India's cities, which are expected to become some of the largest urban conglomerates of the twenty-first century, incorporate both physical and visual contradictions to coalesce in a landscape of pluralism. Yet this isn't a recent phenomenon. Historically, especially during British colonization, the different worlds in these cities—whether economic, social, or cultural—occupied different spaces and operated under different rules, with a goal of maximizing control and minimizing conflict among the opposing worlds. Today these worlds share the same space, but understand and use it differently. Enormous waves of distressed rural migration during the latter half of the 1900s triggered the convergence of these worlds into a singular, but multifaceted entity. Coupled with the inadequate supply of urban land and the lack of new urban centers, this resulted in extremely high densities in existing cities. Furthermore, with the emergence of a post-industrial, service-based economy, these worlds became even more intertwined within the same space.

In this post-industrial scenario, cities in India have become critical sites for negotiation between elite and subaltern cultures. The new relationships between social classes in a post-industrial economy are quite different from those that existed in state-controlled economies. The fragmentation of service and production locations has resulted in a new, bazaar-like urbanism weaving itself throughout the entire urban landscape. The resulting urbanism created by those outside the elite domains of the formal modernity of the state creates a “pirate” modernity that slips under the laws of the city simply to survive, without any conscious attempt at constructing a counterculture. This situation contrasts with the many historic legacies of modernity in India, where instruments such as the State 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 became the place 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 in the city.

Today, Indian cities include two components occupying the same physical space: the static city and the Kinetic City. The static city, built of more permanent materials such as concrete, steel, and brick, is perceived as a monumental two-dimensional entity on conventional city maps. Meanwhile, the Kinetic City—incomprehensible as a two-dimensional entity—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 not perceived 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 that not only creates a richer sensibility of spatial occupation, but also suggests how spatial limits are expanded to include formally unimagined uses in dense urban conditions.

The Kinetic City presents a compelling vision that enables us 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 such a context, an architecture or urbanism of equality in an increasingly inequitable economic condition requires a deeper exploration to find a wide range of places to mark and commemorate the cultures of those excluded from the spaces of global flows. These do not necessarily lie in the formal production of architecture; rather, they often challenge it. Here the idea of a city is an elastic urban condition—not a grand vision, but a “grand adjustment.”

The Kinetic City, with its bazaar-like form, is like 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; it is a city in constant motion, where the very physical fabric is
characterized by the kinetic. Meanwhile, the static city—dependent on architecture for its representation—is no longer the single image by which the city is read. As a result, 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, Muhharam, Durga Puja, and Ganesh Chathurthi have emerged as the spectacles of the Kinetic City, and their presence in 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. For example, in Mumbai, the popularity and growth of the Ganesh festival has been phenomenal. During the festival, which occurs in August or September, numerous neighborhoods become temporarily transformed through lights and decoration. Families, neighborhoods, and city events mark the celebrations, and new spaces are created to house the idol of Ganesh for ten days. On the last day of the celebrations, a large part of the city's population carries the idol in long processions, ultimately immersing it in the sea.

The neighborhood processions weave through predetermined routes in the city. Each procession vies against other neighborhood processions to showcase the intensity of their followings. Each procession carries tableaus depicting images of both local as well global concerns, with Lord Ganesh mediating the outcomes. This representation is not based on formal scriptures or predetermined rules; rather, human ingenuity breaches the boundaries between the local and the global, the historic and contemporary. These tableaus convey the hybrid urgencies of metropolitan India.

Set against the backdrop of the static city, the processions culminate with the immersion of the idol and bid it farewell amidst 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. No static or permanent mechanisms exist to encode this spectacle. Here, the memory of the city is an "enacted" process—a temporal moment as opposed to buildings that contain the public memory as a static or permanent entity. The city and its architecture
are not synonymous and cannot contain a single meaning. Indeed, within the Kinetic City, meanings are
not stable; spaces are consumed, reinterpreted, and recycled. In this way, the Kinetic City recycles the
static city to create a new spectacle.

The Kinetic City’s transformative ability is even more evident in the events that play out at Mumbai’s
Town Hall every year on August 15, 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 that the
ceremony is protected from the monsoon rains, the PWD builds a large porch of bamboo and cloth
that is attached to the building. Decorative trim and other ornamental highlights of this classical
building create a sense of tradition that momentarily transforms the architecture. Although
conservationists protest it each year, decrying it to be an abuse of the legislation that protects heritage
buildings, they ignore the fact everything is reversible and 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 re-colonized by the Kinetic City. The PWD alters the significance of this
building momentarily to expand the margins of the Kinetic City.

This idea takes on a critical dimension when contemplating the preservation of the built
environment in these contexts. Debates about the conservation of the static city have often revolved
around the idea of significance. The notion of “cultural significance” as an all-encompassing idea
clearly emerged in the conservation debate during the 1980s in the Burra Charter—one of the many
resolutions of the International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and
Sites (ICOMOS) to define and guide conservation practice. The Burra Charter (adopted at Burra,
South Australia, in 1979) defined cultural significance as the “aesthetic, historic, scientific or social
value for past, present and future generations.” This object-centric (devoid of life) definition, rooted
in the debate propagated by the antiquarians of the Renaissance, suggests that “significance” is
static.7 What is the validity of such 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 is our cultural reading of the Kinetic City, which now forms a greater part of our urban reality? In this dynamic context, if the production or preservation of architecture or urban form has to be informed by our reading of cultural significance, it must also include the notion of “constructing significance” in both architectural and conservation debates. In fact, the understanding that cultural significance evolves will truly clarify the role of the architect as an advocate of change (versus a preservationist who opposes change)—namely, one who can engage with both the kinetic and static cities 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. Here, the static city embraces the Kinetic City and is informed and remade by its logic.

The bazaars in Victorian arcades in the old Fort Area, Mumbai’s Historic District, is emblematic of this potential negotiation between the static and Kinetic Cities. The original use of the arcades was to provide spatial mediation between the building and the street as well as serve as a perfect response to Bombay’s climate by protecting pedestrians from both the harsh sun and the lashing rains. Today, the original intent of the informal bazaar occupying the arcade is challenged. The bazaars in the arcades characterizing the Fort Area are thriving businesses. For the average Mumbai resident, the hawker provides a wide range of goods at prices considerably lower than those found in local shops. Consequently, city authorities attempting to relocate the bazaars have deemed hawking to be illegal.

This emergent relationship of the arcade and bazaar not only forces a confrontation of uses and interest groups, but also demands new preservation approaches. For the elite and for conservationists, the Victorian core represents the old city center, complete with monumental icons; as the city sprawls
outward, 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.

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

One design solution might be to re-adapt the functioning of the arcades, restructuring them to allow for easy pedestrian movement while also accommodating hawkers. They could contain the amorphous bazaar encased in the illusion of the disciplined Victorian arcade. Through such planning, the city’s components would have a greater ability to survive because they would be more adaptable to changing economic and social conditions. No total solutions exist in an urban landscape simultaneously charged with the duality between permanence and rapid transformation. At best, the city could constantly evolve and invent solutions for the present by safeguarding the crucial components of our historically important “urban hardware.” Could bazaars in Victorian arcades become an authentic symbol of an emergent reality of temporary adjustment?

The static and Kinetic Cities clearly go beyond their obvious differences to establish a much richer relationship both spatially and metaphorically than their physical manifestations would suggest. Affinity and rejection are simultaneously played out in a state of equilibrium maintained by a seemingly irresolvable tension. The informal economy of the city vividly illustrates the collapsed and intertwined existence of the static and Kinetic Cities. The dabbawalas (literally translated as “tiffin men”) are an example of this relationship between the formal and informal, the static and kinetic. The tiffin delivery service, which relies on the train system for transportation, costs approximately ₹300 (4 euro) per
month. A *dabbawala* picks up a lunch tiffin from a house anywhere in the city. Then, through a complex system, he delivers the tiffin to one’s place of work by lunchtime and returns it to the house later in the day. The *dabbawalas* deliver hundreds of thousands of lunch boxes every day. The efficiency of Mumbai’s train system—the spine of the linear city—enables such a complex informal system to work. The *dabbawalas* have innovatively set up a network that facilitates an informal system to take advantage of a formal infrastructure. The network involves the *dabba* or tiffin being exchanged up to four or five times between its pickup and return to the house in the evening. The average box travels about 30 kms each way. It is estimated that approximately 200,000 boxes are delivered around the city per day, involving approximately 4500 *dabbawalas*. In economic terms, the annual turnover amounts to roughly 50 million rupees (about a million dollars).

Entrepreneurship in the Kinetic City is an autonomous and oral process that demonstrates the ability to fold the formal and informal into a symbiotic relationship. The *dabbawala*—like several other informal services, ranging from banking to money transfers, couriers, and electronic bazaars—leverage community relationships and networks to deftly use 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 reduced to survival) and unexploited potentials of existing infrastructure initiate new innovative services. The trains in Mumbai are emblematic of a kinetic space supporting and blurring the formal and the informal, slicing through these worlds while momentarily collapsing them into a singular entity. Here, any 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 whereas the static city aspires to erase the local and re-codify it in a written “macro-moral” order.

The issue of housing most vividly demonstrates the reordering process of the Kinetic City by the static city. In Mumbai, for example, approximately 60% of the city’s population does not have access to
formal housing. This population lives on approximately 10% of the city’s land in settlements that are locally referred to as slums. It is believed that about 70% of the city’s population works in the informal sector. This number has risen with the new liberal economy that curtails bargaining capacity by fragmenting labor in the cities. Despite its informal nature, this population’s productivity enables Mumbai to be competitive on the global scale. This subaltern 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 juxtapose these homes covered by plastic sheets or with walls made of empty drums. These developments represent a kaleidoscope of the past, present, and future compressed into an organic fabric of alleys, dead ends, and a mysterious labyrinth-like streetscape that constantly modifies and reinvents itself. The Kinetic City, like a twitching organism, locates and relocates itself through the city in perpetual motion. Flow, instability, and indeterminacy are fundamental to the Kinetic City. Regular demolitions exacerbate the tenuous occupation of land by the inhabitants of these settlements. The demolitions inhibit any investment the occupants might make in their physical living conditions. Thus, the Kinetic City is a fluid and dynamic city that is 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.

This development only heightens the growing contradictions in the islands of increasing concentration of wealth that physically manifest in the gated communities throughout the city and along the edge of 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 city’s physical nature 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 a secondary development of museums, galleries, parks and progressive urban regulations demonstrating 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 raises an important 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, which is also an effective point of intervention. The city-making process results in globalization and its particular transgressions in the urban landscape, but it also positions the Kinetic City to simultaneously 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 these points of effective intervention. These associations engage with the formal world of the static city while mediating the inherent contradictions of the Kinetic City’s issues of legality, informality, and the mobile and temporal strategies. The most successful of these movements is the alliance among The Society for the Promotion of Area Resources (SPAARC)—an NGO; The National Slum Dwellers Federation (NSDF)—a CBO; and the Mahila Milan—an organization of poor women. This alliance is essentially united in its concerns for securing land and access to urban infrastructure. It has successfully negotiated between the formal and informal worlds in the city and across national boundaries with a network of other alliances working with slum dwellers around the world. In addition to representing efforts to reconstitute citizenship in cities, these efforts form what Arjun Appudarai refers to as “deep democracy.” The depth refers 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...vertical 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”. Through this restructuring of the city-making process the kinetic and static cities can be intertwined beyond the physical and better engage the inhabitants of the city.

The urbanism of Mumbai represents a fascinating intersection where the Kinetic City—a landscape of dystopia and 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 co-existence? Or is Mumbai’s emerging urbanism inherently paradoxical where the static and Kinetic Cities coexist and their particular states of utopia and dystopia become inevitable? Can the spatial configuration for how this simultaneity occurs actually be formally imagined? Despite these many potential disjunctures, what this reading of the city does celebrate is the dynamic and pluralist processes that make the urban Indian landscape. Within this urbanism, the static and Kinetic Cities necessarily coexist and blur into an integral entity—even if only momentarily—to create the margins for adjustment that their simultaneous existences demand.

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