

Bombay's Land: Between the Relic and the Void

Concept and Installation: Neha Choksi and Kapil Gupta
Collaborators: Ashim Ahluwalia, Shumona Goel
Film titles: Line to Scaffolding, Found Green, Absent Decay

For the Venice Biennale exhibition space, UDRI has commissioned us, a group consisting of an architect, an artist, and two film-makers, to develop a poetic and productive engagement with the city of Mumbai. The project has been conceptualized by Neha Choksi and Kapil Gupta and is a collaboration between Ashim Ahluwalia (film-maker), Neha Choksi (artist), Shumona Goel (film-maker) and Kapil Gupta (architect). The project involves three films shot in Mumbai that are projected in and around an installation in Venice. The aim of our efforts is to promote an understanding of the discrepancies between and the felicities of prescribed official land-use policy and actual practice at various scales in the city of Mumbai.

Concept

The starting point is the Bombay Municipal Corporation's Development Plan and the citizen's desire for useful spaces and access to such whether, public or private.

The Development Plan of Mumbai is a land-use plan for growth management. The first Development Plan for Bombay was produced in 1964, and sanctioned in 1967, by the Greater Mumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) under the statutory authority of the Maharashtra Regional Town Planning Authority. It was updated in the 1981 but only ratified in 1993. This plan has been extended to serve up to 2013 as the guide for the spatial development of Mumbai. The Development Plan consists of 127 sheets showing the zoning of Mumbai and the reservations, designations, allocations, etc.

The Development Plan is understood as an imperfect synchronic map of overlaid intentions, loopholes, magical hopes and more. The plan legitimizes and overlooks "uncivic" intentions of all agents in the city, from large developers, who pay for changes in the development plan's prescribed land uses, to small-scale squatters, from middle-class balcony extensions to large-scale urban slum-dwellers, who account for 50% of the city's population and whose settlements are voids in the map; it reveals both what the city is, is not, and what it escapes becoming. It does not help that the plans proposals itself are variously ungenerous, unrealistic, or complete fantasy.

Although there is nothing novel about misreading a map, the extent of citizen misbehavior has provoked us, acting as *agent-provocateurs*, to engage on the same level with BMC's Development Plan and other "maps". We are obstinately optimistic in being invigorated by this land-use plan. We want to participate in the effort of misreading, to see how the various competing agents and agencies in the city mobilize when we choose to misread for a rather simple purpose—to create space. Real space, psychic space, elastic space. In the spirit of the city we are honoring the development plan by willfully and systematically misreading it in an effort to note the relics and voids, fiascos, failures and efflorescence of effort and imagination.

All Mumbaikars know that the island of Bombay is the site of a continuous and dynamic negotiation. The collaborative project defies the logic of the plan as a prescriptive tool for land management and reveals the limitations of unilateral land-use planning. The films will record the poetic, invigorating and enraging evidence of these competing agencies and the resulting silences, voids and relics in Bombay's built environment.

To promote this invention, redefinition or discovery of space, the artists have created, performed and proposed the following, all of which are documented in film or digital video. The misengagements and misreadings of the city produce a poetic and psychic understanding of the city.

A.Line into Scaffolding,

B.Found Green,

C.Absent Decay



BOMBAY DEVELOPMENT PLAN 1991-2011



Line into Scaffolding
Installation and Film (at Banganga)



The conceit of the installation starts with a line drawn in the BMC Development Plan at 1:2500 scale. At 1:1 scale, this magically gets assigned a 1.2 meter dimension. It is an act of childlike misbehavior to assign to a map-line an actual dimension in the real-world when everyone knows that the convention is to set it down to represent a dimensionless Euclidean line that cleanly cleaves the land into parts. The line is the pressure valve and expansion joint in our search for space. We are the citizen, the absurd *agent provocateur*, who thinks she has found a linear loophole. She gets whatever her heart most desires from her 1.2 meter wide plot of pure abstracted space—the surplus thrown off by conventional representational inefficiencies of the hand-drawn Bombay Municipal Development Plan.

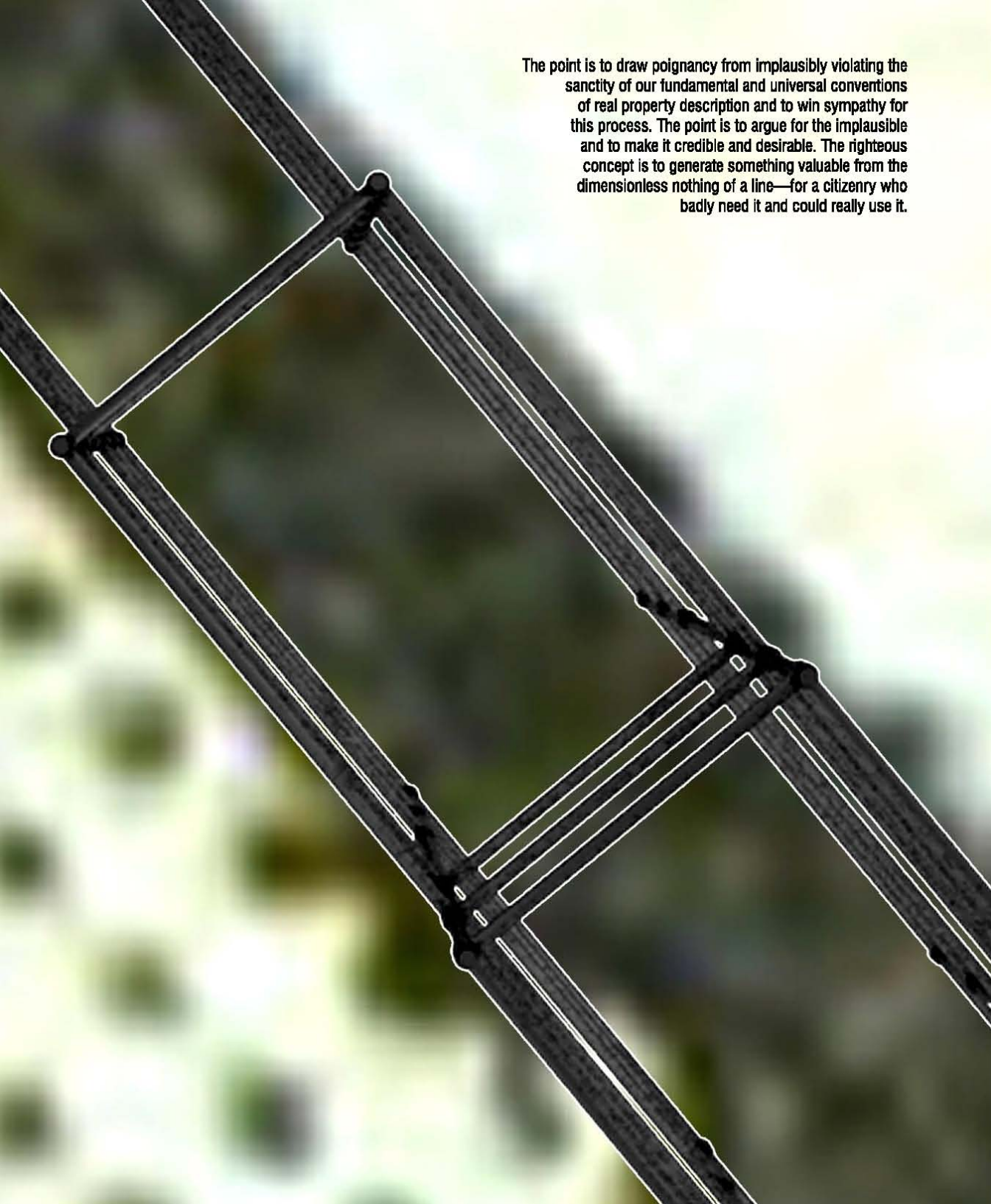


This abstract misreading of the map takes shape in the figure of one large variable height 40 x 4 feet scaffolding that has a single ramped surface weaving up and down, in and about the volume created by the scaffolding. This construction is deployed on a DP line in the Banganga area. The BMC line in plan acquires volume in space and is activated by the intersecting efforts and resistances of the builders, users, onlookers, supporters and detractors. The scaffolding is indicative of space as a degraded building—the scaffold is a tool that reflects what is being done, the building of space, much like music scales, relate to the finished composition.



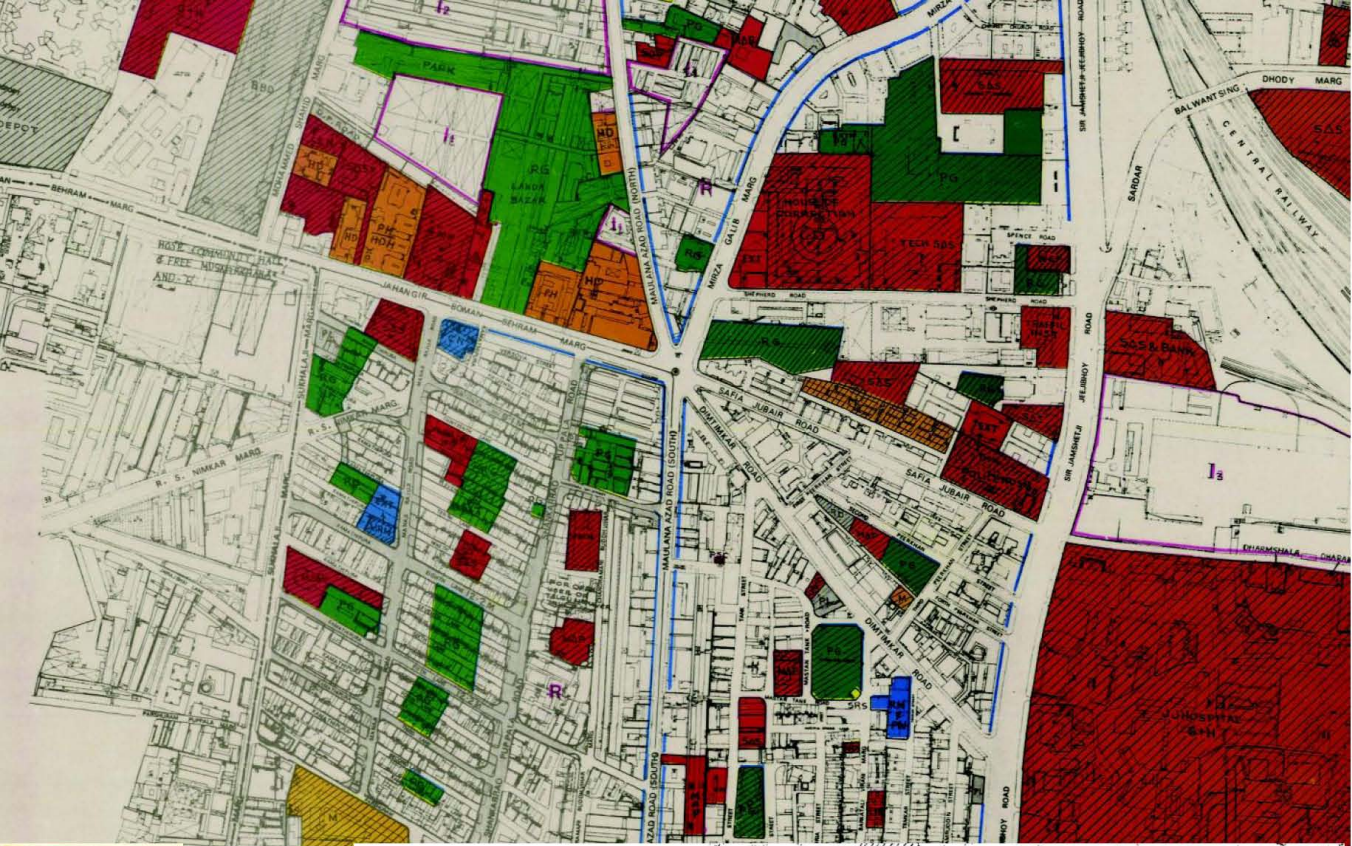
From the moment of negotiation to the construction, from its deployment in the face of local curiosity and official resistance, to the dismantling of the structure, film will document the sights and sounds of the architectural intervention and the larger context of Banganga. The film will include digressions on the site, given that the site encompasses vast cultural, economic, spatial and architectural diversity, running the gamut from the historic water tank and temple complex dating from the 13th century, old 19th century settlements and 21st century high rise towers, all within a couple of a hundred meters from the sea.

The point is to draw poignancy from implausibly violating the sanctity of our fundamental and universal conventions of real property description and to win sympathy for this process. The point is to argue for the implausible and to make it credible and desirable. The righteous concept is to generate something valuable from the dimensionless nothing of a line—for a citizenry who badly need it and could really use it.



Found Green

This film is an earnestly absurdist meditation on one type of void in the city plan: the expected existence of greenery in the green-spaces marked on the BMC's development plan. The bulk of the film unfolds as a combination search and adventure film and follows a young Mumbaikar enroute to locating the spots marked as RG, recreation ground, or PG, playing ground, on the Development plan. His desires find relief in the form of picnicking under an tamarind tree imprisoned in a workshop, hyper-playing among ghost trees on a playground, and strewing saplings in the wood bazaar, part of the old arab horse stalls. Other PGs and RGs in the Nagpada area, photos of Mumbaikars spending leisure time in local gardens over the last 50 years, interviews with locals and with BMC botanists also included.



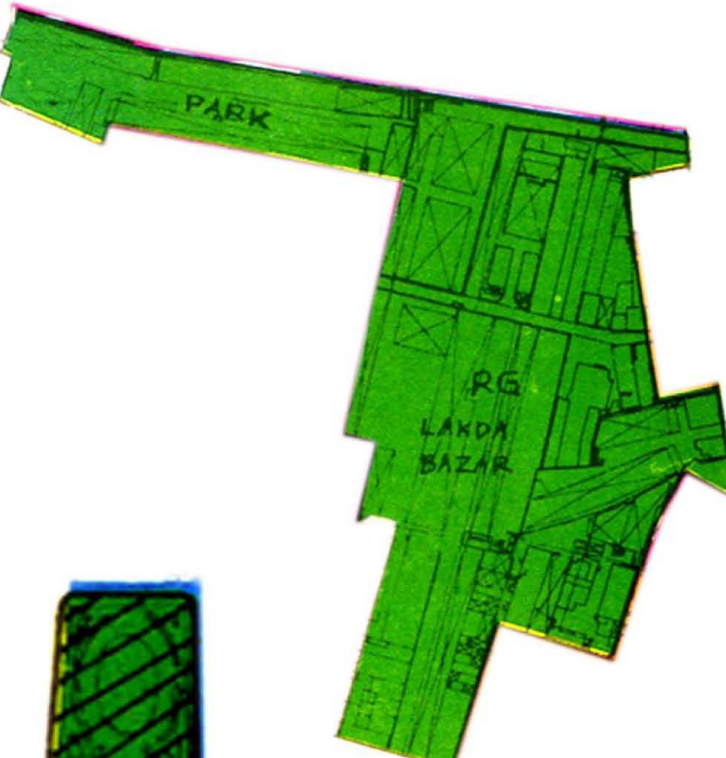
REFERENCES	
1) MUNICIPAL PRIMARY SCHOOLS	
2) PRIVATE PRIMARY SCHOOLS	
3) SECONDARY SCHOOLS	
4) COLLEGE	
5) HOSPITALS/CLINICS	
6) NURSING HOSPITAL	
7) GOVERNMENT HOSPITAL	
8) MUNICIPAL/PRIVATE NURSING HOME	
9) MUNICIPAL HEALTH CENTRE/CLINIC	
10) MUNICIPAL DISPENSARY	
11) GOVERNMENT DISPENSARY	
12) MUNICIPAL OFFICE/FORM DUTY OFFICE	
13) GOVERNMENT OFFICE	
14) PUBLIC SANITARY CONVENIENCE/TOILETS	
15) LIBRARY	
16) PUBLIC HALL/STUDENT HOSTEL	
17) OPEN AIR THEATRE	
18) PUBLIC GROUND	
19) FIRE STATION/STATION/STREET PRESS	
20) POST OFFICE/POST AND TELEGRAPH OFFICE	
21) POLICE STATION	
22) CATTLE ROAD	
23) TELEPHONE EXCHANGE/SERVICE CENTRE	
24) POLICE QUARTERS/RESIDENCE	
25) NURSING DISPENSARY	
26) ENTERTAINMENT	
27) MUNICIPAL/PRIVATE/RETAIL MARKET	
28) MUNICIPAL OPEN MARKET	
29) CINEMA THEATRE	
30) BRASS THEATRE	
31) SHOPPING CENTRE	
32) SHOPPING AND WHOLESALE MARKET	
33) CHILDREN'S THEATRE & MUSEUM	
34) MUNICIPAL ENTERTAINMENT HOSTEL	
35) BRASS THEATRE/ENTERTAINMENT HOSTEL	
36) MUNICIPAL LANDFILL/REFUSE/STATION	
37) MUNICIPAL/PRIVATE/STREET BAZAR	
38) GOVERNMENT/PRIVATE/STREET BAZAR	
39) BRASS THEATRE	
40) REFUSE	
41) CATTLE/STATION/STREET	
42) PUBLIC STATION	
43) SANITARY REFUSE SHED	
44) REFUSE STATION	
45) B.E.S.T. BUS DEPOSIT STATION	
46) REFUSE STATION	
47) PUBLIC LIFT / PETROL PUMP	
48) CAR PARK	
49) MUNICIPAL ROAD MARKET	
50) MUNICIPAL TRANSPORT STATION	
51) POLICE TERMINAL	
52) PARK	
53) PLAY GROUND	
54) RECREATION GROUND	
55) GARDEN	
56) FISHING GROUND	
57) FISH DRIVING GROUND	
58) HOLDING FOR DISPOSABLES	
59) PUBLIC HOLDING/STREET HOLDING	
60) MUNICIPAL HOLDING	
61) GOVERNMENT HOLDING/STREET HOLDING	
62) RESIDENTIAL ZONE	
63) COMMERCIAL ZONE	
64) INDUSTRIAL ZONE	
65) INDUSTRIAL ZONE	
66) INDUSTRIAL ZONE	
67) URBAN INDUSTRIAL ZONE	
68) T. T. ROAD / AIRPORT	
69) NO DEVELOPMENT ZONE	
70) ROAD USE	
71) STREET ON ALTERNATIVE COMPLEX	
72) STREET ROAD	
73) STREET ROAD	
74) ROAD TO BE WIDENED	
75) STREET ROAD	
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Vahanvati Warehouse



Surti Mohallah



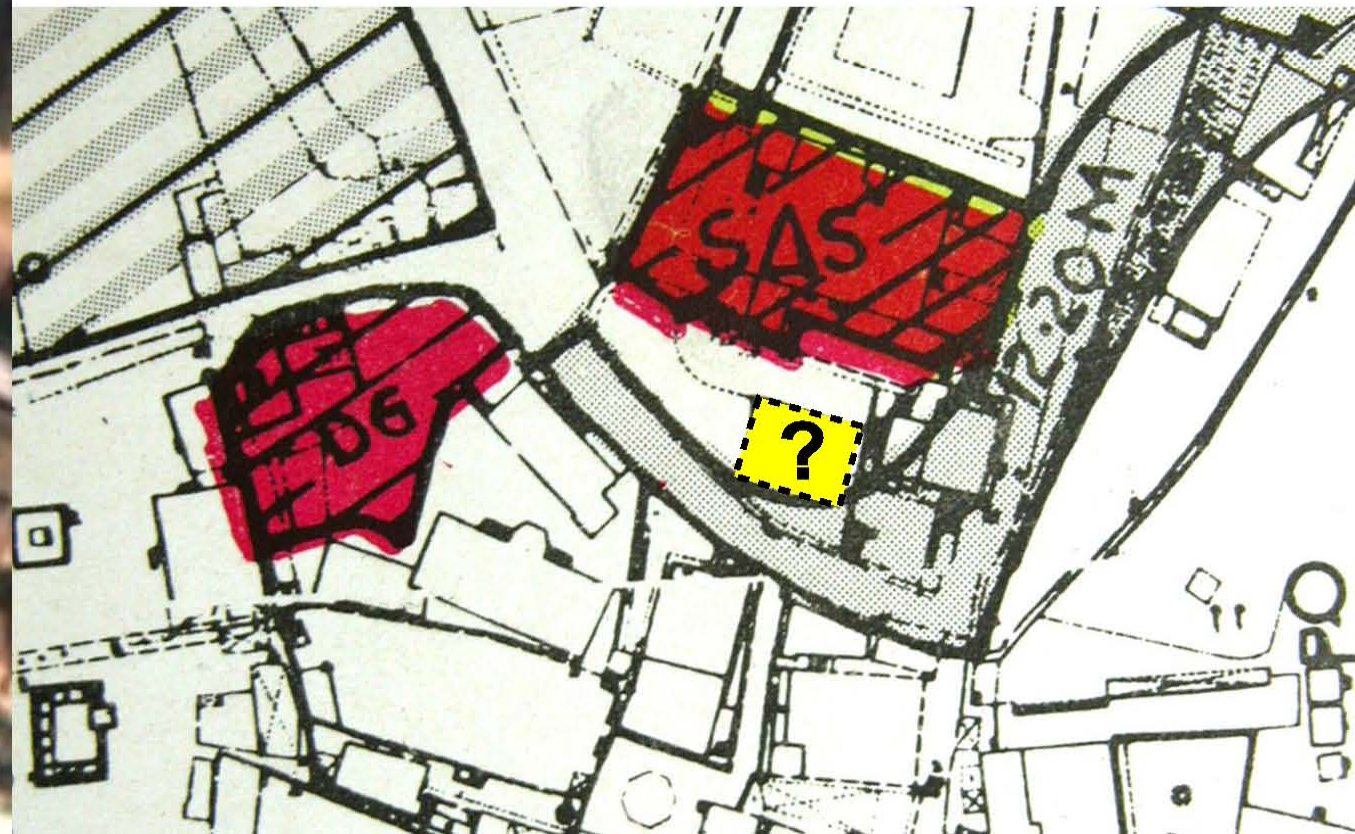
Lakda Bazaar





Absent Decay

These urban relics are the partially built buildings, most often dark unfinished concrete structures, standing as mute markers of developer greed, that dot the Bombay landscape. Some have been there for as long as 40 years, hallowed in legal limbo, destined to be poised at the point of becoming and decaying. These structures are illegally built or have exceeded their legal allotment of space (according to the floor-space index) and are now occupied by squatters in part and unoccupied in others. The DP never included them and never will, since they remain beautifully illegal. The building documented in the 16 mm film is a smaller 25-year old structure with a few stray squatters living among the granite and marble flooring that has not yet been cemented down.





Cities: Society and Architecture

The Urban Design Research Institute, Mumbai was invited to participate in the 10. International Architecture Exhibition on 'Cities: architecture and society' at the La Biennale di Venezia. The exhibition, curated by Richard Burdett, will run from 10th September to 19 November 2006 will take place in the main Corderie at the Arsenale and within the Padiglione Italia in the Biennale Giardini.

The participation of the UDRI at La Biennale di Venezia 2006 appeared in 2 sections of the Biennale. Bombay is one of the cities in the Corderie dell'Arsenale, which is dedicated to the urban experiences of sixteen world cities in four different continents. In the Padiglione Italia where 13 international research institutions will present urban research work from different parts of the world, the UDRI has commissioned artists, architects and film makers to develop an installation that will present a poetic and productive engagement with the city of Mumbai.

The Indian entry to the 10. International Architecture Exhibition at Venice engages both the discrepancies between and the felicities of prescribed official land-use policy and actual practice on the scale of the personal user, developer, city planner, and the larger all-India political concerns. The UDRI exhibition presents the poetic, invigorating and enraging evidence of these competing agencies and the resulting silences, voids and relics in Bombay's built environment. To honor the participatory ideal of democracy, and to acknowledge the multiple oscillations of Mumbai from entopic to ectopic states, the UDRI, will undertake two projects: a joint film and built-space installation and an essay catalog, titled 'Mumbai Reader' in the format of a multi-media CD and limited edition printing. The installation will examine the silences, voids and relics of Mumbai from various points of views, scales and evidence and the intention of the Mumbai Reader is to represent current thinking about the city covering the range of perception and readings of the city.

UDRI Executive Committee

Shirin Bharucha (Managing Trustee), Sharada Dwivedi, Jamsheed Kanga, Kamu Iyer, Rahul Mehrotra, Nayana Kathpalia, Anuj Bhagwati, Abha Narain Lambah, Kapil Gupta, Prasad Shetty, Rahul Gore, Sameep Padora, Shumona Goel, Pankaj Joshi (Executive Director).

UDRI Biennale Team

Rahul Mehrotra, Pankaj Joshi, Prasad Shetty, Benita Menezes, Kapil Gupta, Neha Choksi, Shumona Goel, Samir Parker.

Padiglione Italia

Installation and Film

Concept and design: Neha Choksi (Artist), Kapil Gupta in collaboration with Ashim Ahluwalia (Film maker), Shumona Goel, (Film maker)
Installation Production: Kapil Gupta, Advait Potnis, Udayan Mazumdar, Santosh Thorat, Smita Khanna.

Film Direction and Production

Line into Scaffold, Ashim Ahluwalia, Kapil Gupta
Absent Decay, Neha Choksi, Shumona Goel, Niti Gaurisaria
Found Green, Neha Choksi, Shumona Goel, Niti Gaurisaria

Catalogue: Mumbai Reader

Compilation: Rahul Mehrotra, Pankaj Joshi, Prasad Shetty, Benita Menezes

Content: Bina C. Balakrishnan, Nauzer Bharucha, Shirin Bharucha, Nayana Kathpalia, Sunder Burra and Devika Mahadevan, Shyam Chainani, Preeti Chopra, Vidhyadhar Date, Sharada Dwivedi, Rupali Gupte, Darryl D'Monte, Dilip D'Souza, Andrea Hagn, Shalini Devi Holkar, Sameera Khan, Meena Menon & Neera Adarkar, Vinit Mukhija, Rahul Mehrotra, Shilpa Phadke, Shirish Patel, Anirudh Paul, V K Phatak, Sameera Khan, Shilpa Ranade, Walter Rossa, Vyjanthi Rao, Abhay Sardesai, Kalpana Sharma, Brinda Somaya, Rahul Srivastava, Bombay First McKinsey Report, Kamla Raheja Vidyaniidhi Institute of Architecture, Prasad Shetty, Pankaj Joshi,

Designed + Produced: Samir Parker
Layouts: Neelima P. Aryan
Pre press: Rajinder Mongia, Radharani Ray

Corderie dell'Arsenale

City Potraits

Curator: Richard Burdett
Design: Cibic & Partners, Fragile
Contents: UDRI Research and Resource Centre, Mumbai

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City Projects

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Photos

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Additional Information Sourced

Times of India, Economic Times, Indian Express, DNA, Fact Book of Mumbai, Bombay First, Census Data 2001, Directorate of Census Operations, Bombay The cities Within, Banganga