way from Romanticism and up to the dropout culture of the hippies – was sustained by a presumed holistic model of life, one that enlightened Europe believed it had rediscovered intact in ancient India. At the same time, this idealized India functioned to an extent as a critique of the rationalism of enlightened Europe, and of its concomitant loss of spirituality. Nearly all of the important thinkers and poets of German Romanticism (among them Goethe, Novalis, the Schlegel brothers, and Schopenhauer) perceived ancient Indian culture and its texts in this spirit. As demonstrated by Miksha Sinha, an Indian cultural studies expert, this preoccupation with an idealized India of antiquity also furnished a sense of self-certainty and served the construction of one's own cultural identity (p. 16 ff.). According to Peter Sloterdijk and Sinha, this "Asian Renaissance," which was accompanied by an "Asianization of thought" (as pointedly formulated by Peter Sloterdijk; p. 14 f.), provides the key to a postcolonial, perspectival understanding of culture and identity, one that is today more important than ever before.

Very much in the spirit of the perception outlined above, architects too have turned toward Indian architecture as a point of departure. In 1915, in his lectures in popular education delivered on behalf of the Social Democratic Party, Adolf Behne discovered a spiritual affinity joining Indian and Gothic architecture (Manfred Speidel, p. 20 f.). For Bruno Taut and Hans Poelzig, the East even promised the redemption of Western art, perceived by them as being spiritually impoverished. But even architects such as Walter Gropius and Adolf Meyer, who no one has ever suspected of mystical tendencies, allowed themselves to be infected by this euphoria over the Orient, perceiving "a goal" in Indian architecture and sculpture.

But what does India mean for us today? At the very latest with the commencement of accelerated globalization and liberalization and the economic policies of the early 1990s, the process of modernization that has preoccupied the Indian nation ever since the achievement of independence exactly 60 years ago has succeeded in dispelling this veil of mysticism, which has now been supplanted in the West by a very different image of India. The spiritual "wisdom" of this "promised land" (Hegel) has evolved into the (IT) "knowledge" of a globally competitive economic power. In their book Multi-National City, from which excerpts of the first German translation appear in this issue, Reinhold Martin and Kadambari Baxi provide an account of India's steady development into an IT center, a development which must be viewed in the context of the nation's modernization as a whole. Rather than a-historically mystifying the recently proliferating globalization (which simply represents a further stage in the process of modernization), as many critics have done, these authors delineate the history of Indian modernity in a virtuosic arc: the mood of upheaval in the period following the achievement of independence, testified to by Le Corbusier's Chandigarh, along with many other public buildings and projects; the search for identity during the 1970s and 80s; and the socioeconomic impact of liberalization during the 1990s (p. 56 ff.).

"The Good Life is Insular"

In contrast to this teleological point of view, Gyan Prakash, historian and member of the well-known Subaltern Studies Group, emphasizes the a-historical behavior exhibited by the spatial organization of the city. "A-historical" in the sense that urban development does not necessarily proceed in a linear fashion in the spirit of historical evolution à la Hegel. As the site where

modernization processes are played out in an intensified fashion, the city does not represent a stage in the transition from tradition to modernity. It does not deliver redemption or betterment for all; instead, it is simultaneously modern and pre-modern. Occurring there in parallel fashion are contradictory developments, while divergent developmental stages exist side by side without ever converging toward a common historical objective (p. 28 f.). In this context, Prakash follows the argumentation of Michel Foucault, who in his essay "Other Spaces" asserted that the era of the teleological fulfillment of history in the form of a linear project now lies behind us: "We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed. We are at a moment, I believe, when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein." Reflected in this characterization is the urban reality of the 21st century. This reality is perforated by temporal leaps. Springing up ceaselessly on the one hand are new high-tech islands of affluence, while persisting on the other are large areas and large population groups which exist in precarious state of underdevelopment and poverty. This extreme socio-spatial discrepancy is the hallmark of India's urban development, one which we confront in this volume with the thesis of Indian's insular urbanism.

"The good life is insular," writes Gautam Bhatia in his contribution (p. 89 ff.). This bon mot could stand for the spatial development of contemporary cities as a whole. The powers that be have long since abandoned the project of creating a homogenous and modernist space designed to generate life conditions of equality for all. In its place is an economy structured around special economic zones and IT parks, a society marked by enclaves of affluence for the middle classes, by gated communities and shopping malls, and a politics focused on the provision of advantageous conditions for private investment. The result is a form of "insular urbanism" which, while encountered all over the world today, has assumed hitherto unrecognized dimensions in India. In archplus 183, entitled Situativer Urbanismus, the group Urban Catalyst provided us with a definition of this phenomenon: "In spatial terms, this entrepreneurial mode of urban development manifests itself in an 'insular urbanism': locations of interest to investors are planned out down to the smallest detail as enclave-style projects, while the territories lying between them disappear altogether from the public's consciousness." New for the West, however, is the fact, demonstrated by Urban Catalyst, that the fallow zones generated by such development make possible a new freedom for alternative forms of agency. In India, it is precisely such ambivalent urban interspaces which constitute the basis of existence for millions of marginalized city dwellers. These individuals quickly move into such spaces, occupying and defending the niches that have now fallen into their control, for no matter how precarious they might be, the tight interlinking of such spaces with the larger city represents the sole available survival option (Philipp Rode, o. 86 f.). The enclaves of affluence, then, are woven together as intimately as possible with their larger surroundings, occupied in turn by the majority of the population and characterized by highly precarious conditions. The informal sector, with its inexhaustible reservoir of low-wage workers, provides the new middle classes with the indispensable services which alone ensure their viability. In his portrait of Mumbai, this symbiotic relationship (assuming that such euphemistic expressions are even permissible) is described by Kiran Nagarkar as a characteristic trait of the quality of life of this otherwise dysfunctional megacity (p. 24 ff.). Regardless of moral valuations, it is precisely here that a critical form of city planning should begin, in order to investigate how this state of affairs affects space and the way it is used. For "what sets middle-class neighbourhoods apart from slums is not time but space; not just physical space but also the space of power.." (Prakash)

The Retreat of the State

When the Indian state was founded, the discourse of modernization was driven by the contradiction between city and country. Meanwhile, the state seems to have totally abandoned the objective of even development. In the 60 years since independence, the state has failed to solve the pressing problem of urban poverty, and has proven unable to provide adequate residences and infrastructure. Nearly all large-scale attempts at addressing these issues have brought new problems in their wake. For many people, urban renewal has resulted in the large-scale loss of a viable economic basis. In some cases, slum dwellers have been pushed outward and warehoused in remote districts, where they are no longer able to offer their services, or if so, then only under extremely disadvantageous conditions. In others, the new residences provide neither adequate space practicing handcraft trades, nor sufficient opportunities to sell products to customers locally. This incapacity on the part of the state has led to a wide reliance on self-help efforts; it has also led to the formation of an autonomous branch of the economy, the network of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) which act as intermediaries, assisting poor people with every aspect of their lives. In many cases, it is no longer clear what agenda is actually being pursued by these numerous NGOs, nor precisely who they are fighting for. Increasingly, the process of balancing divergent interests which is proper to the normal operations of civil society has been functionalized and implemented in a manipulative manner, with private investors or even the state itself founding NGOs in order to pursue narrow objectives, for example the expulsion of slum dwellers from their homes in order to acquire lucrative surfaces for development. Mike Davis refers to this process as "NGO liberalism" (p. 70 ff.).
At the same time, the democratic process functions well in India, for slum-dwellers make good use of their right to vote. For this reason, they are a political force to be reckoned with; nonetheless, so-called "vote bank politics" (meaning the unanimous voting of large blocs), does counteract the effects of such assertions of specific interests, and moreover regularly distorts the complexity of the local political reality. "The people who are 'resisting' may not even see themselves as resisting" claim Solomon Benjamin and Bhuvaneswari Raman, who argue in their contribution for an offensive "urbanism of occupation" and for a "politics of stealth" (p. 97 f.). Unequivocal judgments would seem to be inadequate; for virtually any statement, it appears, it would be possible to find assertions of the contrary position: NGOs are now said to be advocates of the poor, now their manipulators; slum dwellers as either marginalized, or are instead small entrepreneurs, potential voters and developers (CRIT, p. 84 f.). Government administrators are regarded as incompetent and inefficient, or else as the safeguards of collective interests. In response to the premise that increasingly, planners operate in a climate of uncertainty, both concerning basic principles as well as vis à vis their working partners, we find the subversive practices described by Benjamin and Raman as fluid strategies of appropriation which ensure the functioning of the organism as a whole. Contrary to Western notions, the occupation of public spaces is not merely the consequence of the prevailing understanding of use and ownership, and is not simply attributable to a general lack of space. This form of appropriation does more than

contribute chaotic or occasionally picturesque forms of liveliness to the Indian city, but instead also produces a necessary tolerance.

The Paradox of Indian Urbanization

Given the overstrained and to some extent dysfunctional infrastructure of India's metropolises, the system ought to have collapsed long ago. The fact that it continues to function at all is due, among other factors, to the individual initiatives of residents in many Indian cities, especially in the slums, who have developed their own systems for providing life's necessities. Despite all of their drawbacks, these do function astonishingly well. Examples are the system operated by Dabba Wallas, which daily delivers many hundreds of thousands of food rations to urban inhabitants; Mumbai's informal recycling system; and the unofficial sewerage pipelines found in the slums. In his article, Martin Fuchs offers a striking account of the social networks and mechanisms of self-government operating in Dharavi, Mumbai's largest slum (p. 77).

Assuming that urbanization continues apace, how will the state come to terms with the tasks facing it in the future? For presently, with an urbanization index of 30% (and in this regard, the Indian megacities are deceptive regarding the overall picture), India is far behind worldwide developments, which have recently overtaken the 50% mark. The fact that just a few metropolises are forced to bear the burden of urban development for the country as a whole constitutes the "paradox of Indian urbanization" (Ravi Ahuja, p. 38 ff.). This unequal growth may further exacerbate existing problems. Can civil society alone overcome them? Which existing mechanisms of planning, administration and the balancing of interests are capable of meeting these challenges? The conference Urban Age India in Mumbai in November 2007 will attempt to deal with the central question of how the world's largest democracy can to come to terms with continuing urbanization and dynamic economic development. Urban Age is a series of conferences organized by the Alfred Herrhausen Society in collaboration with the "Cities Programme" of the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) in order to generate discussions of the implications of global urban development among all of the responsible parties from the spheres of politics, planning, economics and civil society. Support from the Alfred Herrhausen Society has made possible wide-ranging research and the publication of archplus 185. Our special thanks to Wolfgang Nowak (Managing Director) and to Ute Weiland, as well as to Jessica Barthel and Priya Shankar. For collaboration on the contents, thanks to the Urban Age Team of the LSE, in particular Ricky Burdett, Philipp Rode and Pamela Puchalski.

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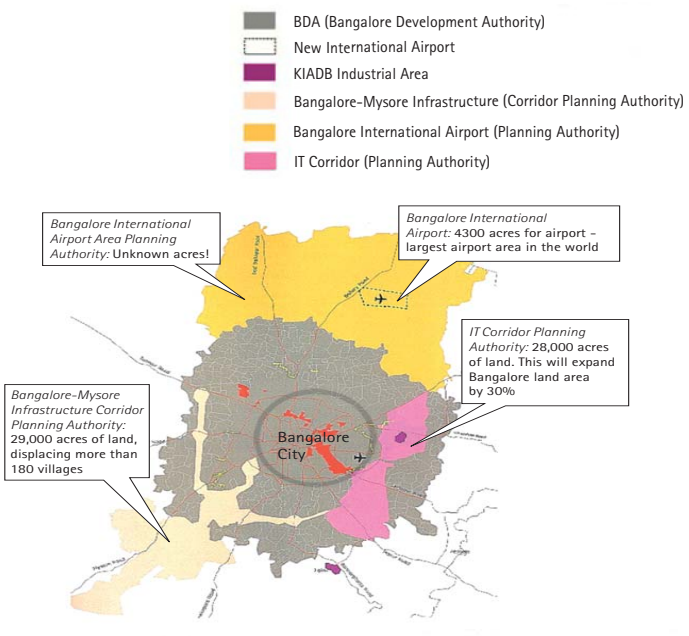

above: Mega-Projects for Bangalore, commented on by Solomon Benjamin and Bhuvaneswari Raman, 2007
Images: Solomon Benjamin

A street view of Juhu Beach, an up-market Bombay area, shows how spaces are occupied by traders and dwellers.

Urbanism of Occupation

Solomon Benjamin, Bhuvaneswari Raman

Reading a city through its everyday politics shows the fluidity of power relations in urban territories. A lot of urban research, especially in the social sciences, emphasizes the impacts (adverse or otherwise) of mega-projects such as the ongoing programs in India for creating Special Economic Zones. These views obscure the actual contestations that go on in cities by assuming hard, and ever expanding boundaries of international capitalism. Thus, those people left out of global capitalist processes are seen as marginalized victims and their politics are reduced to a survival strategy which, with time, will be taken over. Such a view of marginality disregards an essence of cities, where terrain constitutes complex social and cultural embeddings in land and economy. We propose a different view – a conception of an urbanism of occupation. Of course, power is centralized with big businesses and the state, but it is not hermetically sealed: There are crevices, which make the workings of power and its contestations much more fluid and unpredictable in the way these play out in various places. City terrain is radically shaped through unplanned growth, encroachments and mixed land use, interfering with the possibilities of the grand plan. This fragility of the map is an intense nightmare to the planner – both for urban designed cities intended to globalize, but also to the progressive activists' rationalistic master plan designed to equalize.

Assumptions of the Mega City

The mega project map of Bangalore! And this could be any Indian metro city. It is the delight of the neo-liberals seeing economic growth, the investment opportunities in the real estate, arising from India's liberalization. Examples of the cities' various Mega projects are the IT corridor to the South East, the Bangalore–Mysore Expressway project to its West, laced around New Townships to de-congest and arrest it's growth, and to the North, a huge expanse of its' International Airport, set in a yet even bigger planning territory (see plan above). For the neo-liberal globalist, the mega set in both the plan as the map is, of course, a reflection of economic development and in it a huge market is to be tapped. The progressive activist, on the other hand, still believes in the grand plan, to 'balance growth and organize development' thus making globalization 'more inclusive'. The points that activist circles make are technically accurate: Huge territories are acquired by the state and allocations are made to big business, enormous public resources are placed at the beck and call of India's corporate elite, and these acquisitions and allocations to corporate are enforced with harsh measures via violent evictions and demolitions to make way for an urban designed future of malls and IT complexes. A closer inspection however, shows how such a reading inflates it into a 'Ghost', and misses out the day to day reality.

Nightmares that disrupt the narrative of Globalized Modernization and Resistance

What you see at closer inspection is the fragility of the map, and punchers in the plan – emerging from unplanned, seemingly messy environments. 'Property' is encroached upon in the forms of multiple tenures (e.g. tenants renting out to tenants) and claims that make centralized control and surplus extraction increasingly impossible. For the global neo-liberal, the above forms of urbanism are severely disrupting. It disrupts the flow of capital, a disjuncture in this informational age that forms beyond a technical fix. For the progressive activist it disrupts another dream: the dream of mass resistance, a very specific agenda of civil society and social movements. Large developers and financial institutions do very quickly realize the power of this incremental subversive urbanism and press policy experts to use state power via eminent domain, digitization of land rights, to re-occupy space.

What are the Punctures of the Map?

About 80% of city terrain is being settled over time and not shaped according to a masterplan. Planners, senior government officials and global financiers all see this as slums. But in many of these settlements, the incremental development and diverse tenure regimes allow for an economy built around inter-connected small scale home based factories – a networked urban economy. This view of cities is hardly new – seen by researchers like Madhu Sarin in her study on Chandigarh as the failure of the Plan. But in this frame, these 'occupations' were a pre-modern act – one that was 'marginal', and by marginalized groups. A different reading shows that the bulk of economic value addition and almost all of employment comes from such economy-urbanism. But more important, the seemingly messy land tenures and lack of planning actually form the basis to valorize land in radical ways to re-constitute property – at the cost of large capital. Look at a typical streetscape in Bombay's up-market Juhu area (image left). This seems typical of an (exotic?) 'Third world city'. However, a closer examination shows the multiple tenures that re-configure property in this highly valued real estate. Some as below are temporal as the Christmas stand, funded by the local church ward, others built by existing occupants. As such urbanisms thrives, one can hardly ever locate the 'original property' – instead what we have are multiple and porous legalities. Think of Walter Benjamin's essays on Naples in Reflections – and if you look close enough, standing patiently to peep inside the Christmas stand, on the artifacts surrounding baby Jesus, or the day to day consumerism in the street shops – you will discover how capital itself is occupied. Memories of Benjamin's descriptions of Parisian arcades arise – their reflective glamour, set now in a sharper tropical light.

Modernities Unlimited:

On Architecture and Ambivalence in India

Jyoti Hosagrahar

By all accounts, India is racing ahead on a path to modernization and development. And the cities, as the engines of development, are at the forefront of modernity and globalization. Has Indian architecture and urbanism arrived at the state of being 'modern' or is it as yet becoming? Such a question assumes a universal understanding of what is 'modern' and its precise and identifiable features. There can be no discussion of modernity or modern architecture in India without reference to the experiences and interpretations of modernity in Western Europe and North America: therein lies the rub.

Some see the glass and steel skyscrapers of the financial centers, the Special Economic Zones (SEZ) for multinational corporations, exuberant shopping malls, and vast gated communities, as signs of a global modernity. Outside these forms that conjure up images of particular modernisms of Europe and North America, is an array of 'transitional' spaces that are as yet 'modernizing.' An urbanism rife with problems and emblematic of poverty: haphazard growth, inadequate infrastructure, and squalid squatter settlements. From another perspective, Indian cityscapes with their lively bazaars, traditional neighborhoods, historic cities, and living heritage, are the quintessentially exotic 'non-West.' Seemingly isolated from the global flows of technology and information, they are celebrated as symbols of place, culture, and locality even as many complain of their being sullied by 'modern' influences.

Architecture and urbanism in India unsettles the calmness of accepted categorization of architecture (and societies) into 'modern' and 'traditional,' 'Western' and 'non-Western.' How does one make sense of the fragmented and paradoxical built environment? How do we understand its ambivalent modernity? Is the fragmentation a sign of the 'failure' of modernity or the disintegration of tradition? Incomplete and partial in all its aspects, are these vestiges of community and custom, place and tradition, history and spontaneity as yet transitional, on their way to becoming fully modern or are they the failures of modernity and bastardizations of traditions? Taking the 'failures' of Indian architecture and urbanism as a starting point: 'failure' to become 'modern' in European terms and its 'failure' to remain true to its inherited forms, I look into some of the ways that history, place, and locality have engaged with modernity and globalization. This raises the question of what defines 'modern' and 'traditional' in the built environment and who arbitrates their identity.

Enlightenment thinkers in Western Europe brought into focus what Jürgen Habermaas has called, the 'project of modernity.' Cornerstones of the modernist enterprise included the scientific domination of nature, rational modes of thinking, and the organization of society and space that together were to serve as vehicles for achieving liberation from myth, superstition, and religion. Fundamental to the emergence of modernity as a global project was Western Europe's colonization of Asia and Africa. European rulers assumed the prerogative to be 'modern': to define its meaning and assert its forms. The definition was based on difference: to be 'modern' was to be 'not traditional.' In this binary scheme of being 'modern' and 'traditional,' those that were not entirely one or the other were declared to be 'modernizing' towards a pre-determined end. Once those in power had declared themselves the only legitimate moderns, those 'others' they labeled 'traditional' could only aspire, seek, adopt, or mimic modern forms in the dominant mould. However, they never complete the transition to become 'modern' like the original.

I use the term indigenous modernities to denote the paradoxical features of modernities rooted in their particular conditions and located outside the dominant discourse of a universal paradigm centered on an imagined ideal of the 'West.' As a seemingly coherent 'traditional' built environment ruptures, indigenous modernities are expressed in the irregular, the uneven, and the unexpected. In the actualization of universal agendas in a particular place, indigenous modernities negotiate the uniqueness of a region and its history with the 'universals' of science, reason, and liberation. In using the term 'indigenous' the emphasis is on context and locality, the regional interpretations and forms of modernity. Against the rigid opposition and monolithic identities of 'traditional' and 'modern,' 'West' and 'non-West,' the concept of indigenous modernities celebrates their simultaneity and engagement. Rather, the categories infiltrate each other so that neither form is completely one or the other. Acknowledging simultaneity allows an examination of their interaction rather than expecting a simplistic and complete replacement of one well-defined form by another. The spatial experiences of indigenous modernities are marked by the presence of formal contradictions and the absence of coherence where both 'modern' and 'traditional' lack completeness.

Two Vignettes

Gurgaon

In the last decade, Gurgaon, a mega-corporate park, and home to DLF City, one of Asia's largest private townships, has emerged as a significant center of global transaction. A world of glittering malls, vast, gated enclosures of multistory blocks of luxury apartments, and glossy corporate offices, Gurgaon epitomizes, for many observers, symbols of modernity in India. The spaces, for these observers, are largely designed, supported, and inhabited by those identifying with the forms modernity adopted and promoted by corporate powers in Europe and North America to resemble particular modernities in the distant metropoles.

Gurgaon's apartment complexes, office parks, shopping malls, schools, hospitals, and golf courses are all bounded and secured, and distinct from its locality. Filling the interstices, between such worlds are the fluid, flexible, and spontaneous landscapes of the villagers who surround Gurgaon. Urban villages with entirely different land use and ownership patterns are

hemmed in by new developments that have taken over their agricultural lands. Vegetable sellers and vendors of motley items (stuffed toys, mosquito repellant devices, magazines and such like) congregate at bus stops and intersections, providing a "public realm", albeit one that reflects a different modernity than the shopping malls.

Images of Gurgaon render irrelevant locality and tradition. However an historical perspective on the development of DLF City reveals a complex engagement with Gurgaon's particular institutional and social structures in the making of the global 'modern' landscape. The passing of the Delhi Development Act in 1957, for instance, made development of land in Delhi a state monopoly and served to inhibit land speculation and private development. K. P. Singh of Delhi Land and Finance (DLF), a real estate company, forced out of business in Delhi, began to buy land in Gurgaon in Haryana State at a time when it was still largely agricultural.

Land ownership and titles were complicated by the traditional patriarchal patterns of family and inheritance so that farms of even a few acres had multiple owners who needed to reach consensus before sale. Similarly, the absence of 'modern' fiscal instruments to provide loans for real estate development, Singh had to rely on the customary mechanisms of goodwill and social capital had to obtain personal loans. In the end, DLF and other private developers took up large scale construction with few guidelines and controls for development leaving much of the planning to market-forces.

Srirangapatna

Srirangapatna is a small town, between Bangalore and Mysore over 1000 years old, continuously inhabited, and rich with layers of history. Established as a temple town in the 9th century, over the centuries it became a fortified sovereign capital and then a garrison town for the British in the nineteenth century. In the dramatic cultural upheaval under the British in the nineteenth century, Srirangapatna became a center neither for trade, nor industry, nor for administration, but instead, fell into oblivion.

Today, the winding roads, closely lined with houses, many over a hundred years old, give the impression of a place that modernity forgot. The spatial organization of the city by religion and caste is still evident in some places with the oldest neighborhoods of Brahmin priests around the main temple. Stone paved and dirt streets with single and double storied houses; white washed adobe walls, roofs made of hand-made terracotta tiles, carved wooden pillars and brackets all add to the appearance of changeless tradition. For modernist observers seeking forms resembling European modernity, Srirangapatna epitomizes an exotic cultural landscape in contrast to the visions of global modernity of Gurgaon.

Yet, signs of cultural upheaval break out of the perfect picture: wireless towers, bridges, flat-roofed concrete buildings, and mushrooming luxury resorts by the river banks. A municipality aspires to rationalize management and provides piped water supply. With the splintering of large joint families into nuclear ones, Krishna Prasad's house ancestral home has been subdivided among the inheritors until all he owns is a two roomed unit with a loft. Traditional occupations have been made irrelevant, agricultural work is supplemented by white collar jobs in Mandya or Mysore or even Bangalore, and the traditional joint families have given way to nuclear families.

Purushottama's family circumvented building restrictions to renovate their ancestral house. They chose concrete flat roofs against tile because they thought it reflected higher status as did bright colors and carved embellishments. Resort hotels that have claimed the edges of the river to place a price on views of coconut groves and the sacred Kaveri, negotiate historic public ghats (steps and platforms going into the water) where people and visitors continue to bathe and worship.

Reading Ambivalent Modernities

Two landscapes, one seemingly global and 'modern' and the other changelessly traditional and local, neither are completely one or the other. The emergent built forms, their use and meanings, though not identical either to an idealized European model or imaginary, authentic Indian one, were both born out of a cultural condition of modernity. While one is a self-conscious effort to create identifiable images of a universal modernism located in the 'West,' in the other, customary spatial practices negotiated the cultural turmoil of modernity. In the altered context familiar forms acquire new uses and meanings and strange elements were incorporated into familiar arrangements.

As culturally constructed oppositions, 'modern' and 'traditional' are not inherent features of a built form. From this perspective, all modernities are indigenous and all its expressions equally valid. Acknowledging 'other' modernities is also to observe the ways that dominant concepts from the metropole, proclaimed to be universal and liberating, translate into local spatial practices; and the ways that particular forms, places, and communities engage with a changing cultural milieu to adapt and also recreate themselves. Recognizing the plurality of modernities legitimizes its many interpretations. We would then cease to aspire for and lament over an imagined universalism or romanticize about a built environment imagined and fixed as 'traditional.' Unable to completely reject one or surrender fully to the other, they melded into internally divided indigenous modernities.

Evident also is the complex interplay between the deliberate reordering of space, and of social, political, and economic forms of organization (based on Western European forms and experiences), and modernity as the tumultuous cultural condition brought about by the rupture with history. Buildings and cities became the sites for both the disintegration of inherited traditions and for building anew: imagined and lived, planned and perceived as a theater for the enactment of a modernity particular to its context.

What makes Indian architecture and urbanism 'modern' are not the global technologies of spatial planning and design; nor is the built form cast in myth and rigid traditions awaiting modernization. In contrast to such linear narratives, I propose that the anxieties of displacement and the fragmentation of experience in urban India, its ambivalent modernity, is a reflection of countless and unlimited interpretations of its indigenous modernities. If the course of modernity is a constant cycle of destruction and creation and tradition too, is subject to reason, adaptation, and change, then the historical route of the one is intimately linked to that of the other. The unsettling concept of indigenous modernity offers the possibility of recovering a past for a modernity from which we might better understand the trajectory of its development in a postcolonial future - and better direct it.

Frothing Urbanism

Discussing Some Urban Conditions in Contemporary India

Rupali Gupte, Rahul Mehrotra, Prasad Shetty

Urban Landscapes in India are today emerging as a set of disparate conditions spreading across the country irrespective of city boundaries. These conditions, which form the basis of Contemporary Indian Urbanism, seem like numerous bubbles frothing in new emergent patterns, transcending conventional notions of city and metropolitan areas. They are emerging all over the country – within the city, outside it, in the countryside, in deserts, deltas, forests, hills, and every other unforeseeable location. They appear in various scales, intensities and forms – as large road and rehabilitation projects, as temporary spaces formed during their construction, as residues created by those resisting the development process, as large townships and special economic zones, as large and small mall spaces packed with aspirations and desires, as small farmhouses outside city limits, or as smaller enterprises within miniscule houses in a slum. These convoluted formations, rearrangements and erasures form bizarre new patterns of work, living and leisure create even more bizarre metropolitan psychologies. They operate with multiple logics involving large number of actors in complex arrangements – for example it is now easy to find traditionally rival groups like government agencies and NGOs concerned with the urban poor working in partnership with each other. Trying to grasp the emergent urbanism in contemporary India is like trying to grasp the froth, which slides between the fingers as you tighten your fist around it.

The metaphor of "froth" is useful and seems apt to discuss the architecture of this Urbanism. The overall form of the froth is deceptive – it changes constantly without any seemingly predictable pattern. The macro view of this froth makes evident its dynamic nature. While this view is capable of discussing geographical and territorial issues, it remains inadequate to discuss any thing else. Theoretical attempts to force a structured pattern into this form of urbanism ends up in formulating conspiracies of global capital and squabbles over grand plots of globalisation, new imperialism etc.

On the other hand, a fine-grained scrutiny reveals that the froth is composed of smaller cellular bubbles, which become the very basis for the formulation and existence of the froth! While each bubble has its own system and reality - it also shares common walls with other bubbles indicating an overall correlation - changes in any of the bubbles affects other bubbles. The bubbles simultaneously have autonomy as well as behave in a collective manner. For example if we look at a condition of a shopping mall - which could be considered as an autonomous bubble - it is able to manufacture its own reality of high consumption, which brings with it multiple aspirations, desires, freedoms and identity formations not only for consumers directly but often also for passive observers in different ways as borrowed pleasures. Simultaneously the mall causes innumerable changes around it: gentrification of land, changes in real estate values, changes in economic networks etc.

Thousands of bubbles burst and thousands get created every moment in the fizz of froth. This bizarre bursting and creation of new bubbles creates absurd momentary realities sometimes seemingly unconnected. Their life spans are so short that it is impossible to step back and examine them. Newer realities emerge with increasing frequency.

The metaphor of froth helps bring about the complexities and messiness of this urbanism, which have many shades and many contradictions – where formal agencies use highly informal methods, farmers make large profits, experts become agents, state uses informal tactics, civil society organisations segregate communities, rival groups form newer coalitions, the rich fight corruption, religious organisations start health movements, public spaces become private and private spaces become public, NGOs join hands with the government and the world bank, and communities are not innocent. The metaphor of froth also illustrates the dynamic character of the urbanism, its formlessness, its intensities, its absurdities and its ability to create several realities, which inflict an overdose of stimulus on urban dwellers, putting them in a constant state of awe, insecurity and anxiety.

Singular ways of seeing the froth fall short because of the complexities in its structure - the frothing urban realities cannot be seen through a macro view because of its distance; and is only perceived partially with fine-grained scrutiny because of the rapidity of the change. Perhaps multiple ways need to be employed to see this urbanism, which would produce multiple perspectives – all valid.

Bubbles of Glitz and Desire

Most prominent in the urban froth are the bubbles of glitz and desire – formed out of wealth of extraordinary proportions. They seem to be appearing in unprecedented scales and speeds, spreading across the city – in places of old industries, over older neighbourhoods, over protected environmental zones, over slums; and outside the city – on untouched farmlands, on reserved forest zones, on barren lands, over old villages and all other kinds of hinterlands. We refer here to the malls, call centres, gated townships, special economic zones, international schools and hospitals, service apartments, farm houses etc. that allude to new urban desires through their glitz. Discussions on these bubbles undertake a critique that views them as a function of high consumption and volatile global capital. Concepts like "Privatopias" (creation of gated elite communities or private utopias) have become the benchmark representations of these bubbles. In India, the changes in the structure and nature of the economy of the city since the adoption of liberalised policies in the early 90s have been the trigger for the development of these landscapes.

While planning cities in the past, the state took the initiative and ideas of equity and master planning were the primary drivers of the decision making process. Today with the public sector virtually having devolved its responsibilities to private enterprise, ideas of efficiency and quality services are the prevalent drivers in city planning process. The former agenda of the state of creating equal opportunities and services seem to have shifted towards responding to a new class of professionals who demand high services and are ready to pay for it. The instances of utopias sought in Gurgaon and Ambi-Valley with high end luxury services through Public Private Partnerships, or the cleanliness drive of Bangalore through action plans, and the case of e-governance in Hyderabad all respond to the aspirations of this new breed of young professionals who live through easy loans as against their earlier counterparts who were dependent on provident funds and saving schemes to invest in their physical habitat. Clearly the unit of concern has shifted from the urban poor to the young urban professional. Architecture is seen as a market product luring the voracious aspirations of the new middle class that has emerged after the liberalisation and globalisation of the economy.

This liberal economy has also seen another flow manifest itself on the physical landscape – the imagination that the super rich and Indian Diaspora. Government polices since the 1990s aimed at luring the superrich and the Diaspora – these included allowing foreign direct investments in real estate and building of large townships outside cities. This spurred building of townships offering luxury lifestyles. Equipped with the most expensive facilities these have been advertised as examples for good living. The development of the Sea Woods NRI Complex in New Bombay and Sahara Ambi Valley Township are perhaps the best examples to describe these developments. While these are elaborately advertised all over the world, entry to them is highly restricted for any average Indian as they are well guarded with the most advanced security and surveillance systems. Ironically this flow brings with it conservatism unlike the young professional. Here along with high-end consumer lifestyles with flashy aluminium / glass clad shopping malls and multiplexes, this imagination is submerged in a variety of traditional Indian superstitions and beliefs. Grand film-star weddings, which meticulously observe Indian rituals; matrimonial advertisements that seek brides with 'family values'; and super luxurious penthouses built using the wisdom of the ancient Vastu Shastra are common occurrences. An increasing demand for such ancient techniques of in the designing of buildings and interiors is a clear indication towards the resurfacing of the ancient. In fact, the resurfacing of the past is a growing phenomenon with buildings being built by practitioners, who claim ability to decipher ancient texts and scriptures. Besides religion-driven fundamentalism, the quest for greater economic mobility has triggered an enormous interest in ancient treatise with the industrialist and business community in India seeking refuge in the security of ancient props – where pre-industrial, even primitive images are confidently labelled as being integral to the regional identity. These trends are clearly symbolic of the collision course religious chauvinism has taken with the integrative mechanisms of globalisation; a situation in which communities are concerned about the threat to their identities as well as their autonomy and freedom to dissent.

The New Crusaders

In contrast to the activists' groups of the 70s and 80s, which fought for the rights of the labour and the urban poor, the new civil society groups are groups of professionals, resident communities, industrialists and retired bureaucrats fiercely advocating environmental protection and good governance. Today, when one interacts with an NGO, it is not clear whether this body is an NGO, or the Government, or a corporate, or an academy, or the International Development Agency – there seems to be a grand coalition that is slowly emerging amongst the organisations of the civil society. This new organisation today works exactly like a private agency – bids for projects, hires professionals with corporate salaries, delivers products and talks the development language – and does all this with the declared intention of public good. Along with this new avatar of the NGO, there are numerous new organisations that are established everyday. They specialise in physically upgrading neighbourhoods that often results in the displacement of the poor; gating public spaces; filing Public Interest Litigations against hawker encroachments, destruction of mangroves, destruction of chimneys in the old industrial lands, etc. Civil society seems to have found watchdogs in the militancy of these new organisations. Their pressures have been so effective that the government has nominated such groups as consultants for several projects in the city. They seem to have come from nowhere – not stakeholders, not elected representatives, nor experts on matters: but their efforts are focused sharply on public good!

A newly developed consciousness for the environment among this emergent form of civil society

organizations has created reductionist positions such as fighting for the rights of leopards (that exist in the national parks now surrounded and encroached on by the city) or saving mangroves. It is increasingly clear that the consciousness for eco-living is leveraged from concepts of cleanliness, good living, a crime-free environment, healthy food etc. that are primarily marketing techniques of the global economy and are powerful processes that result in urban inequity and resource appropriations. The case of 3 villages of Vajreshwari, Akloli and Ganeshpuri on the outskirts of Mumbai, which are famous for the hot water springs and ancient temples illustrate this shift. Recent allegations by temple trusts in the area suggest that uneducated villagers trying to take advantage of the rising number of tourists, were hampering the sensitive environment around. The government took note and started making efforts to protect the environment. While the area has undergone immense change over several centuries, it is only now that the consciousness of environment seems to surface. This consciousness seems to be propelled by the powerful temple trusts that see the development of the place into a spirituality centre with luxurious tourism products like nature parks, meditation centres, hot spring spas, etc. This is in sharp contrast to the notion of a traditional pilgrim place with busy streets, occasional fairs and a sense of temporality that allows the space to adapt and readapt the dynamic nature of worship in these traditions.

The consciousness of governance has produced several middle class movements and have manifested in drives that flatten the complexities in the way the city is inhabited. The cleanliness drives invariably displace people who are hidden in the ambiguity of the messy urban conditions The aggressive intolerance of the informal/illegal/ambiguous in this consciousness is best presented in films like 'Aniyan', where intolerance of messy urban systems leads to a crusader carrying out a movement to clean up the system or in 'Sivaji', where an NRI (Non Resident Indian) entrepreneur fights corruption in the government and sets up an alternative system of service delivery. Such processes of sanitization would become a determining factor in the aesthetics of the city. They could potentially heighten the polarized adjacencies that already exist in most urban centres thus perhaps visually and metaphorically fracturing them to an even greater extent.

But the activities of the new civil society groups are not without contradictions. Recently in Juhu a public park was taken over by an elite foundation for maintenance, which took measures for a proper, legal and disciplined use of the garden. But just outside the gate of the park, a hawker set up his shop selling exotic soups, juices and salads. This tactical measure to shift from selling popular junk food towards selling healthy food made him perfectly acceptable amongst the otherwise intolerant, legitimacy-seeking, health conscious people who came to the park.

The Interstitial Urbanism

In Mumbai itself, 60% of the population does not have access to formal housing. They live in the interstitial spaces - road edges, drainage channels, railway edges, on no development zones, and along pavements. New means of negotiating everyday life are innovated - people live in pipes, under plastic sheets or in houses with walls made of empty drums. Their workplaces could be under staircases, in cabinets, over public toilets; and entire production units could be in slums generally in 'environmentally sensitive' zones. The Darukhana, a ship breaking yard in the Bombay's eastern waterfront, houses a large informal economy that feeds off ship breaking, an activity deemed hazardous both environmentally and for human engagement. Workers, with a great threat to their own lives, engage in dismantling old ships. The parts of the ship obtained through this process are then sold in a large marketplace adjacent to this yard, thus meeting the city's requirements of tools and scrap metal.

Leisure for this largely migrant group that works in the interstitials could take place in the city's multitudinous dance bars, brothels or class B movie theatres or video parlours. Its shopping needs are met by roadside hawkers that sell cheap commodities (often imported from China), inexpensive but delicious food, garments (often dexterously copied from the world's most renowned and expensive brands) or pirated music CDs.

But the interstitial operators cannot be understood as synonymous with the poor. There are entrepreneurs who earn substantially by running small enterprises. These often perform more than one function e.g. a pan (beetle leaf) shop often doubles as a front office for informal saving systems or even real estate agencies. There also are, Cable-TV operators, who work from slums to tap international transitions as well as broadcast films that are otherwise banned by the moral judiciary. Moreover, a whole lot of other entrepreneurs like jewellers, food manufacturers, readymade garment makers, embroidery makers, courier services etc use the interstitials to decrease that marginal cost which allows them to compete better. Leaders of the minority communities in the city also talks about how often interstitial living provides security to otherwise threatened communities. They argue that even rich Muslim families prefer to live in the mess of the slum and dilapidated buildings rather than shifting to clean and sound environments only because of the safety that is provided in a Muslim slum – the interstitial ghetto!

Mind Space

In Malad, a northern suburb of Mumbai, a mega township came up recently. This place formed the outskirts of the city until the mid 80s and was characterised by large agricultural lands with a creek along the western side. In the City Development Plan, the land along the creek, a sort of no mans land, was reserved for a garbage dump yard. In early 1999, the garbage dumping activity was stopped as residents of a housing colony built in the 1970s at the periphery of this land had filed pubic interest litigation over the fowl smell of the dump yard. Later that year, the whole edge of the creek was cordoned off and a hoarding came up along the fence stating ‚Mind Space'. The ambiguity of the advertisement spurred a series of speculations. No

one knew what Mind Space was. Slowly clues about it started appearing on some more hoardings – it was a township being developed by one of the biggest developers in the country. Soon, outside the cordoned-off space, agricultural fields were hurriedly bought by small developers who mobilised money from large networks of investors, real-estate agents and the mafia. The price of land hit the roof overnight. For the farming communities it was an opportunity to strike gold. Most of these agricultural lands started getting developed as housing colonies. A year later, one of the fenced sections along an arterial road was opened – the smelly edge of the garbage dumping ground was now a brand new mall with three super stores, several small boutiques and a five-theatre multiplex. Just behind the mall was a call centre. As soon as the fence opened, real estate values all around the area spiralled further. People responded to this with confusion – some sold their houses and retired to another quieter town after sending their children to study abroad, some started bargaining with developers to raise the value of their properties and others took loans to buy property in other areas with lower prices with an expectation that there will be an appreciation later.

In retrospect the strategy in Mind Space has become evident. The first sets of advertisements were put up to bring about anxiety amongst potential investors. Once this was done the real estate consultants took over. Rumours were floated in high society parties about large amounts of real estate already being sold. The speculative environment created a large demand for real estate in the project –most of the real estate was either sold or leased even before the foundation was laid. All was not left to speculation – detailed plan was successfully executed over 20 years. The developers had started assembling powers of attorney for the land holdings from private owners since the development plan was made. In the development plan two arterial roads were proposed that would connect the place with the rest of the city and the airport. Further more, what emerged was that the developers themselves had formed the residents association of the housing colony to file the Public Interest Litigation about the foul smell. The Mind Space illustrates a complete inversion of the notion that it is the poor, who use tactical means to inhabit space in the city.

Over the past 7 years, some more sections of the fenced area were opened – there were new call centres, a new shopping mall, large number of residential complexes, wide roads, clubs, gardens etc. A small part of the garbage hill was kept intact and a garden was developed over it. The whole area is under surveillance of private security guards and cameras. The space around the Mind Space complex has also changed. Predominantly developed as residential complexes, these places also have absurd combinations of enterprises – interior designers combined with stock-brokering agents, travel agent with courier and security services, money transferring agencies with an employment bureau or a contract-labour agency, etc. There are also street level informal enterprises, providing cheap food for people who cannot afford food in the malls. In many ways they become a public private-space – hoards of people visit the malls everyday and the mall promises 'a million experiences'. These have become performative sites where people live their aspirations by just floating around in these spaces. These become sites of borrowed pleasures for those who cannot buy the goodies they sell. These performative acts sometimes help to muddle class structures so firmly etched out by abilities of people to have and not.

Mega Projects

The Mega Projects are born out of a reform-based perspective that views inadequate infrastructure as the largest impediment to the economic growth. India's largest current Mega project is its National Highways Development project, covering an area of 13,146 km across the country and thereby producing several types of urban conditions along it – largely in the form of the Special Economic Zones. Similarly various states have embarked on Mega Infrastructure drives. A number of cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Hyderabad and Bangalore are improving their transportation infrastructures. Different models of financing and maintaining are experimented with. There is a National Urban Renewal Mission that provides large-scale finance for such mega projects. Cites are expected to compete on the basis of their reforms implemented to access such finances. Foreign Direct Investment is now permitted in townships, housing, industrial parks, hotels and tourism, infrastructure development, hospitals, resorts, commercial premises, educational institutions, recreational facilities and Special Economic Zones.

While the government usually uses its bulldozer Land-Acquisition Act (which allows the government to acquire any privately owned land with meagre compensation and without negotiation) to get lands for these mega projects, there are also instances of such powers being used to acquire lands for private companies to develop Special Economic Zones. Such instances have however reduced after the infamous Nandigram Crises in West Bengal where a Communist Government faced a violent uprising against its attempts at acquiring lands for setting up special economic zones. However, now we see newer tactics being used by private companies to get lands where use of muscle and money power is at its peak. On the other hand, some farmers have also sensed an opportunity for a good bargain.

Landscapes of Rehabilitations

The Landscapes of rehabilitation typically encompass two groups - slum dwellers and the people displaced by mega projects. High land prices become the raison d'etre of these projects. Here, private developers are encouraged to build houses for the poor on the slum site in return for additional incentive development rights, which can be utilised on the same site or sold in the free market. As land remains scarce, regulations on open-spaces, setbacks, fire protection, etc are relaxed for these sites to maximise the development potential of the land. A slum redevelopment site generally has a rehabilitation building where every care is taken to reduce the costs of construction and maxi-

mise the potential of land by packing the 20m2 houses of slum dwellers in very high densities. Next to such rehabilitation buildings raise the buildings that are developed for selling real estate in the open market – the results of the incentive development rights. These buildings stand in complete contrast to the rehabilitation buildings with elaborate services and generous finishes. There are however several dimensions to such rehabilitation. There are instances were slum communities have formed groups and undertaken self-development, where they have kept the profits and have also been able to get good houses. In other cases, the slum dwellers have bargained a good value for their dwellings and have voluntarily shifted to other accommodations. There are also small developers who have spent large amounts of borrowed money in bribing the slumlords and government officials and have got stuck because some NGOs started mobilising people against the builder.

At a different scale, the mega projects in the city (flyovers, expansion of rakes for the transportations system etc.) have spawned a series of displacements that require rehabilitation. Intrinsically linked to the mega projects, the rehabilitation projects seem to be the flip side of the same coin! In Mumbai, the government is in the process of constructing more than 50,000 houses (over the past 5 years) to relocate and rehabilitate slum dwellers that are displaced by the mega road projects. Here, private developers are involved in building 20m2 tenements in return of transferable development rights, which could be used in other parts of the city. One finds these rehabilitation sites coming up on the outskirts of the city on lands of low value. The Developers are able to dispose this cheap land by using it for rehabilitation and at the same time claim its rights on other property with high land value. Similar to slum redevelopments, there is also a gross relaxation of bye-laws, making the unliveable conditions of the rehabilitated units perfectly legal - bars of 8 stories building are developed at 3m distances from each other. While light and ventilation conditions remain pathetic, high densities in these buildings are bound to overuse infrastructure resources. The most pressing problem though is the loss of livelihood. While the slums were active sites of entrepreneurship, satisfying multiple needs of livelihood, social well being and shelter due to the prevalence of strong networks, hybrid activities and a mix of classes; the new places are dormitory locations barely satisfying the shelter function. As it was difficult to shift people into such rehabilitation sites, the government appointed NGOs to negotiate with slum dwellers to facilitate the smooth relocations. The NGO today is a transformed agency that serves as the "middleman" for the state's mega projects that involve large-scale displacement of people. In one instance a slum was shifted out of the national park into a rehabilitation site – here, an unexpected coalition was formed between traditionally rival environmental groups, and an NGO who were brought together by a real estate developer and facilitated by a state policy. Thus the ironic link between the Mega project and the rehab project is extended in the pot pouri composition of the agencies that are involved. This creates an urban condition where the role of the state is finally totally reversed as the passive bystander that is a token in the equation.

Temporary Spectacles

Interestingly in the incredible urban condition of froth – the glue that seem to connect these bits of disparate urbanism are the temporary spectacles that appear and swell as bubbles and pop out of sight. These incredibly momentary spectacles in cities are enacted during its festivals and are celebratory moments; challenge the secular modernist leanings of the disciplines of architecture and planning. For ten days of the calendar year, during festivals like the Ganesh Puja (in Mumbai) or Durga Puja (in Calcultta), colourful pavilions dot the city – transforming it temporarily with overlays of religious symbols and paraphernalia. With different neighbourhoods competing over the grandiosity of their deities – the sizes of deities increasing and their attires getting more innovative from flower studded costumes to expensive silk attires complete with backdrops that depict themes from the nationalist to moral ones meant to educate children. Often these celebrations are accompanied by local singing competitions, theatre and the prayer recitals organised by the street association. On the final day of the respective festivals, with what constitutes a feat in traffic management, the deities are immersed in the sea. Here the spectacle disappears instantaneously! There are no permanent ways of encoding this spectacle for it is an enacted moment that easily slips through the interstitial space in the city's memory. Similarly, the Muharram procession, a one-day Muslim festival, where men donning black costumes flog themselves, becomes an enactment of trauma and mourning over the killing of prophet Mohammed's grandson in the public realm. Very often these temporary spectacles also become the loudest voices both auditory and visual through which the contest for urban space and resources is acted out. Here disparate imaginations play themselves out on the emergent landscape of the city. In these spectacles, class, location, mobility and aspirations are put on hold and a commonalty that transcends the physical becomes the predominant experience. These temporary spectacles perhaps are emerging as the most accurate representations of the dynamic condition of frothing urbanism.

The Invention of the Modern Indian Architect

A. G. Krishna Menon

Like the Indian nation, the contemporary Indian architect is a modern invention. In structure and form, both are products of colonialism. Consequently, both have struggled with their colonial legacy in shaping their postcolonial identity and purpose. While political analysts will agree that the nation has emerged as a complex, dynamically evolving entity, architectural critics confront a profession largely frozen in time.

Of course, the products of Indian architecture look different from the architectural products of the Raj, but under the veneer of modernity, the basic ideology of the profession remains unchanged. The invention of modern Indian architecture can well be recounted as the story of how architectural images were appropriated from other times and other cultures to meet contemporary exigencies. In sharp contrast to, say, politicians who must, perforce, respond (even if only opportunistically) to the changing needs of the polity, the modern Indian architect unfortunately continues to respond primarily to architectural images produced by celebrated international architects. Relying on the architectural norms and solutions of other cultural and economic contexts to serve local needs was a strategy established to meet the priorities of the colonial government. Not surprisingly, the uncritical perpetration of this strategy in postcolonial India has meant that the country's architects are unable to comprehend the specific nature of and challenges posed by contemporary Indian urbanism.

Architects in India regard buildings as self-evident artifacts whose physical form encapsulates the sum total of the design intent. The language used in communicating the idea of the building is that of its images. Utilitarian considerations reign: the programme provides the why and what to generate architectural design. This is contrary to contemporary theoretical discourse in the West, where buildings are often justified as non-architectural ideas derived from sources like literary theory, philosophy, computational algorithms and sculptural expression. India's is a profoundly practical architecture, one fixed by the specificity of the client's needs and grounded by budgetary concerns. In practical, rather than theoretical terms then, imported images of iconic buildings provide the contours of local architectural imagination and establish the conceptual boundaries within which architects operate.

These boundaries are not totally deterministic but, rather, quite flexible and porous. Indian architects have a wide range of images at their disposal and their choice among these influences the evolution of any architectural project. This choice reveals how architects negotiate the needs and desires of the client, the particular site and its context, the demands of the programme and the decisions and concessions made to address those demands and, finally, the physicality of the building (its image) and the space it inhabits. Imported architectural images constitute the core of a local architectural vocabulary and practice which is, regrettably, devoid of a theoretical substance of its own with which it could, in other circumstances, have engaged in a productive dialogue with these images. The etymology of this visual vocabulary, therefore, determines the nature of the architecture that is produced.

In recent times, on account of globalisation and the communication revolution, this vocabulary has enlarged, almost indiscriminately. The flood of celebrated architectural images inundating the imagination of the architect is supported by global business which has enabled easy access to common building materials and technologies, making buildings all over the world more similar. This similarity results in the loss of contextual references when exotic images are deployed to serve local purposes. In the last decade these decontextualised images have become the medium facilitating the spread of modernism and determining the characteristics of regional architectural identity in much of the Third World. Thus, cities like Shanghai, Manila, Jakarta, Kuala Lumpur and Mumbai, each attempting aggressively to assert a local, modernist regional identity, are increasingly constituted by the same kind of architecture. And increasingly, foreign architects are the agents facilitating this process.

The instinctive valorisation of the 'foreign' emerges as the deep structure of societal expectations. It creates a profound dislocation in the role of the local professional in society because the worth of the local architect is not only derogated by the value accorded to the contributions of foreign architects, but also, in their desperate attempt to "catch up", local architects too try to produce a kind of architecture with which the society at large is not familiar. The local public, whose tastes and expectations are also evolving eclectically, neither under-

stands the significance of the particular images guiding the architect's work, nor, being increasingly articulate and demanding, does it accept them. The modern architect, therefore, has low credibility in society. Of course, there are several other reasons for this unfortunate state of affairs, such as the postcolonial propensity to perpetuate the colonial style of decision-making, the dominance of the client/bureaucrat/developer in determining architectural matters and the routinely low fee structure assigned for carrying out public works. Together these factors create an environment that is not conducive to producing high quality architecture. In this article, however, I focus on the professional decision-by-default to develop an image-based architectural sensibility.

Locality versus Universality

At the time of India's Independence in 1947, Indian architects were conscious of the need for a 'national' identity. Their search for 'new' architecture pursued two avenues: the Revivalists sought alignment with a pre-colonial past, while the Modernists an alignment with the progressive image of the International Style. The strategies used by the Revivalists were, ironically, similar to those used earlier by colonial architects who had attempted to indigenise their designs by creating the so-called Indo-Sarcenic style. These architects had debated the relative suitability of various styles for their architecture: something expressive of Britain's role in India and something the 'natives' could relate to instead of being intimidated by. With necessary changes made on account of political Independence, the Revivalists used similar arguments to justify their works. The basic nature of their architecture, however, did not change and, except for the new rhetoric, Revivalist architects never questioned the ontological significance of the way they designed and built. Both the Indo-Sarcenic architects and the Revivalists plundered the store of iconic images from the past without the impediments of taste and understanding.

The Modernists were no better. Their icons were the buildings in the International Style then holding sway in the West. They too sought to infuse their buildings with a 'desirable' image without questioning the colonial roots of their architectural strategy or seeking to create a dynamic, locally grounded and contextually responsive architecture that could engage seriously with International Style without being overshadowed by it. To their way of thinking, International Style represented the only (and best) route to modernity and progress and they mimicked this style in order to demonstrate their 'progressive' understanding of architecture. Modern Indian identity, it should be noted, continued to be constructed using non-local icons. Such self-perpetrated dependence was reinforced by the decision, soon after Independence, to have Le Corbusier to design the north Indian city of Chandigarh. The heroic stature of Le Corbusier in the international architectural firmament ensured that he had a profound influence on nascent architectural developments in India. The works of Louis Kahn in the subcontinent in the 1960s must also be seen in this light.

In hindsight, it is clear that both the Revivalists and the Modernists re-established the hegemony of Western architectural epistemologies: the former sourced a 'native past' in the manner of the British architects working in colonial India, while the latter sourced a (presumed Western) 'future' by mimicking the iconic images of International Style. In tying indigenousness to an Indian past and modernity to a Westernised future, neither could truly problematise the condition of postcolonial locality and urbanism. Furthermore, in both cases, a reliance on architectural images substituted for the need to develop ideas to establish an autochthonous architectural tradition after Independence. Perhaps this may begin to explain why Indian architects have so far been unable to meet the spatial needs of society or produce a satisfactory quality of living environment. It must also be noted that many successful architects practicing in India today have had an important part of their education in the West and, thereby, experienced the power of the iconic images of Western architecture first-hand. They seldom attempted the more difficult task of emulating the technological transformation taking place in the West which was the basis of those images. For example, the evolution of modernism in Indian architecture created a schism between the building and the process of building: the culture of building as an integrated entity was unaffected. Such a schism is, in fact, contrary to the tenets of modernism. Even as newer generations of architects changed the architectural image, there was no thought for the development of construction processes, which remained primitive. Changes in the construction industry have only recently begun to take place and, that too, on account of the introduction of foreign construction management firms and capital.

And for those who did not have the opportunity for a first-hand experience, professional journals and imported architectural books provided equally evocative substitutes. Western architectural journals have had far greater influence on the architecture ideals of generations of Indian students than any teacher in the Indian schools of architecture. The power of these journals lay in the iconic images they reproduced as attractive photographs and, though second-hand, they nevertheless influenced those who could not avail of a foreign education and experience the buildings directly. The power of such images also derived from the fact that, as editors of architectural journals have sadly pointed out, architects do not read: in these circumstances, the photographs indeed spoke a thousand words and became powerful substitutes for theorising. These journals have, in the process, contributed to the 'Indianising' of international icons, but little else has changed, especially when one considers the fact that they reinforce the power of images in determining architectural production.
I would like to make one qualification here.

The Influence of Magazines

Locally produced architectural magazines like Architecture+Design, published from Delhi, and The Indian Architect and Builder, published from Mumbai, have facilitated some change in the nature of images accessible to Indian architects. These magazines have featured the works of a diverse range of architects who have pursued different, more appropriate, strategies of form-making and place-making. For instance, the issues of sustainability and low-cost housing are now more widely appreciated. But my point is that the power of iconic images from foreign sources continues to dominate the imagination of the modern Indian architect. Earlier attempts at 'Indianisation' were merely literal representations of architectonic elements taken from historical buildings, like chhatris, domes, chhajjas and arches. Even the Modernists merely transferred the images of the International Style on to local buildings but continued to use primitive technology, skills and materials. But, from the 1970s, a few architects attempted a more interpretive strategy by manipulating traditional building and spatial typologies in the modernist idiom. By the 1980s their works began to be recognised internationally by architectural critics like Kenneth

Frampton. This was also the time when locally produced architectural magazines came into existence. Charles Correa, an influential Indian architect based in Mumbai, who has designed several important buildings from the late 1950s all over the country and recently in the MIT campus, distinguished between "transfers and transformation" by explaining that one was about the literal quotation of historical forms – "grave digging" – while the other was about the assimilation and reinterpretation of those forms in the contemporary context. He compellingly demonstrated his transformative strategies in such buildings as The Legislative Assembly Building in Bhopal, Jawahar Kala Kendra in Jaipur and the hotel Cidade de Goa in Panjim, among others. Similarly, Raj Rewal, based in Delhi, and Balkrishan Doshi, in Ahmedabad, both prominent and prolific architects now in their seventies, have emphasised the relevance of "traditional architecture" in their works. Using these strategies, Rewal recently completed a commission for the Ismaili Cultural Centre in Lisbon. The reference to iconic images in their works has been more thoughtful and subtle than the earlier attempts of the Revivalists and Modernists.

However, these reinterpretations of traditions are limited to the planning and spatial organisation of buildings and do not address the development of their architectonic form. For instance, Rewal interpreted the spatial morphology of the desert town of Jaisalmer to design public housing in Delhi and Correa the mandala used in the planning of Jaipur to develop the plan for Jawahar Kala Kendra in Jaipur. The visual vocabulary and aesthetics remained Modernist and Western. The development of the plan and the elevation of buildings were sourced from different iconic images, one indigenous and the other Western, but the indigenous was still interpreted through the values of the Modernist West. This move was lauded by western critics – which approval consequently established local benchmarks. The situation has now changed further.

Hybridisation

In the process of the use and reuse of iconic images, there is little that remains identifiably 'authentic' or 'pure'. These icons are hybrid in nature, having evolved out of the continual intermixing of Western and Indian cultural sensibilities over a substantial period of time. The hybrid architecture which has resulted must be recognised as a new architecture, rather than hastily derided as the debasement of older models. Architectural critics in India have as yet been unable to recognise the true meaning – and challenge – of these hybrid architectural formations. On the one hand, this hybrid architecture is dismissed as comic – "Punjabi Baroque" as the title of architect Gautam Bhatia's provocative book claims. On the other hand, it is valorised as modern Indian architecture, but merely as a regional variation of the master narrative which was, and continues to be, of Western architectural development (perhaps not an unfair assessment under the circumstances, but still missing the point). Again, both evaluations are based on Western criteria of aesthetic appreciation. There is a strong need for an independent, hybrid, local framework for assessing these architectural developments, because the circumstances necessitate it: politically, socio-culturally and, of course, architecturally in a globalising world. In India, we are living simultaneously within, between and after culture, and neither the Western nor the traditional Indian framework is adequate to explain current architectural formations, as has analogously and forcefully been demonstrated by the proliferation of Indian writing in English. The specific legacy of postcolonialism is recognised and problematised in other disciplines such as the social sciences, fine arts and literature, but not, unfortunately, in architecture.

Colonial Heritage

The paradigmatic shift from images to ideas as the source of form-making and place-making must begin in schools of architecture, where theory and the study of history are neglected areas of academic pedagogy. This is the legacy of colonial art and architectural education. This neglect results in the inability of Indian architects to confront the deeply complex structure of their architectural culture in order to transform it and thereby address the contemporary needs of society. The ramshackle condition of Indian cities is evidence of this neglect. It is not merely the individual client to whom an architect must be responsive; the profession, as a whole, must also be sensitive to the specific exigencies of Indian urbanism.

The present architectural curriculum is ill-suited to promote this paradigmatic shift because most current schools of architecture are hold-overs from the earlier colonial schools that sought to train Indian draftsmen and surveyors to assist British architects and engineers. Independence has not substantially altered this educational imperative to impart a vocational skill and most schools regard the teaching of theory and history (except as an incidental opportunity to inculcate 'facts') as an impediment to producing the pragmatic architects the country is presumed to need.

And yet, a commitment to the critically informed teaching of theory and history is essential for understanding our contemporary disciplinary and cultural condition and for charting meaningful directions for professional development. To accomplish such a shift in emphasis in architectural education, the disciplinary base of the profession must be widened. The prospects for such a change are bleak.

Few schools acknowledge this intellectual and institutional crisis. At the time of Independence there were just two schools of architecture and, by 1972, when the Council of Architecture was established by the Indian Government to regulate the profession, there were 16. Today there are about 140 schools that, together, produce about 4,000 architects a year. There are only about 40,000 architects registered with the Council of Architecture to serve, at least notionally, a population of over one billion people. Since the number of architects is grossly inadequate, most of the architectural work in the country is carried out by non-architects: engineers or masons who double up as petty contractors. These sobering statistics determine the paradigm within which the Indian architect operates today. Furthermore, even though architects like to consider themselves part of the Westernised elite transforming the country, their actual status in society as effective professionals is low. Their advice is routinely substituted by others who hold influential opinions about the architectural product, thus reducing the economic worth of architectural service in the market place. It is, consequently, unsurprising that in governmental and popular perception, the advice of the engineer has greater authority in deciding architectural issues than that of the architect, whose contribution is reduced to merely manipulating the façade of the building under construction.

The burgeoning of architectural schools in the last 15 years has, sadly, resulted in a precipitous drop in educational standards as the shortage of architects needed to service India's developing economy has conso-

lidated the debilitating colonial pedagogic agenda that imparts vocational training. The ubiquity of computers in architectural practice has also only reinforced this vocational trend as schools churn out mechanically skilled draftsmen instead of thoughtful practitioners. And, in the globalised marketplace of business process outsourcing, there is a growing demand in the West for Indian technicians, thus vindicating the intellectually colonised pedagogic choices of most architectural schools.

From Image to Idea

Finally, the fear of increasing chaos in the system is forcing bureaucratised agencies like the Council of Architecture to standardise benchmarks and curriculum. To achieve this objective the focus of governance in architectural education is to discipline and punish Schools for infraction of rules; for example, there are currently over 40 Schools listed for de-recognition. This has radically stifled new educational initiatives and increased conformity, thus reinforcing the colonial agenda yet again.

Nevertheless, a few Schools are trying to break the mould in their pedagogy by engaging with the ground realities of architecture and urbanism in India. The School of Architecture at The Centre for Environment and Planning (CEPT) University in Ahmedabad, the Kamala Raheja Vidyanidhi Institute of Architecture and Environmental Studies (KRVIA) and The Rizvi College of Architecture in Mumbai, and the recently closed (for infraction of rules) TVB School of Habitat Studies in New Delhi, have consistently demonstrated the efficacy of undertaking regular academic research to improve their educational agenda on the one hand, and effectively mediating the development of architecture and urbanism in India on the other. The KRVIA recently mounted an exhibition of their academic research works of the past 15 years entitled, Make/Shift Mumbai, Imagination and Propositions, which explored important issues confronting the city. In a similar manner the TVB School of Habitat Studies has considered the city of Delhi its laboratory to establish a 'lab – to – field' link with government agencies managing the city. CEPT and Rizvi conduct regular national and international workshops to add value to the understanding of Indian architecture and urbanism. In these Schools the invention of the modern Indian architect remains a contested domain in theory and practice.

The challenge for Indian architecture today is both intellectual and institutional. It must, at long last, confront its lingering colonial legacy (without regressing into parochial revivalism) and formulate a disciplinary philosophy and professional practice that is both substantive and mature enough to reflect and respond intelligently to its historical context (local and global). This requires the development of an independent, hybrid, local architectural sensibility that is based on the rigorous generation of ideas rather than the easy and mechanical mimicry of received images. Architecture must be understood (and taught) as a way of engaging sensitively with society and its changing needs rather than as a routinised tool with which to implement pre-determined and formulaic solutions. And meeting this challenge requires not just a cadre of critically innovative practitioners and teachers, but also the firm support of institutions that are bold enough to unshackle themselves from their particularly postcolonial bureaucratic adherence to the inherited status quo. The modern Indian nation deserves no less.

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