

Architecture and Amnesia in Indian Modernity

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Vernacular architecture remembers by forgetting; official architecture forgets by remembering.

I. Memories of Architectural Illiteracy

I grew up in Mumbai in the 1950's and lived there without any significant breaks until 1967.

I was brought up in a middle-class family with upper-middle-class aspirations and opportunities, including an early education in one of the premier Jesuit schools in the city. I grew up speaking English most of the time, Tamil within my family world, Hindi on the streets, Marathi and Gujarati from time to time. The rented family flat was five buildings from Churchgate Station and the headquarters of the Western Railway in one direction, and in the opposite direction, five buildings from Marine Drive, and thus from the Arabian Sea.

Here is a list of some of what I did not know about my built environment in my early Mumbai years, even as I was reading everything from Steinbeck to Updike, Eliot to Camus, and Henry Miller to J.D. Salinger along with large amounts of trash from such greats as Erle Stanley Gardner and Harold Robbins, and the incomparable Traveller's Companion series of erotic books, known suggestively to us as T.C.'s. I did not know that the great monuments

that I passed several times a week, such as the now infamous Victoria Terminus, the Municipality Building and the Headquarters of the Western Railways, were extraordinary examples of the British Colonial Gothic. I did not know what the word “Saracenic”, either Indo or otherwise, meant. Because young Hindu boys did not hang out much in the stretch of Mumbai that goes from Crawford Market to Byculla, and is loosely called Mohamed Ali Road, I hardly knew what a mosque looked like, save for the fact that there was one important mosque between the Marine Lines Railways Station and my school, St. Xavier’s High School, in Dhobi Talao. I did not know what a Talao really was and certainly had no idea that this simple word indexed a vast watery terrain beneath my feet, a world Dilip Da Cunha and Anuradha Mathur have now brilliantly revealed and analyzed. Although our postal address sometimes referred to Churchgate Reclamation and other records referred to Backbay Reclamation, I had only the dimmest idea of what had been reclaimed and from whom in my neighbourhood. I lived near Marine Drive, very close to the Eros, Metro and Regal cinema theatres and the beautiful buildings surrounding the Oval Maidan, but I had no clue about Art Deco, either as a word or as an architectural style. I went to College at Elphinstone College, hardly a half-mile from my home, hardly aware that I was in the heart of another extraordinary architectural zone, marked by the famous “Kala Ghoda Statue”. It was only when I began to read the collected works of my friend Rahul Mehrotra and others that I realized that I had been cutting classes, chasing girls (or, more truthfully, ideas about girls) and wasting my time in one of the richest architectural spaces of the colonial world. I did not know that I lived in a small part of Bombay, what came to be called “South Bombay”. I did not know that there was any other Bombay, beyond say Matunga or Bandra

or Mazagaon. Beyond that, in my mind, lay a hazy mix of quasi-villages, reservoirs, beaches and picnic destinations, not really part of the city at all.

In short, my ignorance about my built environment was monumental. And my lecture today is a belated effort to put this ignorance in a slightly fuller context by asking whether there is something more to my ignorance than lack of curiosity, poor history textbooks, a typical postcolonial interest in everything except one's own environment and the universal tendency to demand little more than comfort from one's customary haunts and spaces. Rather than blame myself, or blame Canada, I will try to hide in plain sight and blame architecture itself. So that is what I propose to do today but I ask your indulgence because as I will show in my conclusion, there is something more to my argument than mere complaint.

II. Architecture and Modernity

Though architectural historians will rightly remind us that architecture has a long history, they are unlikely to deny that there is a special relationship between architecture and modernity, if we understand modernity as a project and not simply as a period. This is especially the case since architects and architectural critics, first in the United States recognized in the work of Venturi and others a sensibility that was distinctly post-modern. In recognizing this, they were recognizing that modernity as an architectural project had come to some sort of conclusion, even if only for the moment.

The inner relationship between architecture and modernity has been noted both by scholars in the field and by significant others, such as Walter Benjamin, Henri Lefebvre, and Lewis Mumford, whose common preoccupation was with the city. Thus it is in urban life that we find one important link between architecture and modernity. Indeed, it is today difficult to think of architecture outside the ambit of the city, though rural planning, environmental design and landscape architecture have made important moves to complicate and contest this picture. Still, the fact is that modern architecture usually imagines itself in a crowded context of other designed buildings and objects, such as roads, rails and below-ground infrastructure, which generally is rooted in the urban imaginary. What are the key elements of this link?

The first was remarked by Walter Benjamin in his essay on Paris and the Arcades, in which he shows how the re-making of Paris was critically tied to technologies of glass, steel and other materials whose availability is a distinct product of industrial modernity. For Benjamin, this meant that the very technology which gave industrial capitalism its special qualities was also vital to the aesthetics and economics of modern Paris and that the architecture of Hausmannian Paris was based on the deployment of materials in a manner which facilitated the typical sites of bourgeois life, such as the train station, the department store and the arcade, along with the visual symmetry of the boulevards, the parks and the public spaces of the city.

One could take this insight to the built history of Mumbai and look at the way in which the railroads, warehouses, harbours and the housing complexities of Mumbai's industrial

opening to the rest of the world were massively determined by the Bombay Port Trust. To this day, the BPT, through its control of a variety of spaces, routes and infrastructures tied to the Eastern Harbour of Mumbai, links Mumbai's industrial history to its built form and urban logic. In a later period, the availability of reinforced concrete and the global spread of the art deco building style had a massive influence on many parts of Mumbai in the 1930's and 1940's, and is visible today in many parts of South Mumbai, especially on Marine Drive, Oval Maidan and various parts of Backbay reclamation. Both in Mumbai and in cities throughout the world, the technology of elevators transformed the height of buildings and the look of the emerging skylines of the first half of the twentieth century.

In more recent times, remarkable developments in the technology of glass and other materials such as stainless steel and aluminium have changed forever the possibilities of the skin of buildings in cities such as New York, and indeed have created whole design businesses wholly devoted to the skins of tall buildings.

As important as the technologies of construction are the technologies of destruction, which have grown increasingly sophisticated in the last two centuries. The taking down of buildings, neighbourhoods and whole quarters of cities was most famously exemplified by Hausmann in Paris but the technologies of destruction are often less sudden and more insidious. The gradual but officially permitted deterioration of infrastructure by city and state governments has been forcefully documented by Naomi Klein in her recent work on "catastrophe capitalism". Warfare remains a major and obvious technology of urban destruction with a long history. Its industrial moment has been forcefully analysed by Paul

Virilio (among others) and in Virilio's work we can also see that in war accident and goal, contingency and necessity, damage and collateral damage, are not neatly separable.

A major global scene of organized urban destruction is to be found in the myriad projects of slum demolition which have produced an enormous record of displacement, destruction and despair, which by its nature does not yield solutions to the problems of the urban poor in the world's large cities. Instead slum demolition draws upon the low-end technologies of construction, such as tractors and industrial shovels to conduct low-level urban warfare against slum dwellers from Lagos to Manila. Although slum-demolition campaigns cannot be described as projects of architecture, they are certainly tied by with various utopias of urban planning and with the systematic fantasy of changing urban skylines, rebranding cities and attracting global investment which forms a key part of the climate for celebrity architecture. Mumbai is a posterchild for this process, and Dharavi is the eye of this storm.

The second link between architecture and modernity is to be found in the growing dominance of visibility in modern life, also a familiar theme in much more social and critical theory (Abbas; Jay; Mitchell). Of all the components of the human sensorium, architecture relies critically on vision. This is expressed in the architectural preoccupation with light, colour, spatial movement, degrees of transparency and privacy, the balance of views from within and outside the skin of an architectural object and the ease or difficulty with which such an objects achieves its legibility.

The architectural plan, model or design is increasingly an autonomous object, judged by its own criteria of beauty and graphicality (as with the drawings of Zaha Hadid) and in the case

of some of the most important architectural designs, the plans never produce buildings and thus become part of an autonomous order of seeable and discussable objects of visual engagement. Architectural exhibitions thrive in this space of architecture without construction. The large industry of architectural museums, exhibitions, archives and books provide a circulating visual world within which the actual built objects which architecture produces are incarnations rather than mere examples. Further more, to the trained architectural observers, critics and avant-garde consumers, this visual archive and vocabulary serves to lend a magical aura to the more routinized architecture of public projects, planned developments and other more boring built forms. Thus all new buildings acquire some of the aura of visual enchantment provided by the plans, visions and utopias of the graphic architectural imagination. In this sense the borrowing of small postmodern features (such as the arch) by builders of large private homes in the 1970's and 1980's maybe seen as kitschy but in fact they could also be seen as a form of cultural taxation being paid by lowbrow developers to high-end architectural auteurs.

The language and aesthetics of the skyline are now a routine part of the meta-discourse of architects as well as of literate architectural publics, in regard to the worlds aspiring megacities, such as Sydney, Kuala Lumpur, Shanghai, Dubai and some changing older cities such as Mumbai, Hong Kong and Chicago. The skyline is an interesting imaginary which indexes the intersection of the architectural and the visual features of the modern imaginary, for it indicates a special, two-dimensional point of view, which is also available in the trompe de l'oeil exteriors of many new tall buildings while incorporating a sort of retro-visibility which

rejects the literalist aspirations of three-dimensional depth. The idea of the skyline, recalling the aesthetics of photography and the post-card, streamlines the city, and in the case of cities like Mumbai, it is a useful tool to draw the eye away from the ground, the depth and the sprawl in which all of Mumbai's undesigned poverty and chaos is contained. The skyline simplifies, beautifies, elevates and sublimates the actual mess of the street-level in many cities.

As a visual convention, the idea of the skyline also provides a counterforce to the other dominant visual trope of modernist architecture, which is the trope of the cinema (Abbas, also the Cinematic City). There is no doubt that cinema and city have a many layers of complicity in modern life, rooted in the kinetic energy of cities, in the compressed and multiplex points of view that cinema enables, in the anonymous sociality that characterizes both the cinema hall and the city, and perhaps in the deep experience of vicarious viewing that the urban walker and the urban film-goer both share. Cities have lent their kinetic properties to the moving image and the filmic apparatus has allowed films to deepen the urban sense of the cut, the frame and the dissolve, which also characterize the visual experiences of urban life.

Yet the skyline offers a counterpoint to the kinetic energy of the cinema, for it resists plot with character, depth and perspective with flatness and surface, and the human energy of cities with the serenity of buildings cut out against the sky. The visuality of the skyline brings the city to a standstill and rids it of its human population, returning the city to earlier ideas of landscape which thrive on the absence of human beings. Of course, many films,

especially science-fiction or fantasy films, play with such de-population effects and in so doing exploit the inner contradiction between the static skyline and the moving image of the city.

In all these ways, the city is inextricably linked with the visual order of modernity, and with its ideas of movement, point of view, memory and sociality. The modern city may be regarded as a constant negotiation between **points of view** and forms of experience which share with the visual order the sense of multiplicities of perspective, different orders of transparency and pluralities of depth which are affected by the moving purposes of the viewer. Architecture, whose primary future is to imagine something where there was previously something else, is the primary professional custodian of the visual archive of urban possibilities. Yet, it is also the site of the erasure of these possibilities, as I shall soon argue.

The final and perhaps most subtle link between architecture and modernity is their shared preoccupation with social life as a form of life. Although thinkers as far back as Aristotle had noted the fundamental association of humanity with sociality, the preoccupation with sociality as a complex and fundamental feature of humanity is really a product of the 19th century and takes its leads from such great thinkers as Marx, Freud and Nietzsche, in this as in so many other matters. The birth of the social sciences in the nineteenth century is fundamentally concerned with the possibilities of sociality after the technological and political revolutions of the nineteenth century, and is evident in the preoccupation with “normality” (viz. Canguilhem), social competitiveness (Spencer), libidinal economies

(Freud), social morality (Durkheim) and crowd behaviour (le Bon), which continues well into the twentieth century, in such varied thinkers as Simmel, Cooley, Mead, Mauss and others, who tried to understanding the bonds of self and other through the lens of interaction, public etiquette and reciprocity. Architecture participates in this discourse primarily through the work of architectural criticism, which is all about space, design and liveability. This link becomes clear when we look at the problems of nationalism and memory.

III. Nationalism and Memory

Modernity and nationalism have a shared ambivalence about memory. Since they are both projects of and for the future, they are both necessarily selective about their interest in memory. Modernity thrives on its self-understanding as a project of rupture and of newness and industrial modernity is especially aware that its reason for being is tied up with a reduced reliance on historical and collective memory. Modernity, in its most recent and Western forms is inherently tied up with ideas about progress, change and innovation, as well as its inherent cosmopolitanism, which is ideologically reflected in the idea that historical pasts tend to be local, parochial and partial, where modernity aspires to universal, general and total. Of course, in our present awareness that modernity is itself multiple, variable, historical and parochial, we have tended to forget that this is a victory of history over ideology and is at odds with the essentially future-centred nature of the project of modernity. Indeed, what Habermas famously called "the incomplete project" of modernity is substantially a result of the stubborn persistence of pastness in collective life. At the same time, modernity is always aware of its own historicity and the discourses of

modernity, in all their glorious multiplicity today, especially in the age of post-universalism, do not deny their debts to tradition. After a brief dualistic honeymoon under the spell of modernization theory, tradition is no longer seen as the other of tradition but as a special interlocutor of tradition, which produces hybrid modernities, temporalities and futurities. Thus, the relationship of forgetting and remembering is not so simple and unilinear as it once appeared to be in the ideologies of modernity.

This is even more so in regard to nationalism. In a long and line of thinking from Ernest Renan to Ernest Gellner, Benedict Anderson and many other students of nationalism, it has been pointed out that the work of forgetting is as important to most nationalisms as is the work of remembering. Nevertheless, the literature on nationalism is much richer about the social mechanisms of collective memory than it is about the collective work of forgetting. Much excellent work, both local and comparative, has been done on the ways in which selective remembering is central to the pedagogy of nationalism. Here the disciplines of history, archaeology and philology have played especially important roles, and on the material side so have monuments, mausoleums and many other forms of public architecture. This vast literature on how nationalism functions as a selective pedagogical project is so large as to require little reference here today. It is furthermore clear that architecture in this context is a cousin of archaeology, for as the latter unearths material histories that can be summoned as part of the narratives of particular nationalist historiographies, likewise public architecture has always played a vital role in defining and refining the popular understandings of what nationhood is about. Architecture

accomplishes this task of remembering in at least two distinct ways. One is through its role in drawing new nations into a common vocabulary of material presence in the design of major public buildings, airports, military installations, dams, highways, social housing etc, which usually reference one or other kind of metropolitan model. Colonial architecture is a fascinating example in this regard since it has the task of bridging the grandeur of the metropolis with the peculiarities of the colonial habitat and the hypocrisies of colonial rule.

But much less is known about the ways in which forgetting works as part of the project of nationalism. Most of the available cases see the complex work of forgetting in a zero-sum memory ecology, a sort of hydraulic example, in which the selection of something to remember is an automatic and mechanical lever to erase or forget something else, which is less desirable to the nationalist project, usually some subaltern or minority memory, some trace of violence or repression or some site of national shame, defeat or monstrosity. On the whole, forgetting as a laborious social project has either been treated in this mechanical way, as a by-product of the project of remembering or, in a few cases, in some sort of psychoanalytic vocabulary which does not yield much more light on the problem (Zizek; XXX).

This is not the occasion for re-opening the grand question of how various nationalist projects undertake the on-going and always incomplete work of forgetting through which the virtues of the nationalist imaginary must be sustained. I will focus on architecture, as one bridge between nationalism and modernity, and that too with a focus on India, in order to explore the problem of amnesia as a key feature of nationalist modernity. In my

conclusion I will speculate a bit on how central architecture is to this project and the implications of the contributions of architecture to the project of collective forgetting.

IV. Architecture and Amnesia

It is hardly a matter of controversy that architecture in the era of nationalism plays a central role in the project of nation-building. Indeed it is a central technique in the making of national space. Architecture, in its monumental variety, is a vital part of being seen as a state (thus complementing practices such as the census, state ethnographies and land surveys which enact the business of “seeing like a state”). Indeed what in the spirit of Henri Lefebvre we might describe as the nation-space is hardly imaginable without the work of architecture. The radical modernist versions of this link are to be found in capitals like Brasilia, which monumentalize architecture almost more than they realize the vision of the state. Indeed, what gives places like Brasilia, and their quasi-counterparts like Chandigarh their eerie quality is not just the abstract brutality of their designs but the very fact that they seem destined to be unoccupied. Their lack of organic roots and the elimination of the chaos of the past render them into mausoleums, places of death and silence rather than of a populated and convivial future. Other national capitals, like Paris, Beijing, New Delhi and Cairo, are far more typical and represent sites where architecture seeks to impose the modernist national image of space onto prior living histories by framing, restructuring and re-inflecting key structures, thoroughfares, plazas, monuments and other public places, simultaneously annexing pre-nationalist memories and framing them in the vision of some form of spatial futurity. Haussmann’s Paris perhaps best catches this project of remaking.

Yet other national spaces are explicitly concerned to celebrate and restore select aspects of heritage, sometimes colonial, sometimes pre-colonial, sometimes sites of loss and war, sometimes sites of victory and liberation.

In the case of India, modern architecture, especially in the classical early nationalist styles of Charles Correa, Balkrishna Doshi, Raj Rewal and others, never fails to reference India's past, often by drawing on a pool of forms, materials, and strategies which are distinctly classical, such as the mandala, the chakra, and the combination of water, trees and shade to evoke some special forms of Indian rusticity. Needless, this early nationalist architecture is at pains to avoid the kitschiness of Hindu temples or the chaos of the Indian bazaar, electing instead the simplicity and silence of an abstract, quasi-Hindu metaphysics which seeks emptiness and solitude in the midst of India's heat and dust.

In cities like Mumbai and Calcutta, the British colonial presence is the dominating presence and the genuine charms of Indo-Saracenic style make it impossible to ignore the colonial past, just as in Delhi the deep history of Muslim rule is deeply wired into the built environment. Smaller cities like Ahmedabad, Bhopal, and Bangalore offer more unfettered occasions for the modernist imagination, less cluttered by the constant presence of colonial modernity.

It is important to note at this point that my reflections on forgetting through architecture are intimately inspired and connected to Ackbar Abbas' brilliant insights into the nature of architecture in Hong Kong, an analysis which revolves around his idea of "disappearance" as a political and aesthetic reality, which builds on the work of Paul Virilio and Walter

Benjamin. This is not the occasion for an extended summary of Abbas' delicate unravelling of the idea of disappearance, and his rich demonstration of the fact that "disappearance" is a heterogeneous and multi-layered phenomenon, produced by constant building and re-building, the unintended consequences of efforts to conserve Hong Kong's various pasts, the openness of the city to a multiplicity of architectural styles and signatures and to the presence of historical narratives about democracy and freedom that make certain subjects appear and disappear simultaneously. In Abbas' argument, the logic of disappearance also thrives on the affinities and oppositions between architecture and cinema which deploy motion and fixity in ways that contribute to the systematic gap (or what he calls hysteresis) between the city and its representations.

My own sense of the logic of forgetting through architecture is indebted to Abbas' style of analysis though my substantive argument is a bit different though complementary. I begin by repeating that forgetting is not the simple obverse of remembering and that architecture does not induce amnesia simply by its physical incursions, or by simply "blocking the view" so that one kind of history is just rendered invisible by the interposition of another in our spatial imaginations. The ecology of forgetting is rather more complex and it works something like this.

When something significant is added to the built environment, it certainly carries with it messages about the site, the builder, the architect, the context, the audience and the pedagogy that the building implies or intends. In vernacular architecture, all these messages are typically tacit, the accretion of messages is slow and subterranean, semiotic comfort is

prized above disturbance and spatial meaning appears in being rather than in seeing.

Monumental architecture is exactly the opposite in its effects and logics, working as it does through hyper-visibility, through the pressure to be seen rather than just to be inhabited, and by the obvious efforts to make history in and through space. The architecture of the urban planner or designer seeks to find common ground between these two extremes and seeks to be arresting without being discomforting. Naturally, this balancing act is not always successful, as one or other impulse tends to win. Today's monumental architecture, the architecture of Rem Koolhaas, Norman Foster, Renzo Piano, Santiago Calatrava, and perhaps a dozen other virtuosos, fits in the tradition of monumental architecture with the added feature that the message and the medium are now one and both converge on architecture itself as the activity to be contemplated, rather than the instances of its creativity. In this sense, we could regard the global world of urban brand architecture as a world of "architecturality" rather than of "monumentality", in the sense that monumentality is now at the service of architecture rather than the reverse.

But even the most sensational new buildings that seek at one stroke to transform their entire context usually have to build on the forgetting of something else. But what is this something else? Here we come to the nub of architectural amnesia and its special ecology of forgetting, which relies on what I call use "amnesia by displacement".

Here let us return to what we may call high visibility architecture, typically public, monumental and in recent times, in one or other way, animated by nationalism. And let me also return to Bombay, the city where I first learned how to forget what architecture wished

me to remember. Consider the great works of Indo-Saracenic architecture that dominate South Mumbai, from at least Crawford Market in the North to the Rajabai Tower in the South. These are the great buildings of government, education and public life, linked by such great urban roads as Hornby Road, Queen's Road, Vir Nariman Road, the Colaba Causeway and the like.

In every case, there was a regnant ideology of public architecture in place when these great structures were built and there is a significant literature on the elements that went into their design, their proportions, their materials and their intentional symbolism. And it is true that in each and every case these buildings, their adjacent open spaces and the causeways and esplanades that linked them directly required the burial, erasure or destruction of other spaces of commerce, residence or traffic on the sites. In this sense, no site, especially in a major urban and imperial space is a tabula rasa and every act of construction is preceded by an act of destruction. Sometimes, the destruction that is involved involves other examples of life and of lifestyle and these are thus doomed to be forgotten. Thus every complex urban space in India, and elsewhere, is an archive or palimpsest of destruction, where layers of public space give way to others and are recoverable only by the specialized work of the historian, the archivist or the antiquarian. In this sense, modern architecture requires ruins and this space of the ruin, though often invisible, is where architecture meets archaeology. In India, the national drama surrounding the Babri Masjid is only the most prominent instance of this logic of burial, disappearance, exhumation and retrieval. This is the easiest part of the ecology of forgetting to identify, the

simple fact that built forms, even those that announce efforts to colonize desolate spaces, always delete their predecessors, and along with this deletion comes the invitation to forget whole contexts, histories and ways of life.

But there is another aspect to the amnesia induced by public architecture and that has to do with the archive of possibilities that always exists when an architectural design is accepted as a blueprint for an actual project of construction. We sometimes get a glimpse of this archive when we have access to the sketchbooks or note books of great architects or the records of their patrons as possibilities are discussed, debated and mostly discarded. These evanescent records are the history of the unbuilt environment, the history of architectural possibility which is always vastly richer than the history of the built environment itself. Today, when most large-scale designs do not come to actual physical fruition, this archive is a self-standing set of represented monuments or monuments to representation, as instanced in the brilliant drawings of Zaha Hadid.

What the ordinary observer or inhabitant of any built environment can never know, in any given instance, is what exactly the imagined alternatives were to any instance of successful building, the roads not taken, the possibilities considered and discarded, not because they were ridiculous or outlandish, but because they seemed to lack some crucial feature of the future imagined by architect and client. Thus every building of any note in Bombay is the site of an array of unbuilt possibilities. Sometimes we are lucky to know what these unbuilt possibilities were, through some retrospective archival effort.

In Bombay, there was a notable struggle between proponents of the Victorian Gothic Style and those who worked in the Indo-Saracenic Style, and major instances of these two styles about each other throughout South Mumbai. The entry by R. F. Chisholm for the design of the the Municipal Corporation building in Bombay was perhaps the first major plan worked out in the Indo-Saracenic style. It was rejected in favour of a Gothic design by F. W. Stevens.

We could see the problem of architectural amnesia in Imperial Bombay as wholly a matter of the struggles for space of the Victorian Gothic and the Indo-Saracenic styles. But this struggle takes out of the loop altogether styles and idioms which were somewhat outside this eminently narrow range of possibilities. The life history of the town planner Patrick Geddes reminds us that as one sort of approach to town-planning and architecture gradually took over British colonial cities in the twentieth century, another style remained plausible in the princely states such as Indore, where Geddes had more room to explore his ideas. We could reasonably ask the counterfactual question: what if Patrick Geddes had been in charge of all the major urban planning projects of British colonial India in his lifetime? What archive might he have consulted and realized? Or we can go further afield into the British colonial world and look at place like Ceylon, Singapore, Malaysia, Pretoria, and so on, and ask whether this large and circulating world of planners and architects might not have provided alternative possibilities for a city like Bombay. And we can look still further afield to other colonial port cities with which the British were acquainted and also other styles of British architecture from the Victorian period, less monumental than the

peculiar Victorian Gothic and less Orientalist than the Indo-Saracenic style, which might have entered the British vocabulary in Bombay.

And all this does not even bring in the possibility that India's own nascent urbanisms might have been sources of the architectural imagination for each other: even if we take only the large cities (Bombay, Madras, Calcutta, Delhi) and the second order of important Indian towns (such as Lucknow, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Baroda etc) surely they could have been richer sources of the architectural imagination than they were in the building of imperial Bombay?

So it should be clear by now what I am thinking of as "amnesia by displacement". I do not mean exactly the displacement of whatever was on a particular site before something new is built on it, though surely that does lead to one kind of forgetting. But what is harder to trace, more elusive and more general is the displacement of the entire archive of plausible alternatives by the style and form of what is actually built in any given site in a place like India. I stress "plausible" alternatives because I do not wish to imply that at any particular moment and in any particular context, anything is possible. After all, the burdens of context are many, as are the limitations of tradition, the resources of the client and the vocabulary of the reigning establishment. Yet, one of the things about what does get built is that it naturalizes the possible and gradually contributes not only to that chain of examples, influences and derivations which new can later christen as some sort of style, but as such a style develops, it steadily pushes out of view a whole repertory of unbuilt possibilities, each of which might have germinated other lines of influence and other traditions of built form.

These possibilities become steadily less thinkable, until over time they are hardly available to the imagination any more. This is how the amnesia produced by architecture actually works.

Thus, to return to the list of what I did not know about Bombay's built environment in the 1950's and 1960's, I can now put my ignorance in a bigger field of effects, which always accompany experience of the built environment. My own ignorance was part and parcel of a big project of unbuilding and forgetting, which is the lost history of all intensely built environments. It is a history of roads not taken at every point in time and space where a new building comes into being, and thus it is a history which is not only forgotten but is almost never traceable. This is why the strong word amnesia, with its implications of total and irrecoverable loss, is suitable for this process and the word forgetting is a bit too weak. My ignorance of my built environment, my casual habitation of the glories of my small world in Bombay, were only a small absence in the larger pool of Bombay's unknown, unbuilt and unrecoverable architectural possibilities. It is these possibilities which architecture erases, not because of some deliberate indifference to history or memory but because architecture as a practice, in the end, needs to close many possibilities so that one of them can become fully real and realized. The architecture of the unbuilt surrounds, like an invisible cosmos, the actual monuments that are lucky enough to come into being, but the terrain of the unbuilt is no less real for being necessarily forgotten.

V. A Footnote about Conservation

These reflections about architecture raise a deep question about conservation and the related matter of heritage in the great cities of India. The standard critiques of conservationist ideologies is that they are elitist and expensive, that they take resources away from bigger projects of social housing and urban planning for India's exploding urban masses. There is the related critique of nostalgia, which is seen as out of place in an environment of fast-forward development, utopian urbanism and nationalist modernism. There is something to these charges. But from the point of view of the argument about architecture and amnesia that I have presented here today, conservation, especially of heritage sites, could present another sort of opportunity for recovery and recollection, not of the sites themselves (valuable though that may be). Rather, conservation could enable the recovery for pedagogical purposes of the debates that lay behind these heritage sites and the possibilities that these sites themselves foreclosed as they entered the history of the built environment and made it harder to imagine the possibilities of the unbuilt. Thus, conservation, usually seen as the most important tool of remembering, could actually be seen as running the risk of a second forgetting, since it restores the history of the built environment as the only possible history. Were conservation also to develop an interest in the unbuilt, the unremembered and of abandoned options, it could bring alive the archive of architectural possibilities that always lie around us and behind us.

And so let me conclude with a thought on nationalism and architectural modernity in India. I have already stressed that all nationalisms require forgetting as much as they do remembering and that architecture has served centrally in both efforts. But there is a

wonderful critical potential in the future of architecture in places like India. That future does not lie in the tomorrows of elsewhere (like Shanghai in some fantasies for Mumbai) or in the floating terrain of international brand architecture whose main purpose is to sell an accidental group of architects, but it might lie in a systematic effort to struggle against the grain of that amnesia which I have argued is the very basis for the work of building, and thus of architecture itself. But if the critical spirit of architects, of critics and of informed citizens could be alerted to the deep histories of the unbuilt, we might find deeper resources for the future of the local, the regional, the national and all those other addresses in which we actually live and wish to imagine our futures. And who better than the architects themselves to lead the rest of us into this promised land?