

## POST-INDUSTRIAL TRANSITIONS

### The Speculative Futures of Citizenship in Contemporary Mumbai

#### Rethinking the South Asian City:

Urban studies today pay increasing attention to dystopic conditions. The relationship between the city as a figure and site of modernity and understandings of social transformation has undergone a sea change as social science adjusts its normative lenses and seeks hard to find some measure of hope in the conditions of life prevailing in contemporary cities. In the context of rapid urbanization and the dramatic increases in the ratio of urban populations in relation to rural, urban settlements are emerging as natural sites of research, contention and contestation. The *problems* exemplified by cities (or, to put it another way, the problematique of the urban) – social, cultural, environmental – are defining not only directions of design research (see, for example, Bruce Mau's recent book, *Massive Change*) but also contributing to the reconceptualization of social science methodology (see, for example, Amin and Thrift's *Cities: Reimagining the Urban*). A number of authors point to the neglect of the city as a site for conceptualizing and understanding society as a whole in the development of modern social theory during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. As part of this trend, we are also witnessing an increased attention to conditions in cities like Mumbai. If Paris was written of as the "capital of modernity," (by thinkers like Walter Benjamin who were among the few early 20<sup>th</sup> century authors to recognize the centrality of urban experience to understanding modernity as a historical phenomenon) places like Mumbai, Lagos and Dubai are now exemplary sites for understanding contemporary urban conditions. Mumbai, for example, is projected to become the largest urban agglomeration in the world in a few years. Thus, writing the stories of these cities has become an important preoccupation. But the search for the right angle from which these stories should be told continues apace.

As cultural historians of South Asia turn their attention to cities, it is clear that the city did not easily fit in as an organic or 'natural' site in the historiography of and literature on modern South Asia. The village was thought to be the natural and authentic locus of South Asian society and accordingly, cities do not have a clear place in the story of the nation. Consequently, the development of policies concerning urban affairs has also been neglected. Yet, even though the overwhelming majority of the population of India lives in villages, urban issues have come to the fore with an intensity that is historically unmatched<sup>1</sup>. There are several reasons for this shift and the city that has been most at the centre of the shift is Mumbai, in particular since the violent communal riots that took place in the city in late 1992 and early 1993 and more recently with the various terror attacks and infrastructure failures plaguing the city.

In this essay, I would like to focus on Mumbai in its current period of transformation (from the early 90s to the present) – which is specifically a post-industrial period – to demonstrate the centrality of Mumbai to the debates about the urban in India and beyond. Second, by so doing, I would like to unpack the nature of the transformations that make Mumbai both unique amongst the cities in India as well as exemplary. If we view globalization as a series of effects, I would like to show how certain sites, though extreme in their transformations, also become exemplary precisely because they are unstable, experimental zones rather than examples to be emulated. In order to pursue



Source: Bombay Cities Within

<sup>1</sup> Ramesh Ramanathan, the founder of a powerful new institution in Bangalore called Janagraha, commented in a program on CNN-IBN (July 5<sup>th</sup>, 2006) that just as financial crises forced liberalization, repeated urban crises, like the Mumbai floods of July 2005 have thrust the issue of urban development into national view.

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this argument, I will concentrate on the spatial transformation of Mumbai during the era of liberalization. In reading the landscape of Mumbai as a text, with architecture and infrastructure as signs of an emergent urban design, I hope to work through the paradoxical experiment that Mumbai represents – its inversion of the 'normal' or rational relationship between planning, development and design in order to foreground the logic of its peculiar territoriality. In conclusion, this essay will return to the question of the dystopic, the nature of the urban and the relationship between spatial transformation and social change.

#### From Bombay to Mumbai:

The renaming of Bombay as Mumbai in 1996 by the Shiv Sena, the political party that was then in control of both the State government as well as the Bombay Municipal Corporation was widely viewed as a symptom of other kinds of shifts that had been underway for more than a decade prior to this event. In particular, the riots that followed the destruction of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya in December 1992 and the serial bomb blasts in March 1993, which left more than 250 people dead and inflicted huge losses of property were seen as watershed events in the psychological transformation of the city.

A number of works, written after these events marked this shift in their titles – *From Bombay to Mumbai*, *Bombay and Mumbai: A City in Transition* and *Wages of Violence: Naming and Violence in Post-Colonial Bombay*. The authors and editors of the post-Babri literature on Bombay by and large perceive 'Bombay' and 'Mumbai' to be two distinct conceptual entities, with each name signifying particular practices and, more importantly, a particular kind of ethos. Much of the social science literature assumes the 'modernity' of Bombay and its 'cosmopolitan' ethos (see, for example, the title of Sujata Patel's edited volume, *Bombay: Metaphor for Modern India*). But, as Arjun Appadurai points out, the content of this cosmopolitanism has certainly not been stable. He describes it as a tolerance of diversity that rested upon the possibility of commercial relations amongst different linguistic, ethnic and regional groups. Thus, Bombay could be most accurately described, according to Appadurai, as a "cosmopolis of commerce."

This violence – against persons, things and property – is seen as a turning point in Bombay's history both by scholars as well as popular writers. But these interpretations in turn position the history of Mumbai as a proxy for national history. They view the breakdown of relations between communities, violently expressed in the riots of 1992-93, as a metonymic expression of the breakdown of those relations at the national level.

The specificity of urban relations is not particularly salient as an explanatory point of departure<sup>2</sup>. In other words, the crisis of the city is more likely to stand in for a national crisis in the early writings that centralize Mumbai. This positioning derives, in part, from the 'suspect' place of the city in nationalist historiography. As Partha Chatterjee claims, there was no "organic imagination" of the city in anti-colonial nationalist thought. Thus, the ethos of places like Mumbai was viewed with great ambivalence. As cities created by colonial capital, cities like Mumbai represented both the opportunities for participation in a global modern culture as well as inauthentic sites as far as a nationalist imaginary was concerned.

Notable exceptions to this position are to be found in the works of Arjun Appadurai and Thomas Hansen, both anthropologists. While Hansen describes the relationship between violence and the cultivation of a masculinist culture by the Shiv Sena in some detail, Appadurai pays attention to what he calls the "spectral" question of space and urban infrastructure in its relation to the problem of inter-communal relations.



The South Asian city becomes an object of inquiry in its own right during this current period of economic liberalization and the anxieties associated with the opening up of national economic space. Yet, it remains, in this early period, a subordinate object, always discussed in relation to the nation. At the same time, urban crises might be viewed as symptoms of an increasing ambivalence with regard to sovereignty in the political realm, and of the decreasing ability of the nation-state to serve as a container for questions of sovereignty. In other words, while urban crises might reflect and serve as proxies for the crisis of the nation, they simultaneously hint at the increasing obsolescence of the nation-state as the arbiter of these questions. The city rent asunder by violence is a particular kind of a city — it is an orderly city, organized by a regime of visibility governed by the ethos and practices of the nation-state. This is not a regime of visibility organized through formal, aesthetic gestures but one whose effects are nevertheless felt upon the organization of space. But this 'spectral' quality of the spatial question has increasingly become more visible as convergence between violence, displacement and spatial transformation becomes a part of everyday life in the major Indian metros.

In the genealogy that I have been tracing so far, the neglect of cities as cultural sites of self-formation in post-colonial Indian society has come full circle to face the consequences of a failed strategy of development concentrated around the heroic building of rural infrastructure in the Nehruvian era. **The consequences of rural poverty has been visible on the surface of cities like Calcutta, Bombay and New Delhi for decades, coming to a head with violent state-sponsored displacement drives in the 70s and the 80s.** The legal opposition of these state practices by concerned individuals and NGOs led to the recognition of the rights of pavement and hutment dwellers to remain where they were at least on humanitarian grounds and their gradual transformation into so-called vote-banks for politicians. Thus, neither the normative cultural ideals of modern self-formation nor the normative organization of urban politics around the democratic provision of services adequately describe the conceptual history of the South Asian city in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In the canonical genealogies of the modern city, formal gestures of architecture and urban design play a crucial role, as critics, practitioners and theorists from Benjamin to Le Corbusier have forcefully demonstrated in their writings. Yet, in the case of the South Asian city (and the Indian city in particular), issues of surface and landscape, design and organizational activities have hardly played a substantive role as objects of inquiry in their own right. They have been treated instead as objects of observation, as symptoms and signs through which the history of other objects can be narrated. In the contemporary moment, however, there may be reason to think that this lack of attention leads to a certain kind of

blindness, a certain way in which we are missing the possibility of seeing the visible. The extreme contradictions of the contemporary moment have complicated the question of visibility, registering their effects on the surfaces of the city. The surface no longer appears available to the penetration of the social scientific gaze in a straightforward way. Thinking the Indian city through a reading of its landscapes and surfaces is thus another way of addressing the transformation in the very regime of visibility. Seeing the visible here becomes another way of addressing the surface or the superfluous.

**In general, questions of surface and landscape, of design and activity have become central questions for social science in face of the speed with which built environment is being transformed in the contemporary moment.** These questions are intimately connected to the availability of an archive and the possibilities of calibrating memory with a past that is increasingly difficult to objectify through grand narrative and heroic acts or stable monuments. Several recent works of history and cultural studies have made these questions their central preoccupation, including Christine Boyer's *City of Collective Memory*, Achille Mbembe's essay "The Aesthetics of Superfluity," on contemporary Johannesburg, and Ackbar Abbas' book, *Hong Kong: Culture in a Space of Disappearance*. In looking at contemporary Mumbai through the lens of its post-industrial surfaces and landscapes, I am especially interested in connecting to this emerging body of thought. As I have already indicated above, my interest in Mumbai as a site is driven not by its ability to serve as a predictive example but rather as an extreme experiment whose consequences form the limits of contemporary urbanism in India.

### Thinking through Architecture:

"We stand at the dawn of the regime of the invisible, its role in determining urban structure vast. The visible becomes an irruption of other forces, a graphic user interface for a more powerful command line below." — Kazys Varnelis, "The City Beyond Maps"

If maps of cities were meant to adequately reflect the forces behind the shapes of cities, or the political capacities and the aspirations of residents, maps of cities like Mumbai would always reflect what Graham and Marvin have called "splintering urbanism," which they attribute to the most recent, neo-liberal phase of capitalist political economy. Yet, in the light of the brief genealogy of the Indian metropolis, sketched above, it might be possible to think differently through the formal gestures of architecture and its embodiment of organizational strategy, particularly in a period of rapid institutional transformation. The construction boom of recent years, the circulation of multi-national real estate capital and the availability of credit for investment in architectural assets is now a firmly established reality in most Indian cities. The active manipulation of physical form has clearly come to the fore as a new site of organizational

activity, driven by speculative strategies. The struggle over design infrastructure provision and public finance, which is the other side of this flowering privatized investment, has, predictably, reached an impasse that is fomenting the sort of urban crisis that Ramesh Ramanathan, the head of the powerful, Bangalore based NGO, Janagraha refers to (see above, note 1). Thus, increasingly, another sort of city has come to the fore during these decades of economic transition in which the formal gestures of architecture and its embodiment of spatial strategies in physical form play a vital role.

The manipulation of physical form has become the organizational site of speculative strategies. A new informational order is behind the radical changes to the urban landscape of Mumbai. An idiosyncratic skyline is the physical manifestation of various attempts by the State and the market to realize profits while simultaneously providing social housing. Between themselves, state officials and developers have been experimenting with the city's planning roadmap on the one hand and with zoning and other regulations on the other hand as they work out algorithms that will provide satisfactory solutions to the housing crisis while creating a profitable market in real estate. The underlying currency of contemporary speculative activities is thus development rules and regulations on the one hand and people on the other. Poorly housed masses are routinely being displaced into transit camps from slums and dilapidated housing stock that has been neglected for decades<sup>3</sup> in order to make land available for redevelopment. There is a direct relationship between the rise of such speculation and the deindustrialization of the city.

Known in the colonial period as the 'Manchester of the East' for its huge textile mill base, this city of industrial capital has been forced to make a transition to the 'new economy' in order to remain economically relevant. The importance of making space for the 'new economy' of IT enabled industries, for financial and other services and for the people who came along with these new industries has been increasingly evident as smaller Indian cities like Bangalore have become investment sites for international capital. Bombay's attempt to become a 'global city' in Sassen's terms thus involves a struggle not only against its own atmosphere of decaying and degrading social relations but also against its already bloated demographic state. But the most visually evident forms of violence are those exemplified in the built forms of Mumbai, as they are marked by the increasing

3 The lack of availability of housing for rent in Mumbai is a well-known fact. It is related to the decades-old rent control bill from 1948 that froze rents at the then prevailing rates and made tenancies heritable. As a result, since the sixties, there has been virtually no development for rental housing. As Shirish Patel — a prominent structural engineer and city planner — has pointed out, this policy is directly responsible for the growth of slums and for the fact that many middle income families are also forced to reside in slum colonies and settlements due to lack of availability of affordable rental stock.

communalization of the city. While the relationship between the violence against persons and the violence against property is neither straightforward nor self-evident, this relationship has been perceived as a spectral trace, becoming evident in the remapping of the city's population through major and minor readjustments and movements of resident away from proximate dangers and aggressive neighbours.<sup>4</sup>

Thirdly, the formulation of complicated regulations in which the displacement of people, the redevelopment of the land they occupy and the promises to re-house them by turning the rights they created by squatting or other forms of occupation and settlement into an equivalent amount of square footage per person are some of the complicated schemes aiding real estate speculation in contemporary Mumbai. In the face of all this spatial speculation aided by masquerades of populist justice, entangled in the aspirations of the poor, the city is undergoing a massive transition, which might be read as an experiment in an old fashioned sense. It is, in other words, an experiment involving the empirical manipulation of the physical fabric, creating patches and pathways for the circulation of global capital. These activities closely intertwine information as the underlying medium of speculation with the unstable situation of residents, turning people into the currency through which real estate capital circulates. The symbolic capital of displacement in the name of 'making over' the city is producing an experimental landscape that sets Mumbai territorially apart from the rest of the country.

These spatial transformations make the above question of surface and landscape extremely important ones and more particularly, they make architecture a specifically significant anthropological object. In this essay therefore, I specifically focus on the surfaces of the city as a site, and not on the more commonly posed problem of housing per se which takes us into a more functional realm of how to achieve dignified living. Here I want to think about the legibility of what is happening in the city and to the city by making built space the object of my reading — that is to position these surfaces as the "projective extension" of the city's transitions. I also want to highlight the relationship between architectural forms and spatial imagination — in a city like Mumbai, the phenomenology of density, the juxtaposition and crowding that assaults the senses is the ground upon which social interactions take place. Not surprisingly, forms of the imagination are dominated and

4 See Appadurai's essay, "Spectral Housing and Urban Cleansing in Millennial Mumbai" for a detailed exploration of this complex relationship between violence against persons and that against property.



oriented by this density and, beneath the mask of architecture, one is confronted constantly by the need to calibrate the archaeology of spatial imaginaries.

**Daniel Liebeskind, who recently visited Mumbai for the first time remarked, “Mumbai is clearly a city that eludes architects who see the city as a material object. It’s a city where human beings are far more important than brick and mortar, concrete, glass and steel.”** In the logic of such remarks, Mumbai becomes a place where architecture itself disappears as a material fact, and is substituted by sheer demographic density that constitutes its visual overlay, even taking the more traditional place of infrastructure as its underneath. How does one read these signs?

For a theorist like Mike Davis, the architectural expression and arrangement of these densities in vast slum settlements exemplifies the creation of a ‘surplus humanity’ by a system of neo-liberal governance. But there are also some paradoxes to consider. According to a recent World Bank document, Mumbai has the world’s largest slum population sitting on some of the world’s most expensive real estate. It is the world’s most densely populated city and is the most “topographically challenged” of the world’s largest cities. At the same time that Davis was writing his piece, “Planet of Slums,” now a book, several Mumbai-based urbanists were noting that Mumbai’s problems of density and degraded built forms had less to do with poverty and more to do with policy. That, in fact, the city continued to attract migrants because of its ability to generate jobs but because the mechanisms for a fair housing market simply did not exist, even those who might be considered middle-class in terms of income had to end up living in slum colonies. It is amply clear however, that even without new migration, Mumbai has a huge crisis on its hands. But this crisis is not merely a crisis in housing. The idea of a ‘surplus humanity,’ of a superfluous population is a key issue in Mumbai’s present economic situation.

The connection of this class of workers to the built forms of the city is vital because the logic of “productive sacrifice” of this ‘superfluous population’ appears to be one of the key underpinnings of the forms, policies and institutions of private property in the city (see Mbembe 2004). The lack of rental housing stock, for example, pegs the question of housing to the ability of individual’s to mobilize resources geared to property ownership or, in other words, toward the institutions of private property and privatized ownership. The infrastructural needs of the city, in turn, are also calculated in relation to the occupation of various existing and potential infrastructural sites by people. Several recent projects like the World Bank funded MUTP (Mumbai Urban Transport Project) for example have yielded complicated negotiations over the production of housing units for people being displaced from these vital infrastructural sites. Indeed, in the past few years, it appears that the real or virtual production of new housing units is intimately tied up to the displacement of residents whose occupational rights have to at least be recognized in order for the expansion of the city to occur in a ‘normal’ or ‘rational’ way.

Secondly, even if jobs are available in the city, the working class is better defined, as Sandeep Pendse has put it, as ‘toilers’ – those whose existence in the city is underwritten by forms of degraded and destructive labour, “predetermined by a logic of productive sacrifice” (ibid). The post-industrial economy in Mumbai in fact is characterized by a whole subterranean world involving such sacrifices in terms of the sorts of industries that are occupying the interstitial, transitional economy – for example, recycling industries of various kinds – from the sacrifice of migrant children in the sweatshops of the gold and diamond processing industries and the embroidery shops to countless other examples of small-scale and hazardous kinds of work to that of the faceless toilers in the new economy, those ‘knowledge-workers’ who are treated as night-shift fodder by an industry prepared for high attrition rates. These sites of production are themselves



Source: Kapil Gupta

situated within and at the edges of post-industrial space – spaces abandoned by industry or contaminated by their very adjacency – the abandoned textile mills and other large infrastructure, the slums, the crumbling housing stock, the marshes, mangroves, creeks, salt pans, rivers and hills. To complete the circle, the appetite for space, created by the dense concentration of populations, turns to these very sites to conjugate or tie together the visible needs of this population with the motive for profit.

These sites are being revisited apparently because of the lack of space for building in the city but paradoxically, as several studies have pointed out, there is not so much a lack of space as frozen space – as much as 2600 acres of land in the centre of the city are occupied by derelict mills and declining port functions. In addition, building heights are severely restricted by a universal limit on floor space on all plots throughout the city with zoned exceptions, growth in rental stock was practically non-existent because rents were frozen at 1940s levels (and continue to be so), the State and its various agents – the railways, the municipality and so on – themselves own over a thousand acres of land, much of lying idle or occupied by slums. All this ‘frozen space’ does not include the slum settlements on ‘encroached infrastructure’ or encroached public works. This space and potential space is frozen from development, suspended in time. But the perception of frozen space is also just that at one level – a perception, and in particular, a perception that is promoted by the reform-minded private sector, eager to bring about a profitable market in space.

**In the absence of comprehensive reforms in these policies an interim city has been quietly developing, on the ruins of the industrial city. The sites I mentioned earlier are ‘post-industrial’ landscapes not merely in the sense of supporting new economies that no longer depend on factory-based production but they are post-industrial in the temporal sense as well – terrains that become available to an archaeological imagination *because* their toxic ecologies are deliberately re-engineered by the market and turned into palatable real estate products.** In comparison to post-industrial sites elsewhere in the world and especially in Euro-American cities where industrial ‘decline’ has arguably been taking place over a longer period of time, the cultural fate of post-industrial sites in places like Mumbai have been much less predictable. This is specifically the case because places like Mumbai have begun to serve as a ‘back-office’ for the more toxic functions associated with worldwide industrial decline including industries such as toxic waste recycling, ship-breaking and so on. Mumbai’s own industrial infrastructure, now deployed in these activities, is thus in a State of suspension between its own obsolescence in the new economy world and its continued usefulness to this very world as a recycling site. It is therefore difficult to imagine the kinds of gentrification projects that refurbish, renovate and reuse industrial spaces that have become commonplace in the European and American cities like Manchester and New York. In Mumbai, refurbishment of a very different kind is visible in these post-industrial landscapes.

Outside the ambit of any kind of protection or public debate, a new city, an experimental city – or what one might call an ‘ex-city’ is being born. The pursuit of short-term changes has created a new landscape within which these questions must now be raised. This landscape is both dramatic and mundane, an ecology of new spatial forms that have created new layers of obsolescence, decay, vacancy and a sense of temporariness underneath the skin of the existing built fabric. The sense of temporariness created both by acts of destruction as well as acts of construction whose simultaneous presence characterizes Mumbai’s peculiar territorial and visual condition today. The haunting silence of the cloth-making machines in the textile mills of central Mumbai, presently on the block awaiting auction and conversion into real estate products, now meets its audacious counterpart in strange new reclamation projects that create contiguous space



stitching together a dramatic ecology of salt-pans, paddy fields and chemical factories. In the following section, I discuss these changes with specific reference to a recent public-private initiative to transform Mumbai into a 'world-class' city, which is being referred to as the 'Mumbai Makeover Project.' My reading of this project is an attempt to probe a little beyond the visage of these experiments and to tie these activities to the emergence of the kind of speculative regime that I spoke of earlier.

**The Mumbai Makeover Project:**

A lively debate began in Mumbai in 2004 about how to 'make the city over' – the project, which newspapers have been referring to as the Mumbai Makeover project – began when a group of elite citizens formed an NGO called *Bombay First* and hired the international consultancy group McKinsey and Co. to prepare a report on how to transform Mumbai into a “world-class city.” This was an unprecedented move and signals a real investment of the elite in making claims to the city for practically the first time in the city's post-colonial history. Earlier investments amounted to philanthropic actions, which were largely disconnected from the arena of politics, governance and other matters of the State. In exchange for being left alone to pursue their goals of profit and their largely discrete lifestyles, the first citizens of the city were content to leave the political sphere in the hands of politicians and bureaucrats. With liberalization and the decline of the industrial economy, the tightening control of the State in industrial policy and the State's conscious decision to deindustrialize the city in favour of developing the rural hinterlands, it became clear that more investments would be needed to kick-start the city's shift to becoming a service provider. The growing tensions within the city between ethno-religious groups and the contest over space between rich and poor only served to exacerbate these views, sometimes translated into a feeble concern on the part of elite groups over the degraded environment of the city and the declining quality of life.

This project has not only successfully mobilized public opinion within the city – including the emergence of serious and lively opposition and the cultivation of knowledge about the arcane planning policies that have driven the city's spatial development – but it has also managed to mobilize the World Bank's special interest in supporting the project. Interested actors within and outside the city take McKinsey and Co.'s *Vision Mumbai* report document and its recommendations as a point of departure. In fact, the Bank, in its recent consultations with the State government, has been urging land use reforms to improve the efficiency of the city's functioning because the city's size and scale mean that the city's functioning has an economy-wide effect. Land use reforms are the holy grail, the key that might have an effect equivalent to the economic reforms that India adopted as the price for opening up its economy to international capital.<sup>5</sup>

What is interesting is that, for the first time, a wide range of citizens are being exposed to technocratic solutions as an answer to counteract the damage done by populist political reforms that the State has been attempting to enact over the course of the 90s and in this decade. In a sense, this debate has succeeded in 'fomenting a crisis' for a range of actors, bringing the problems and issues into public view. An even more urgent reason came to light when the northern parts of the city were flooded on July 26<sup>th</sup>, by a downpour that deposited nearly a metre of rainfall in an afternoon, completely overwhelming the already fragile infrastructure and resulting in a huge loss of life and property. But by this time, the makeover project was already well underway, at least in a series of highly visible measures.

**Shortly after assuming power, the new prime minister had promised, in October 2004, to put the weight of the central government behind turning Mumbai into Shanghai. Dreams of a shining future for the nation were being pinned on the future of the city. One of the first acts of the new Maharashtra State government elected in October last year was to demolish 90,000 huts with great brutality and render 400,000 people homeless, cast out from their makeshift shelters for not being able to prove that they had been in the city prior to 1995, the “cut-off” date for the legalization of residencies. The logic of the “cut-off” date was central because it had become a crucial instrument in classifying and categorizing people, in deciding who could stay in the city and who could not.**

In 1995, the Shiv Sena government had also launched a “free housing” scheme to re-house those who could prove that their residency in the city predated 1995. This scheme was to be made financially viable by providing incentives for private developers to re-house the eligible poor by using market instruments, specifically *tradable development rights* or TDRs to mobilize the resources to address the needs of the poor. In exchange for rehabilitating the slum dwellers into an agreed upon, barracks-like Slum Redevelopment Authority (SRA) development, the developer would be allowed to build upon the plot thus freed of 'encroachments' or on another plot and sell the built space to a starving market of middle and upper class consumers.

The pragmatics of frozen space discussed earlier is crucial to the distorted market values of land in Mumbai. This distortion has had the effect of making Mumbai one of the most expensive real estate markets in the world. Thus private developers benefited enormously from this situation while the poor became

a currency for releasing locked space. In practical terms, slum dwellers consenting to this agreement would first be dislocated into 'transit camps' and then resettled into the SRA housing to which they were assigned by a consultative process involving the government and the developer. The same scheme was applied for the redevelopment of the frozen rent buildings. As mentioned above, these buildings, in the centre of the island city – which is to say, historically among the oldest developments – have been in a State of disrepair and dilapidation, rendered obsolete from the point of view of the market, unable to realize their potential exchange value through rent harvesting or through the sale of the extremely valuable real estate plots upon which they sit.

The developer therefore views the individuals eligible for resettlement and relocation as equivalent units of space. Thus, to obtain the rights to a certain amount of saleable square footage of space, the developer calculates the equivalent number of tenants or slum dwellers who need to be resettled and fabricates the numbers accordingly if they happen to fall short of the numbers required. These schemes create equivalencies between various categories of people affected – through ideas of space or infrastructure deprivation – to yield an overarching category of the urban poor. As a route to the mass reconstruction of the city, the establishment of such notional rights actively connects this technocratic form to mass displacement on the one hand and to the destruction of a complex ecology of built and social forms that have developed over time. Translating these 'obsolete' chunks of inhabited space and time into an updated experience of the city involves a complex experience of displacement and suspension for these residents. The assertion of the State's sovereignty in creating rights to 'free' housing is thus a process in which an effective abolition of the reality of space takes place in favour of a dematerialized image of that space which can be retailed on the market. Urban subjectivity takes on qualities of exile and transience.

All these 'reformative' acts, which are also acts of reformatting with the intended effect of creating a market in real estate have in fact aided speculative investing based on insider knowledge and connections on the one hand and the creation of a peculiar form of right – the right to free housing, which is, in effect, the enabling mechanism for the creation of the market. **The speculative, profit-driven temporality of the market is linked to the dreams and aspirations of those who are effectively cut-off from participating in it.** These displaceable people are also broadly speaking the class of 'toilers', who are at once indispensable and expendable in terms of their labour for the new city.

In the last part of this essay I want to turn to the real effects of this experimental stage upon the culture and phenomenology of citizenship in the contemporary city. I am not interested in doing

this in order to predict what might happen to the city in the future

as a reading of a conspiracy between various actors: politicians, bureaucrats, developers and international real estate capital. But what I am interested in is reading the intersections between the creation and circulation of real estate capital as a particular form of global capital and the delirium of poverty in the city. This delirium has unleashed a peculiar state of speculation that exploits the current freezes and impasses in the market for space, creating a habitus of transition and transience, suspending residents into States of expectation and waiting for indefinite periods.

**Time in Crisis:**

Based on the preceding analysis, one could argue that the foundational logic of the city of the future is thus a certain assumption that the rights of the urban poor, created within the broader, functional framework of citizenship – that is, created as a consequence of claims and needs – are a kind of wealth that can be lavishly spent in the process of creating the market for space. The wasted lives of the poor, their expendability and debasement constitutes the foundational logic of the future. But this is not, as I said earlier, a functionalist argument about the conspiracies that thwart the development of the 'good city' and propertied citizens. I am interested in the phenomenological state unleashed in the present as it appears to brush against the future, in the juxtaposition of new forms against old ones. As the various planning instruments – like FSI, TDR and so on – have become weapons enabling constructions, we see bizarre mutations of the built landscape. Defying all possible logic in terms of infrastructure and therefore of sustainable living, these buildings have instead become a new symbol of the “politics of verticality” which makes legible changes in the nature of urban citizenship resulting from their being merely adjacent to mutations of the built fabric.

**The verticalization of the island city has added a three dimensional twist to the drama of hierarchy, exclusion and dispossession. Juxtaposed against the built fabric, these structures transform not only the social and cultural life of the city but also equally, the representational order within which space is conceived.** From the point of view of the market, they render existing built and yet to be built space – the space of slums, of the rent-controlled buildings, the factories, warehouses, the salt-pans, the mangroves, urban villages, and industrial housing stock – “inefficient” and “obsolete” in their present condition. These spaces, in other words, are turned into spaces of severely diminished exchange value by this process. This emerging vertical city thus renders these landscapes obsolete by the sheer force of juxtaposition against this fabric, now perceived as one of dereliction.

Navigating a precarious territory between populist mobilization and corporate profits, these changes are significant as acts of

Based on author's participation in informal, informational meetings with World Bank consultants for the Mumbai project in 2005 at The New School, New York.



speculation and also for serving as the speculum, or mirror, within which the future might be viewed. The city of the future is a floating world, it is being built, not on space per se, which has to be created and unlocked from a labyrinth of regulations. This floating world goes with a floating population of persons subject to displacement – categories of persons who could be moved in order to make urban space more 'efficient.' The most evident of these categories is the urban poor who serve as an instrument, the counterfeit currency for urban improvement. They stand both as signs of the failure of the current development process as well as the vehicle, a resource to be deployed in the reconstruction of the city. By contrast a whole world of others, who are barely keeping their heads above this slum situation are rendered invisible as their struggles to secure rights of residence have only resulted in the outward expansion of the city turning them into a travelling population of commuters spending increasing amounts of time in motion from the distant peripheries to the centre. They are cut off from the logic of this current logic of space creation because the space they occupy is not yet within the ambit of 'exchangeable' or tradable space.

**Rights to shelter in the city are thus not, by any stretch, rights to properited citizenship. They are rather rights that reduce residence to remaining, as remainders, as an effectively mobile population.** The nature of space inhering in property can be read as a relationship to various forms of transitoriness and obsolescence. The ideology of flexible planning takes time to be a purely *temporal* fact, not a *social* fact, implying a static and homogenous notion of future time. However, the sort of flexible and 'speeded' up landscapes that I have been describing are suffused with a sense of time in suspension, with the sense of suspension that is the social prelude to displacement, relocation and transience in general. Indeed, in defending the rights-based development schemes such as those offering 'free' housing and rehabilitation to slum-dwellers who could prove the occupation of their shanties from a certain date in the past (which itself keeps shifting) in exchange for development rights to private developers, a prominent housing rights activist declared publicly that the scheme was agreed to in order to protect slum-dwellers from the threat of demolition. Where demolition is a constant and imminent threat, the SRA scheme suspends the slum-dweller in a space of constant anticipation, sometimes lasting an entire lifetime.

The conjugation of landscapes crafted by the sort of flexible planning process being pursued at present *hesitates* between the market and senses of place. The presence of the State, even through its absence in terms of provisioning, produces strange new worlds of subjects whose experience of time and space are caught within a series of manipulations and transformations performed on the preserved conditions of dysfunctionality, which are, in turn, transmuted into increasingly transient physical conditions. They are, in other words, caught within the space of a fundamentally speculative temporality. Within this speculative space, the temporality of planning, of modernization, of cycles of construction and destruction and the long duree of ecological time are headed for an inevitable, head-on collision.

A distinct rhetoric about built space seems to underwrite visions of the city of the future. This vision builds on normative ideas about the built

# No slum in sight but 'residents' pick up compensation

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Mumbai: In a shocking instance of official bungling, it has been revealed that 'residents' of a non-existent slum in Khar received monetary compensation in the aftermath of the 26/7 floods.

Around 80 families received compensation ranging between Rs 2,000 and Rs 5,000. Interestingly, the families had been evicted five years ago by the railway authorities from the Murthy Nagar slums, located just outside Khar station. The slums were cleared as part of the railway's expansion drive.

The Society for the Promotion of Area Resource

where is the question of paying compensation?" he asked. Local railway officials corroborated Britto's statement.

While he admitted he was not sure if the residents were at Murthy Gully on the day of the deluge, Bobdi said their names had been recommended by local Congress activists. "Also their names figure on the electoral list, therefore, they were granted compensation," he said. But officials at the suburban collectorate said the name figuring on the electoral list was not sufficient reason to be eligible for compensation. "Only those who had suffered in the deluge were eligible," said officials.

R S Billimoria, station superintendent, said the railways had kept the area clear for years now. "As soon as someone puts up a makeshift hut we immediately demolish it. During the deluge on July 26 there was no one residing on the road," said Billimoria.



'Residents' of a non-existent slum in Khar got manna from heaven

Centre (SPARC) was in charge of rehabilitating these residents. According to the NGO's founder A Jockin, the residents were chased away from Murthy Nagar and had moved to various slums in Khar.

A majority of the 80 odd families were paid Rs 5,000 each from the state government's relief fund while a few were paid between Rs 2,000 and Rs 4,000. Amongst those who signed as witnesses to the distribution of the compensation was Congress corporator from Khar, Prakash Bobdi.

The list of beneficiaries and witnesses was obtained by local social activist Edwin Britto under the Right to Information Act. He sought the information upon learning that compensation had been paid to the slumdwellers. "It was more than five years ago that the slumdwellers were evicted so

Even hawkers outside the station affirmed that there was no one there.

Meanwhile, Bobdi defended the Congress action saying the list was forwarded to the collector's office. "The officials inspected the area for three days, made inquiries and only then was the money was distributed. In fact, minister of state Baba Siddiqui inaugurated the distribution ceremony," he said.

Siddiqui, when contacted, said he had inaugurated numerous such distribution ceremonies and did not remember anything. "You should contact the authorities for the details," he said. S S Zende, collector, suburban Mumbai, also maintained that it was all hogwash.

"There is no truth in the allegations. All those who have been paid compensation were eligible for it," he said.

# Migrants give Mumbai the edge: expert

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Mumbai: Renowned economist and urban expert Nigel Harris has little patience with those who moan that slums and relentless migration are ruining Mumbai. "Bombay is unique because of its immigration, its concoction of Gujaratis, Tamils, Parsis, and others," he says. Harris, an 'economist of the city', draws comparisons with England ("a miserable little imperial country, mummified in the past") and says immigration rejuvenated it.

This melting pot of people is one of the features that make Mumbai unique. But more importantly, it is also what will make the city competitive in the global economy. Globalisation has ensured that the comparative advantage of cities and countries is now mobile. "It is carried by companies and people. That's why migration is so important, it's what will bring the next wave of technological innovation," he says.

On Thursday, urban experts, activists and others got a take on Mumbai's favourite problem. "How to compete with Shanghai?", from Harris, at a meeting organised by the Bombay Chamber of Commerce. Far from advocating an ultra-fast makeover in the form of malls and flyovers, Harris said Mumbai must exploit its uniqueness to compete.

"It has a beautiful physical environment like Hong Kong and New York, a unique history and heritage buildings that reflects this. No one travels to look at skyscrapers."

One crumb of comfort: Other cities around the world have been here, done this. With de-industrialisation setting in around the '80s, many cities around the world made the difficult transition into service centres. To do that, they had to recapture political power through

decentralisation, says Harris.

"With globalisation, the power of the national government has reduced so that cities secure their own future through their own efforts. London, now an exporter of financial services, can be anywhere in the world. It has nothing to do with England."

Indeed, Harris holds that the new type of city will not be about a location but a "junction of flows". "And the smart cities are those that plan these junctions of flows—air, road, rail, sea—in relation to each other. For example, Singapore and Barcelona have their ports close to the rail and their free trade area close to the airport."

Sounds like a new form of the Greek city-state? Perhaps. "Local authorities are becoming a new kind of political entity, a sub-national entity operating globally," he says. In London, Barcelona, Bogota and many other cities, transformation followed the strengthening of the powers of the local authority and the creation of citizen forums that charted out a vision for the city.

In Barcelona, for example, 400 agencies including NGOs were brought together to carve out a common vision for the city. Similarly, the Shanghai local government is very powerful, as are the mayors of many Latin American cities.

In fact, Shanghai's transformation over the past few years followed the Chinese government's decision to allow the city to keep 90% of its revenue for a specified number of years instead of giving it to Beijing. And the Houston municipal government has the power to extend its jurisdiction by a few miles every year. What's important though is evolving a consensus vision for the city. Most cities like Rotterdam and Barcelona created forums for evolving consensus, says Harris.

environment – the city must resemble Shanghai or Singapore and must therefore be reassembled. The non-modern and the not-yet modern – both classified in the inimical zones of the 'temporary' by high-priests of modernist planning – are slated either for preservation as signs of a completed past or for erasure as abhorrent signs of dysfunction, disorder and even disease. In their place, the city of future is sought to be endowed with homogenous, 'modern' built forms by a slew of experts. These solutions however, must tailor together ingenious legal formats together with a particular set of forms. These sartorial acts are premised on the impossibility of the coexistence of diverse experiences of city-making and inhabitation as well as a diverse built formats, apparently preferring the rise of vertical forms as neutral and desired solutions to the housing crisis. On the other hand, while liberal notions of citizenship were underwritten by the permanence of property, the only constant in the transient space of the city is an imminent sense of dispossession, which is beginning to underwrite a new form of citizenship as it were – a form of transient citizenship premised on an impermanent, speculative future.

## Ex-City

Unlike most of the other Indian metros, Mumbai's brush with the future has taken a rather convoluted turn and is expressed most succinctly in the emergent, idiosyncratic new skyline, that is being modified in some areas, one building at a time. These modifications imprint instability upon the surrounding design. As I have tried to argue, this instability is fundamentally temporal in nature. The juxtapositions of forms, old and new, lead to a reinterpretation of the landscape as a whole and bring a speculative ethos into being through literal example. Each new act of vertical expansion rubs up against a ground level reality of existing forms enabling new, speculative opportunities to arise. These manipulations of physical form, connected to the real and potential displacement of populations from their settlements, together become the organizational site of speculative activities. But the real and potential network failures – through natural disasters like the flood of July 26, 2005 or acts of terror like the serial bombings of the commuter railway networks of July 11, 2006 expose these activities as precisely speculative acts by casting light on their unsustainability. **Mumbai thus becomes exemplary as a limit case of urban re-design, using citizenship, belonging and livelihood as its currency. The connection between the built environment and belonging thus exposes the new potential for rethinking urban citizenship itself,** through a nexus of agencies belonging to the public, the private and the non-governmental sectors. These transitions and transformations, visible in the emergent urban design process are not merely extreme but clearly contain the seeds of the dystopian future of urban citizenship. The story of Mumbai's transition once again positions it as an island unto itself, within a network of new urban centres, both within and outside India rather than in relation to national development. This story thus deserves to be read alongside the specifically speculative transitions of other global cities as an act of experimenting with the temporality of the future itself in an era of globalization. For what speculation produces is a future that already becomes a past even before it hits the ground. This particular ethnography of post-industrial Mumbai therefore is a step in the direction of a broader ethnography of the transformation of the category of – the future itself in the age of speculative capital.