

Vue de l'arrêt Hidalgo dans le parc de la « Alameda Central », ligne 3 qui traverse la ville du nord au sud.  
Photo: David Navarrete 2012

pas avoir repris ce qui fait le succès du réseau de transport urbain implanté à Curitiba, à savoir sa portée sociale? Il est évident qu'il manque à ce projet la vision globale, les institutions et la disponibilité des autorités métropolitaines pour

optimiser les ressources et les infrastructures existantes tout en sachant les intégrer à celles qui seront créées. Ainsi à Mexico, la quête de l'égalité en termes de mobilité reste inachevée malgré de bonnes intentions. ▀

## MUMBAI

# A city without streets

ROHIT SHINKRE

*A city is a place where a small boy, as he walks through it, may see something that will tell him what he wants to do his whole life.*

Louis Kahn

I was struck by this quote amidst a pile of objective analysis and interrogations about the city. Also, this was conforming to my own experience of Mumbai.

As a child my journeys in Mumbai, mostly in and around Dadar, were full of encounters with people and places; living, working, worshipping, resting, toiling, hurrying, loitering,

eating... Houses of all types from road side shanties to family mansions, shops and businesses of all kinds, metal workshops, carpenters, tailors, billboard painters, music shops, flower vendors, street acrobats... anything one could possibly imagine. There was a certain chaos, maybe, but not disorder... a creative chaos... the kind out of which life

evolves. These travels through Mumbai were an integral part of my learning like for any other child in other real cities.

It made me aware of the diversity of the community around me, how we shared the same territory and how the built environment allowed this sharing. I realise later how the architectural typologies had this inherent quality to together create an environment that was something more than a simple addition of its parts.

The built form defined the public realm giving it a sense of scale and place. It created spaces for all. The façades had depth – a multi-layered skin – Shops, verandas, awnings, projections at street level and galleries, balconies, *chajjas*, sun-shades on the floors above. All of this allowed a rich interface between the spaces within and without. There was a “soft” order that allowed all things to co-exist and evolve much like nature itself. This was an environment generous of encounters and, referring back to Louis Khans words, for the child that I was each encounter carried in itself the possibility of a different future. I was an integral part of the chaos

That city has quite naturally changed since Entire (mill) compounds or individual structures scattered in the city are being redeveloped one after the other into taller buildings and gated communities. The taller buildings in most cases rest on parking podiums and the gated communities are self-sufficient islands within high compound walls. In either case what is created is not a living or working space “in” the city but one that extracts you from it.

The retail activity is organised in malls, open spaces and greenery happen at the podium level leaving a rather desolate streetscape lined with high compound walls or parking podiums. On major arteries this desolation is further compounded by flyovers. The façades have lost their depth – single layered curtains – abrupt separators of spaces within and without. There may be transparency but no dialogue. There is no street. Every other project aspires to be an icon for the city-choosing to stand apart rather than be a part of it.

The urban & architectural typologies that I see emerging around are brutally transforming the city, polarising it by creating very distinct boundaries between socio-economic groups.

**Architecture for living communities.**  
**Photograph contributed by Ar. Amrit Narkar, Teaching Assistant, AoAM (UA)**





**City as a transit space.**  
Photograph contributed  
by Ar. Amrit Narkar,  
Teaching Assistant,  
A&AM (UA)

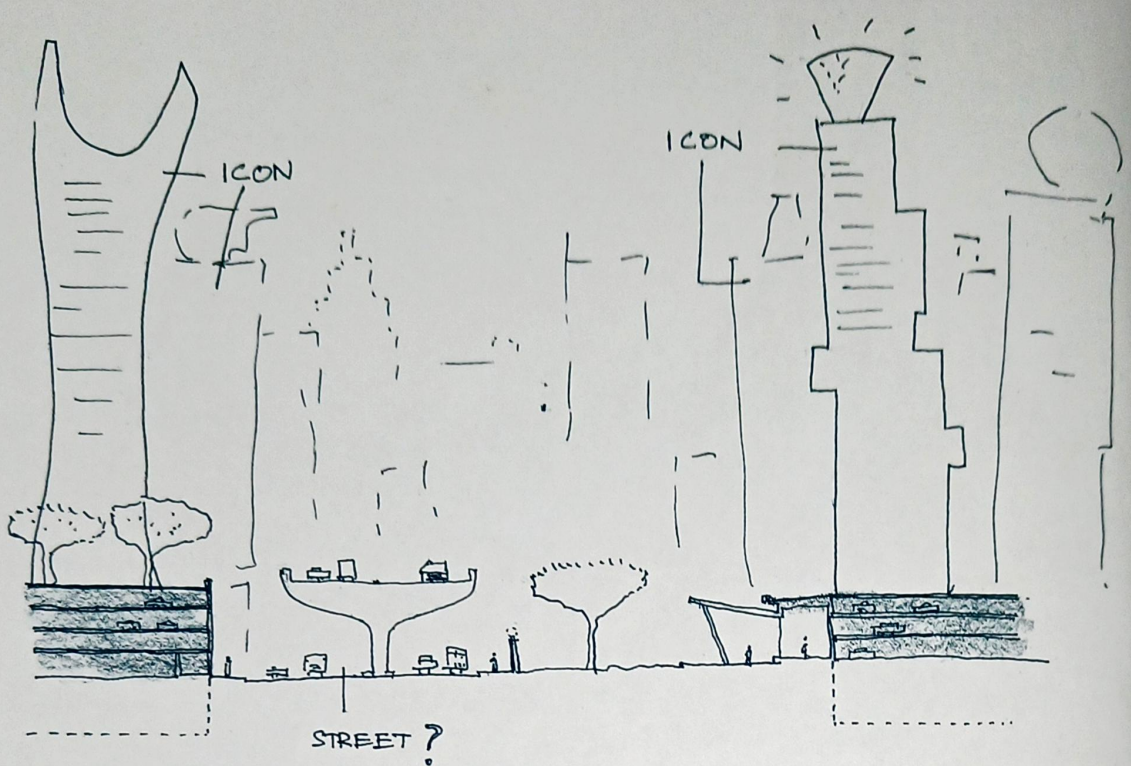
For each of the many “exclusive” mega-project, in Mumbai that we talk about, there is a far greater sprawl happening silently elsewhere in the region. The middle income group (MIG) is elbowed out to Nallasopara, Kalyan, Bhoisar, Vasai, Panvel and even beyond and Govandi, Mankhurd, Wadala, Deonar are the new Dharavis catering to the economically weaker sections (EWS).

For some Mumbaikars the city is only a transit space that links destinations and not an environment they live in or a community they engage with. Their experience of the city is highly predictable and even sterile in the sense that it leaves little scope for the creative chaos which to me is the essence of a city.

For others, much larger in numbers, this city is a chimera and on the wretched margins of which to survive.

There seems to be literally no space for dialogue except when claimed by violence and disruption that we do face periodically in Mumbai. Increasingly innocuous incidents provoke disproportionately violent protests. There are many cities already experiencing chronic violence- water riots, food riots, fuel riots, communal riots, vandalism... Lagos, Mogadishu, Rio, Abidjan, Kingston... like a constant state of war within. If we persist with our madness Mumbai is on track to be on that list.

One may argue that Architecture only reflects socio-economic reality and did not create it but then what created it? Architecture is certainly a tool to transform this reality and to avoid reinforcing its extremes. It can create a sense of social coherence and equity for the city more so in a Republic like India. Sustainability is as much a social matter as an



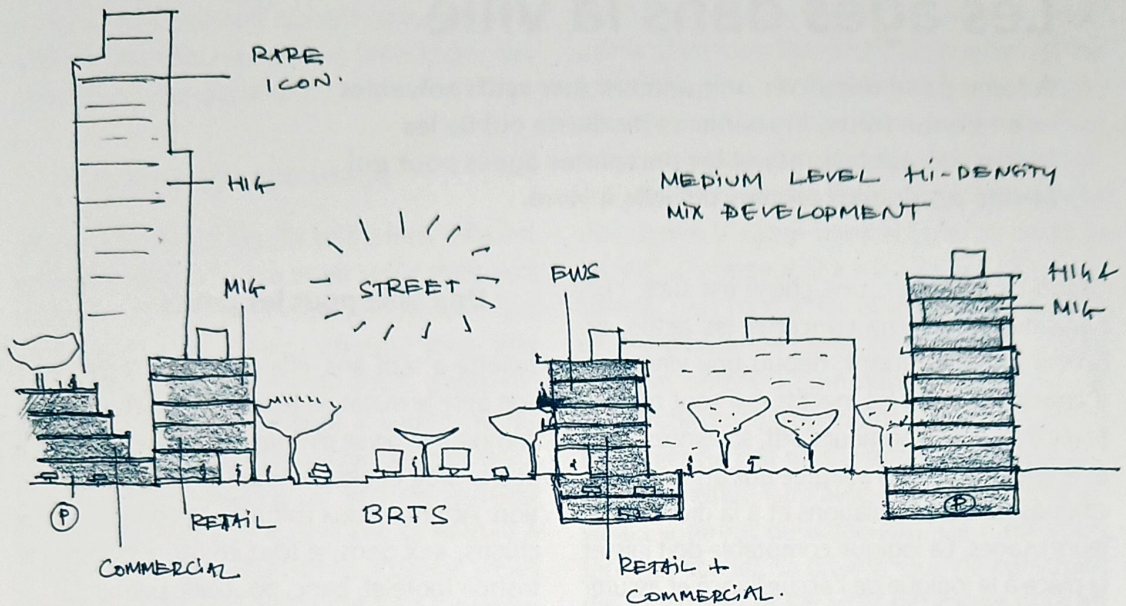
City as a transit space. Sketch  
by the Rohit Shinkre

environmental one- The city, like the Earth, is also not our inheritance but the legacy for future generations. The Mumbai we are creating today is quite simply socially unsustainable. Social inequalities are not new to Mumbai but the formal response to them today is.

The city is a complex phenomenon where the whole is not a sum of its parts, much like the forest and its trees. Its chaos requires "complex" adaptive systems that create possibilities for communities and not simplistic deterministic ones that create rigid constraints. Prevailing planning models & design typologies tend to conform to the latter. They may be justified in Greenfield new townships but seem inapt for inner city redevelopment. It is interesting to note that in the 20<sup>th</sup> century when exact sciences like Mathematics and Physics felt the need to develop an approach to deal with chaos and uncertainty Architecture lost that very important ability it inherently possessed. We must examine why.

Today's financial capacities and management capabilities can easily afford large projects. An exceptional endeavour like say Fatehpur Sikri which would happen once in the life of an empire, happens routinely today. Be it post-industrial redevelopment or new townships, very large areas are planned, designed and set to be developed in a relatively short time span. Nothing really measures to the overwhelming scale of the projects. Nothing counts beyond resolving the financial, programmatic and technological challenges of their big scale. The context / city doesn't figure- and hence nor do people.

Projects of smaller scale are more responsive to specific opportunities and users. They will naturally induce a greater mix of different program components and avoid the stark segregation between commercial, residential; further segregated into luxury, HIG, MIG, EWS; or retail zones that we see. Smaller projects would require longer time to create an



City for sustainable communities. Sketch by the Rohit Shinkre

equivalent development. The staggering unsold inventory of residential units and commercial space in Mumbai and the high numbers of retail projects that are frequently re-built are an eloquent statement about the flaws in programming & planning assumption. The unsold inventory is an economic disaster and the short life-cycle of projects is an ecological disaster. Breaking large developments in smaller ones- not just phasing them- would allow the opportunity for course correction in response to real market dynamics and community needs rather than be lead by rosy assumptions about these made by finance wizards. This is even more important in the current unpredictable and volatile economic landscape. Lastly and most importantly from an urban design perspective implementing such projects in smaller parts will bring down the scale to include place-making and community building as an inherent part of its Architecture. The large schemes will fit-in better in the existing fabric

and with smaller redevelopments and not stand out like mammoths as they do today.

It is time to question unfounded aspirations to transform Mumbai into a Shanghai or Singapore that are endorsed by our thought leaders. It is a myth that high rise is the only response for high density. I can imagine a far better city with medium rise, mixed use development for mixed income groups and the occasional high rise icon; all of which served by efficient and cost effective transit systems like the BRTS in lieu of the flyovers that we have become a default response to improve intra-city mobility.

The street is the narrative of a city and as such will change with time but here we are obliterating it. Mumbai is a great city in its own right. I would much rather see it transform into a better Mumbai than to have it adopt a borrowed identity. ▀