

SPECTRAL CITY
ARCHITECTURE,
IMAGE, DESIRE,
CINEMA

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Desire is the internal causality of an image with respect to the existence of the object or the corresponding state of affairs. – Gilles Deleuze¹

CITY OF LIGHT AND SHADOW

This city is consuming itself. It is eating itself up in the mythologies it has made for itself. The mythologies are continuously devouring the existing city and making it something else – through image. This is a never-ending process of production, consumption and regurgitation. A new city is born every day in these images as they hover like phantoms over the neighbourhoods and streets that make up Mumbai/Bombay.

They flicker, disappear, re-form, in perpetual flux – creating above and below the city a terrain of images, translucent and glowing. Some of these are like mirrors reflecting in reverse parts of the city itself, or in half-formed images of another city; others are like frames cutting up the city into discrete parts; and there are some that are like lenses, distorting what is seen into something fantastic or gruesome.

Each of these images captures a new city; each of these is a portal into another possibility of the city. And just as all of these cities are real, all are equally not. In this terrain of floating images, myth and reality collapse into one another with no real separation between them. Myth is lived and real life on the streets is living myth. No part of the city escapes from this self-perpetuating process, of the city recycling and consuming itself in the form of image.

In these images, spaces and characters exist on a heroic register. A hint becomes a gesture becomes a movement becomes a revolution. Every tiny insignificant instant is momentous – but only in reference to an earlier, equally momentous one. The image is deceitful. It is a mask for impersonation by which the material of everyday life is transfigured into the stuff of dreams and nightmares.

It would be naive to call these images mere apparitions having no relationship or effect on everyday life, for the quotidian is embedded in this terrain. Real bodies and experiences weigh down the limitless disintegration of the world into images with their tangibility. After all, these images and imaginations are produced and consumed in particular geographies by particular bodies: tangibilities that frantically attempt to hold the floating images together. But even as their heaviness and particularity struggle to retain their own forms, they disintegrate and begin to break up into fragments – floating, dismembered parts within the shimmering spiral of the spectral city. The 'object' of this spectral city is the image. The spectrum is one of desire.

CONCEIVING CINEMA CITY

What is 'cinema city'? The term cannot be reduced to the sum of its two parts: the 'city' within which cinema is produced and consumed as if the city is an empty container – a space for the everyday untouched by desire; or the 'cinema' as a space in which we imagine the city – a space for desire mediated through flickering screen images. Even a casual glance at the conflated words points to the similarities and overlaps between the two. The space of the represented and the lived cannot be so simply separated.

As cultural artefacts we dream and live in both. In both we make ourselves anew. In both we find utopias/dystopias that we attempt to inhabit within the parameters

¹ Gilles Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, London: Athlone Press, 1990: 17.

of the everyday: our bodies, relationships, networks, buildings, machines, institutions. The city and the cinema are embedded in one another. The space of desire is what spans the space of cinema to that of the city.

In the line quoted above from Deleuze, desire attempts to break free of the frame of the 'image'. The image, then, is simultaneously both the container (constrainer) and the portal through which we 'become'. It is within and through the image that we reconstruct ourselves. In that sense, cinema city is conceived in this terrain of images we produce and consume, making and remaking ourselves into new beings.

CINEMA/CITY: MIRROR MACHINES

The mirror is one of the earliest image-making assemblages, one of the most rudimentary devices/machines that enable self-representation. In it we see ourselves reflected, and we become aware of our position with respect to the world; we tuck in our shirts and straighten out our skirts. Technologies of the cinema and the city can be seen as elaborations of these mirroring machines that exist in the realm of the everyday. From the very first films where, for instance, local trains are shown entering a platform, we see evidence of this urge to see ourselves represented – it seems to make us immortal, larger than life. Cinematic images enable this transformation.

The architectural drawing plays a similar role. In architects' and urban planners' multiple utopian/dystopian imaginations of the city, in their reimaginations of the city through countless built examples and unbuilt proposals, we find arguments for the reconstruction of self and society. Architectural journals overflow with spectacular images of ideal homes and metaphors reconfiguring the city – ranging from images of dynamic spaces of opportunity bristling with activity, to lamentations about an imminent ecological disaster only to be salvaged by a turn to a pastoral paradise; to the city being a disease that corrupts with its dark alleys and strangers, that needs to be cleansed of everything dangerous and replaced by glittering emptiness and light; to neo-traditionalist paeans to a long-lost past that needs to be revived in order to salvage the city from the alienating effects of modernity. These 'u-topias' or 'no-places' exist as imaginations to reflect upon who we are and what we want to become.

Both the cinema and the drawing are involved in making 'images'. The image is an apparition we create to replace the real over and over again until it is all that exists. Simulation becomes reality. Reality becomes spectacle. But these images which do not exist in actuality are not made or consumed in ether. They are a part of the concrete world of 'felt' relationships and spaces. They are enabled only by the tangibility of their modes of production and consumption. The relationship between them needs to be explored in the contemporary city (and through history).

THE MAP

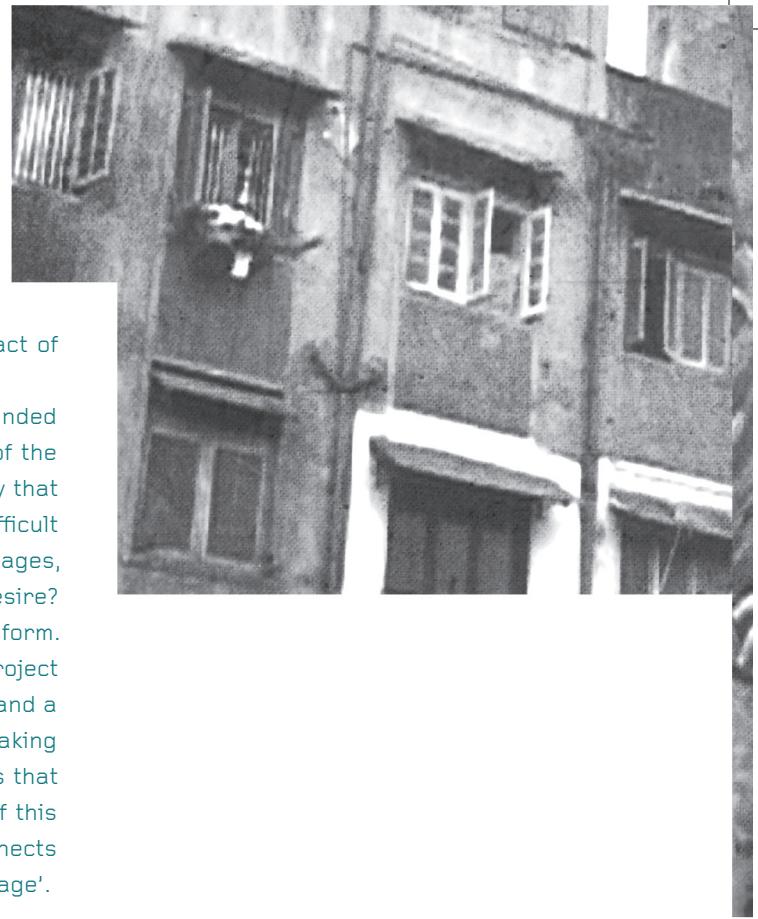
How does one capture this city of images? How does one 'map' them? How are we to ascertain the relationships that exist within this cinema city – this city of images? How are we to discern the 'form' of this amorphous, ever-shifting terrain? We are not supposed to have recourse to ambiguities in a map; after all, a map is meant to be a navigation device that is objective and neutral. It places entities (spatial or

temporal) in particular (and clear) relationships to one another. Through the act of representation, it simplifies, regulates, flattens, stabilizes.

However, this seeming objectivity of the cartographer is a fallacy. One is reminded of the parable of the blind men and the elephant, each feeling a different part of the beast and assuming he has the right version in his mind. Besides the subjectivity that the act of mapping automatically entails, here we are faced with an even more difficult task. How do we even begin to seize this amorphous, ever-shifting terrain of images, to be able to 'map' it? How is one to comprehend this city? How does one map desire?

Desire knows no space or time determinants – it has only scale-less form. Desire is made up of vectors with no mass. Mapping the body of desire is a project of capturing vectors that transgress time and space: bits of a projected future and a constructed past, nostalgia for a rural hinterland and longing for elsewhere, remaking the public and the domestic. These cannot be determined on topographical lines that are measurable and determinate. Instead, to be able to determine the 'form' of this spectral city, we must be able to discern the ghostly form along which desire connects its tangible and intangible realms – the topology of desire through and within 'image'.

Let us try and draw out this shifting terrain of desire.



COLLECTIVE MEMORY AND TYPOLOGY

... the soul is constituted of images, [and that] the soul is primarily an imagining activity ...

– James Hillman, *Archetypal Psychology: A Brief Account*

The psychoanalyst James Hillman proposes that mythologies contain within themselves the archetypes through which we constitute ourselves as beings. Archetypes are patterns from our collective memory that direct and shape our desires and behaviour in everyday life. In them we see the attempt to excavate and inventorize the forms that shape our collective unconsciousness. The assumption is that these forms have embedded within them certain meanings through which we make our place in the world. The stories that we tell as societies to make sense of our lives draw upon these apparitions and create relationships between them. This is the essential nature of narrative within myth. These ghost-like apparitions are a part of the 'collective memory' of our society.

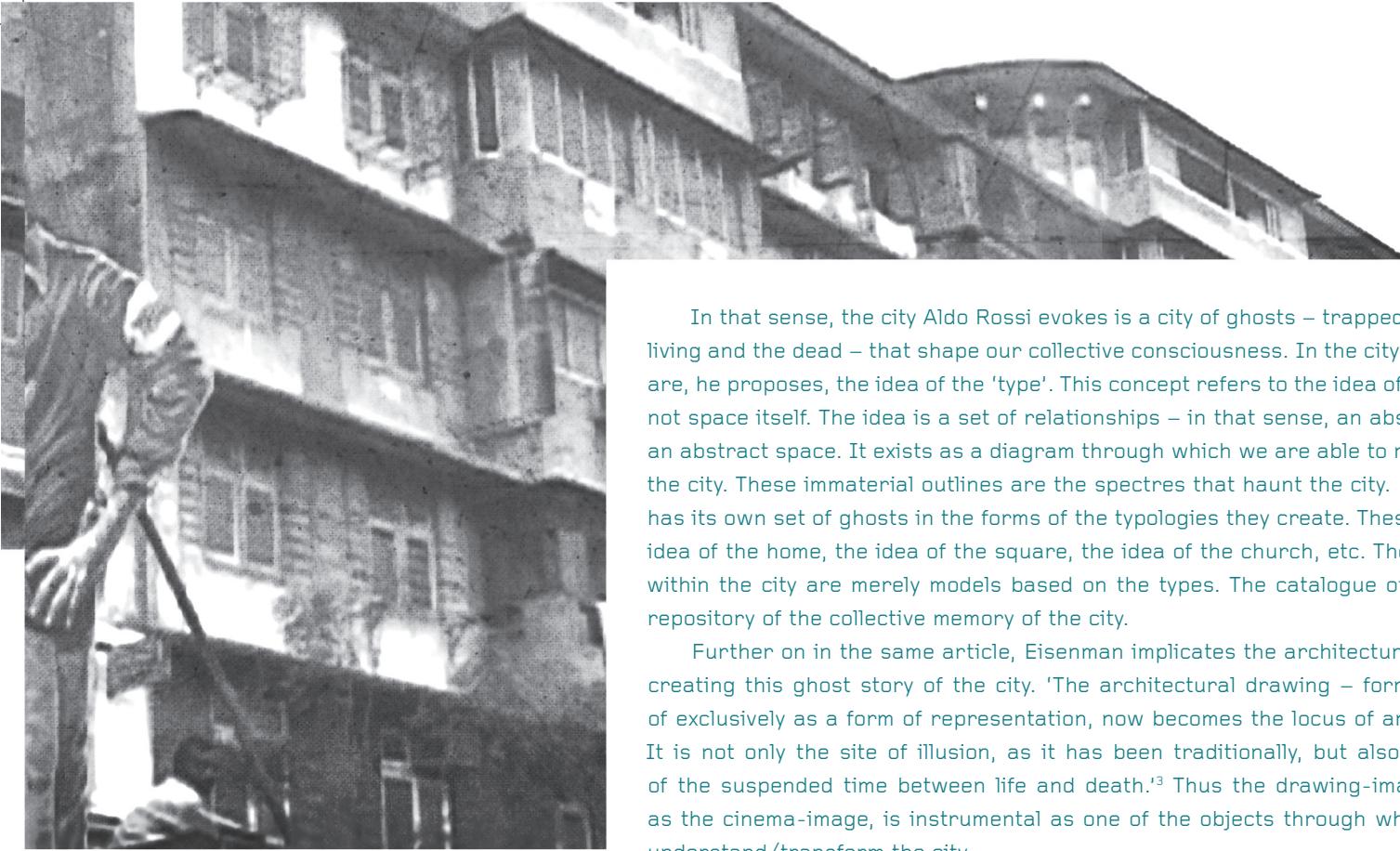
The Italian architect and urbanist Aldo Rossi speaks of the memories embedded within cities as ghosts. Peter Eisenman, in his preface to Rossi's *The Architecture of the City*,² quotes Rossi from his *A Scientific Autobiography*:

Cities are in reality great camps of the living and the dead where many elements remain like signals, symbols, cautions. When the holiday is over, what remains of the architecture is scarred, and the sand consumes the street again. There is nothing left but to resume with a certain obstinacy the reconstruction of elements and instruments in expectation of another holiday.

Eisenman continues:

For Rossi the European City has become the house of the dead. Its history, its function, has ended: it has erased the specific memory of the houses of individual childhood to become a locus of collective memory. As a giant or collective house of memory, it has a psychological reality which arises from its being a place for fantasy and illusion, an analogue of both life and death as transitional states.

² Peter Eisenman, 'Editor's Preface' to Aldo Rossi, *The Architecture of the City*, Oppositions Books series, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1982: 10.



In that sense, the city Aldo Rossi evokes is a city of ghosts – trapped between the living and the dead – that shape our collective consciousness. In the city these ghosts are, he proposes, the idea of the 'type'. This concept refers to the idea of a space; it is not space itself. The idea is a set of relationships – in that sense, an abstract form in an abstract space. It exists as a diagram through which we are able to make sense of the city. These immaterial outlines are the spectres that haunt the city. Every culture has its own set of ghosts in the forms of the typologies they create. These include the idea of the home, the idea of the square, the idea of the church, etc. The real spaces within the city are merely models based on the types. The catalogue of types is the repository of the collective memory of the city.

Further on in the same article, Eisenman implicates the architectural drawing in creating this ghost story of the city. 'The architectural drawing – formerly thought of exclusively as a form of representation, now becomes the locus of another reality. It is not only the site of illusion, as it has been traditionally, but also a real place of the suspended time between life and death.'³ Thus the drawing-image, as much as the cinema-image, is instrumental as one of the objects through which we read/understand/transform the city.

NARRATIVE AND SPACE IN JAAGTE RAHO

There is no story that does not involve an invocation of space. All characters in a story inhabit some landscape. A story is told as interactions not only between the people within the narrative, but also between the spaces they inhabit. One only has to look at a typical fairytale to know that this is true. Between the palace of the princess and the castle of the ogre lies a forest that must be traversed with great hardship. These are spaces invoked as images from a collective memory that assigns them certain meanings: the stability and purity of the castle, the dark and mysterious world of the forest, and the castle of horrors and danger. These hyper-real evocations are embedded in the fairytale as a form – an allegory of the real world, a moral tale of good versus evil.

Ernst Bloch, in his reading of the relevance of the fairytale, makes a connection between its typical themes and contemporary life:

The fairy tale narrates a wish-fulfilment that is not bound by its own time and the apparel of its contents. In contrast to the legend, which is always tied to a particular locale, the fairy tale remains unbound. Not only does the fairy tale remain as fresh as longing and love, but the demonically evil, which is abundant in the fairy tale, is still seen at work here in the present, and the happiness of 'once upon a time,' which is even more abundant, still affects our visions of the future.⁴

The melodramatic space of Hindi cinema can be seen as one where similar myths are manufactured. Within the frame of melodrama everything is in the realm of the hyper-real. Stylization, distortion and exaggeration are not extrinsic to the act of storytelling but an essential part of it. The melodramatic space of Hindi cinema invokes spectres of the many mythologies in which the subcontinent is actively involved, making new identities and nationhoods. It is perhaps not surprising, then, to see epic themes invoked as rhetoric in many works of the early post-independence period. After all it was a time when culture was often put to the service of the nation-building project.

³ Ibid

⁴ Ernst Bloch, 'The Fairy Tale Moves on Its Own in Time', in *The Utopian Function of Art and Literature: Selected Essays*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1989.

Khwaja Ahmad Abbas's *Jaagte Raho*, directed by Amit and Sombhu Mitra and starring Raj Kapoor, was released in 1956 – almost a decade after India's independence – in the period of the Second Five Year Plan, when older state divisions were re-forming and new states were being sculpted out of linguistic boundaries. The Samyukta Maharashtra Samiti was founded in Pune the same year – a call for an independent state of Marathi-speaking people that would include the city of Bombay – which led to riots in the region. Also in the same year, Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar converted to Buddhism in Nagpur, along with more than 38,000 'scheduled caste' followers, to escape the oppression of the Hindu caste system. Meanwhile the city of Bombay was expanding – by the following year Bombay Municipality would include the suburbs of Mulund and Dahisar.

It is in this year that *Jaagte Raho* is set – a parable of the city as a place of crime, darkness and evil, a morality tale of pastoral innocence confronting urban corruption and cynicism. And the city, although never expressly named in the film, is Bombay: the archetype of the modern metropolis.

It is this metropolis that introduces itself in the title sequence of the film. Through the windshield of a fast-moving car, we see the glittering lights of the city. The lights reflected on the roads of the city – the sparkling modern metropolis – make it a

CHILD/PLAYGROUND

In stories concerning migration, the city is often a space for escape from older hierarchies. Here, in this new time and space, identities can be reformed. A labyrinth of light and delight, it is a playground for those who know how to play the game. The city is a place for regaining the pre-formed identity of a child – it allows one to shape a new self in the anonymity of its light and shadow. In its glittering gallery of pleasures you can be lost and be reconstructed. In the gardens of the city, we can all be equal. Wasn't this the promise of freedom that underpinned the modernist project? A break from the strictures of the past? A return to primitive instinct enabled by the promise of urbanity – or civilization?

But this promise is soon betrayed by the city when it reveals its own set of rules and hierarchies. The city-grid becomes an instrument of power. Architecture is complicit in this control of time and space. The grid even allots a time and place to play where it does not threaten but in fact further sustains the grid. Within the city, it is only in the garden that we find a limited amount of freedom; and within the working week, on weekends. The remaining time and space within the grid is allotted to more fruitful activities.

Jacques Tati's *Playtime*, made in 1967, is set in such a city – Paris. Its inhabitants move robot-like through a crystalline, transparent city where all buildings look the same, and differences between private and public are non-existent. Monsieur Hulot arrives in this city and is unable to understand its logic. His body makes strange sounds on the perfect chairs, leaves fingerprints where it is not supposed to, is heavy and awkward in this light, empty city. His innocence is that of a child uninitiated into the rituals of the city – he moves by pure instinct and intuition. His movements break the boundaries of the monotony of the city until it begins to spill over, revealing the bounds of what constitutes knowledge of right and wrong, valid and invalid. With guileless laughter, the child/fool reveals the absurdity of our rules – the places where the unknown overflows what is known.

FATHER/GRID

The father represents the order of society, the system, as it is. This is the structure by which the world is supposed to run. Everything has its right place and nothing is out of turn. People are supposed to follow these rules and regulations without questioning because they are what society is built upon. The father is the figure who has to be killed for a young man to be able to gain manhood – the figure whose strict rules and regulations need to be challenged when the young man falls in love with the wrong woman in so many stories. One such is the romantic retelling of the love story of emperor-to-be Salim and the courtesan Anarkali in *Mughal e Azam* (1960).

The grid is more powerful than its inventor. Its logic is omnipotent. Or so it thinks. Upon the irrationality of the world we impose the Cartesian grid, which places everything in relation to itself along an x, y or z axis. Le Corbusier's instrument of choice after clearing the fabric of Paris to build a new world was Cartesian geometry. The clarity of the grid cleanses and places things in clear relationships with one another. It makes the unintelligible legible. Geometries are imposed on an unruly world to bring order to it. One is reminded of the many city-plans that have been actualized around the world, including that of Chandigarh by Le Corbusier. In the American city the grid was the basis for city-planning based on the logic of capitalism. In a city like Chicago, Mies van der Rohe's glass towers rise shard-like, extruding the grid in the vertical direction.

labyrinth of delight, with the promise of freedom. In this city, anonymous strangers walk in the shadows. The film begins in one of these shadows.

Raj Kapoor plays the unnamed protagonist of the film: a villager who arrives in the city late one evening, probably to escape the destitution of rural life. Barefoot, he has nothing on him except the clothes he is wearing. For this immigrant from

VAMP/LABYRINTH

'Action introduces the known (the manufactured); then understanding, which is linked to it, relates the non-manufactured, unknown elements, one after the other, to the known. But desire, poetry, laughter, unceasingly cause life to slip in the opposite direction, moving from the known to the unknown. Existence in the end discloses the blind spot of understanding and right away becomes completely absorbed in it. It could not be otherwise unless a possibility for rest were to present itself at a certain point. But nothing of the kind takes place: what alone remains is circular agitation – which does not exhaust itself in ecstasy and begins again from it.' – Georges Bataille, 'Inner Experience', in *The Bataille Reader*, 1954

As Bataille points out, this pleasure of the unknown can be self-perpetuating. It can become a labyrinth in which we lose ourselves. Absurdity spills over into madness and threatens all known notions of order. Chaos reigns unbridled through the streets of the city, overturning everything. The riot emerges out of this unreason – where instinct rules over the realm of knowledge.

In Guru Dutt's *Pyasa* (1957), the poet is lost in the haze of this delight and corruption as he walks down the streets of the red-light district of the city. As he encounters fragments of conversations and images, sense of place, time and identity blurs. He sings sarcastically, 'Jinhe naaz hain hind par woh kahaan hain' ('Where are those who once had pride in this nation'). In the lines of the song the virility required for nation-building is threatened by the seductions of pleasure embodied in the image of the prostitute. It takes a stoic to resist such temptations. There are many who succumb, threatening their own manhood.



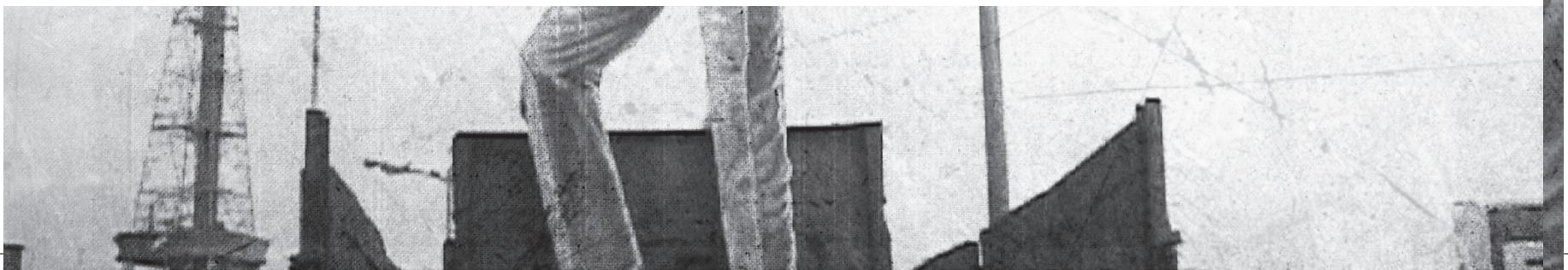
the hinterland, the city by night is very different from the one we saw from inside the moving car. In place of the glittering streetscape, the city is a dark, frightening place with strange towers looming overhead. The only light is formed by pools cast by intermittent streetlamps.

He wanders aimlessly from one alley to another. All he wants is some water to drink, but it is nowhere to be found. He loses all sense of direction in the darkness surrounded by buildings disappearing into the night sky. As he sits despondent on a pavement, he sees a drunk staggering down the road singing to himself: 'Zindagi khwab hain, khwab mein sach hain kya aur bhala jhoot kya' ('Life is a dream, in a dream who's to say what is the truth and what a lie').

The desperate man asks the drunk for water. He is offered alcohol instead to quench his thirst. Shocked by this city where alcohol is more easily available than water, he refuses. But this is only his first encounter with the corruption of the city. Still searching for water, he continues to roam the streets. He tries to drink from a fire-hydrant but is stopped by a policeman. All his attempts to find water are thwarted until finally he arrives at an apartment building behind a tall gate. On the other side of the bars of the gate he sees a dripping tap from which a stray dog is drinking water. Tempted and desperate, he surreptitiously slips in through the bars. But just as he is about to quench his thirst someone sees him and mistakes him for a thief. An alarm is raised and a group of men rush to capture and punish him. Our hero is chased into the apartment building through the fire escape. Behind him, the group of vigilantes follow in pursuit.

This is the space where most of the action in the film takes place. The building appears to be a regular apartment block with a doubly loaded corridor running through the centre connected by staircases. But it does not seem to have a beginning or an end – it continues endlessly. As the hero is chased up and down, in and out of similar-looking corridors, he enters one room after another. All the rooms are almost the same in appearance, except that in each he encounters, like a catalogue, an evil of the city: in one room a wife is being beaten up; in another the husband is stealing the wife's jewellery to serve his gambling addiction; in a third counterfeit notes are being printed; and so on.

The grid of the apartment building becomes a metonym for the grid of the city in three dimensions. As Raj Kapoor frantically flings open doors, climbs through portholes and ventilators, there does not seem to be any way out. Within this grid, amidst ostensible order, violence, corruption and evil are rampant. Identities within this apartment building exist only in terms of the positions they occupy in the Cartesian system of its numbered units. In a telling sequence we see that when the residents of the building converge in one room, the only means they have of trying to identify the thief amongst them is by asking each other for flat numbers. In this city where all residents are strangers to one another, you can only be recognized by the number you have been assigned.



VILLAIN/BULLDOZER

But architecture is very often anything but benevolent. 'Architecture is the expression of the very being of societies, in the same way that human physiognomy is the expression of the being of individuals. However, it is more to the physiognomies of official characters (prelates, magistrates, admirals) that this comparison must be referred. In practice, only the ideal being of society, that which orders and prohibits with authority, expresses itself in what are architectural compositions in the strict sense of the term. Thus, the great monuments are raised up like dams, pitting the logic of majesty and authority against all the shady elements: it is in the form of cathedrals and palaces that Church and State speak and impose silence on the multitudes.' – Georges Bataille, 'Architecture', in Neal Leach, ed., *Rethinking Architecture*

As an instrument of the powerful, architecture imposes, subjugates, destroys. As a vehicle for the future, it forgets, erases, destroys. One of the most famous of modernist city-plans (but never built) is Le Corbusier's plan for Paris. Impatient with the messiness of the inner city, he wiped off the entire fabric with a sweeping gesture in his drawings and replaced it with high-rise towers. He was merely mirroring an urban renewal project built by Baron Haussman in Paris from 1853 to 1870. Under the patronage of Napoleon III, Haussman cut avenues through the heart of the city – to bring order and a certain idea of beauty. Unfortunately, this vision of modernism has led to many architectural disasters. As a model for housing, this antipathy to the complexity of historical fabrics and their layers has been adopted by many cities around the world in the name of 'urban renewal'. Even today, in its urge to become a global city, the city of Shanghai is demolishing its older working-class housing called 'shi ku men' and replacing it with generic skyscrapers – displacing many and perpetuating state-sponsored gentrification. The utopian project of architecture can often deal with the world only by erasing it – and starting anew.

HERO/OBELISK

In *Beta* (1992), Anil Kapoor is eventually able to step outside the dungeon that his stepmother Aruna Irani has built around him with the help of his wife, Madhuri Dixit, who is able to show him her deceitful ways. Once the veil falls from his eyes, he is able to make decisions clearly and without ambiguity – although he is still not willing to condemn the woman who kept him in chains for years. In Alexander Dovzhenko's socialist-realist *Earth* (1930), we meet another such figure. Vassily leads the peasants, who buy a new tractor, into a better future of technology – threatening the old order. He is later killed by a landowner and becomes a martyr.

As the obelisk rises from the ground, it breaks free of the forces of gravity. It is an icon, a landmark. In it lie our aspirations and hopes. Architecture is, naturally, an obelisk – by its very nature it carries within it the power to express collective vision, if so desired. One is reminded of the spate of dams commissioned by Nehru as part of the nation-building exercise. These temples of the new nation carried with them the burden of being able to conjoin together, under a common ideology, a varied and disparate people. Our cities are littered with such monuments to ideologies. Historic buildings are reappropriated to validate new power structures and new technologies are instrumental in laying claim to being 'modern'.

The film continues and the residents of the building get closer to capturing the thief. He still has not had any water. As his pursuers close in on him, the hero finally finds a way out at the rear of the building. He climbs the sewage pipes on the façade of



the building up to the roof. The group of men chasing him corner him there and accuse him of being a thief. The desperate and frantic hero screams: 'I am not the thief! You are! This city is!' In the confusion that follows, he manages to walk out of the main gate of the apartment building. He hears the refrain of a song in the distance and follows it: 'Jaago mohan pyare, jaago... Nav yug chume nain tehare' ('Awake young man, awake... The new age is rising'). It leads him to a shrine in a garden where a woman in white is praying as she waters the plants. The last shot of the film shows Raj Kapoor drinking water from a jug she holds out for him as the rays of the early morning sun stream in through the trees.

MOTHER/WOMB

The nation is the motherland – the passive female archetype, the womb we all come from. Her safe arms reach out around us and offer us solace. The garden or 'mother' nature – away from the chaos of the world and stripped of anything violent – is one spatial equivalent. Another is what is considered the domain of the mother: the home.

The home is a symbol of retreat and is at the same time the kingdom of women. The home is a return to the maternal womb. In traditional societies where women are kept protected from the gaze of men and the world, it is only in enclosed courtyards that they are allowed to be free. These protected spaces are filled with tamed nature – flowering plants, fountains – for children to frolic. An ideal home is a place where children can play in safety until their inevitable growth outwards from to the 'real' world. Often, the 'home' takes the form of the 'homeland' or the 'native place' – an idealized return to a pastoral landscape whose purity is unquestionable.

Time and again, this image is regurgitated in the making of a nation. Bharat Mata whose image is the body of the nation – and who we cannot bear to be decapitated in Kashmir's struggle for independence – is an obvious example. How much this intolerance has to do with the image of the mother and possessiveness about the womb, I wonder.

STEPMOTHER/DUNGEON

It is often in the command of the love of an overprotective mother that we begin to suffocate. The embrace becomes a grip. The very same shelter that was created to protect us becomes a dungeon from where there is no escape.

In Indra Kumar–Ashok Thakeria's *Beta* (1992), Aruna Irani plays the dominating stepmother who does not allow the son, Anil Kapoor, to step outside the house or meet with anyone outside. Thus she keeps him perpetually under her control. A similar obsession with domestic protection is seen in the Greek film *Dogtooth* (2009) by Giorgos Lanthimos, where paranoid parents create an elaborate scheme to protect their children from the outside world which includes strange games and new languages. The neurosis this kind of overprotection can lead to in children is only too well known.

Likewise, anxiety about the 'outside' can be seen in advertisements for developer-driven middle-class housing around the city. In one such series of advertisements for a housing colony in Pune, the 'special features' being advertised include boom barriers, cc-tv cameras, multi-security checks, video door phones, access control via proximity cards, intercom systems, emergency search lights, public address systems and surveillance cameras at children's play areas, among others. In *The Uses of Disorder*, Richard Sennett draws a link between what he calls the adolescent nature of American culture and this paranoia of the outside. To achieve maturity, he insists, would mean being able to confront and to come to terms with this contradiction.

DIAGRAMMING JAAGTE RAHO

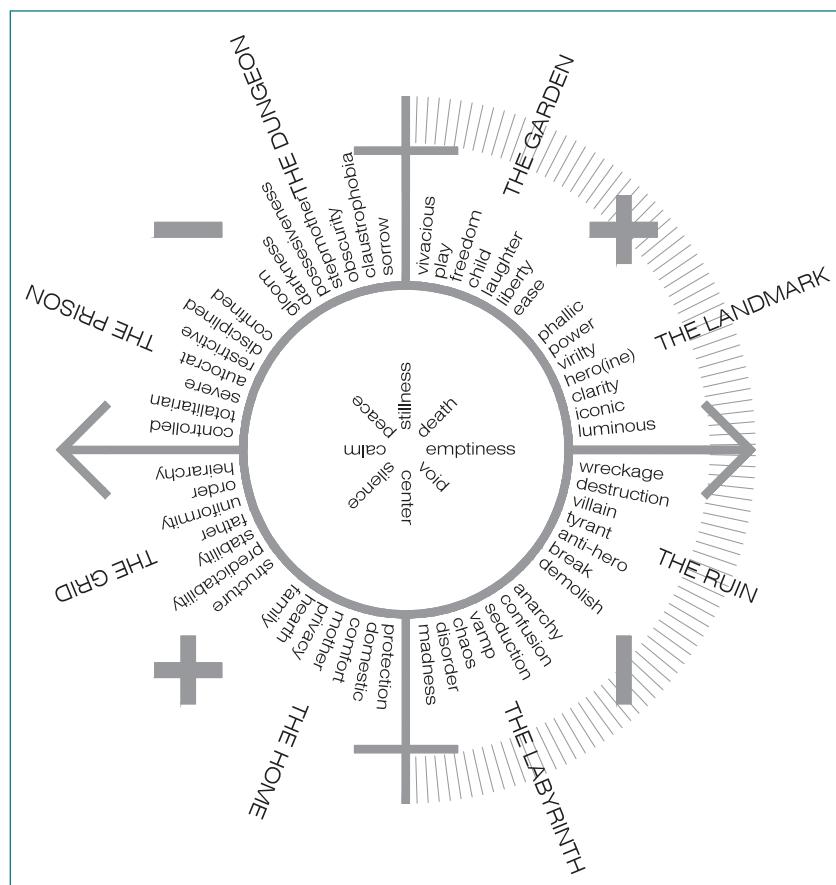
Jaagte Raho can be read as a story of the relationship between four spaces, each of which is invested with meanings that emerge from the collective memory of the city. The opening sequence suggests the dream of the city as a maze of light, dazzling and beautiful. This bejewelled city is exposed as a mere surface when our protagonist steps outside the light into the shadows and finds that beneath this façade, even a simple drink of water is impossible to find. The second space is the streets of the city which are dark corridors leading to nowhere. It is like a dungeon where monsters might live. The third space in the film is the apartment building that he enters to find water. The building is very rarely seen from the outside. As he is chased through it we are caught in an endless grid. Like the city that does not end, it extends in all directions, horizontally and vertically. Every corridor looks the same and in every cubical room a different sin flourishes. The anonymity of the city as the grid, an instrument of ordering chaos, is shown as a destroyer of the human spirit. The fourth and final space is the only place of succour within the city; it lies in the triad formed by tradition, symbolically represented by the shrine, the woman as mother giving water to the weary, and nature in the form of the garden where our hero finds solace.

For each of us the garden, the tower, the labyrinth, the phallus, the womb and the dungeon have meanings in terms of the nature of the spaces they evoke. The narrative

uses these meanings to construct a story. These spaces exist as idealizations in our waking dreams and our nightmares. They are evoked like phantoms through the narrative to tell a story of the city.

To build a 'map' of the spaces within the film – that is, to be able to discern the directions of these vectors and the positions of these points within the spaces of the city in the film, and the narratives that we weave around them – we took recourse to two concepts. From Aldo Rossi's notion of the typology, we tried to determine a set of spatial parameters which resonate with embedded meaning in our city. With this, we conflated the notion of the archetype based on Carl Jung and Gareth Hill's popular model of masculine and feminine. We constructed a makeshift diagram to be able to map the spatial terrain within the narrative – between the 'spatial archetypes' evoked by stories regarding the city. Naturally, there can be no such simplistic diagram to explain the human psyche and its relationship to space; this would be a project doomed to failure. The diagram, thus, must be seen as a plaything, a grid that is at best a thinking tool to initiate rearrangement.

To explain the diagram, we first create a cross-axis based on the concept of gender, as distinct from sex. Gender is a broader, more inclusive notion, and is not determined by the sex within which we are born. We



place on the vertical axis, the male, and on the horizontal, the female. Upon this we superimpose diagonal cross-axes of active and passive archetypes. 'Active' is the proactive, extroverted archetype, while 'passive' is still and introverted. Each of these can be positive or negative in nature. For example, the active male archetype is often seen as the hero of the film or the protagonist, but with unbridled power and madness it can be seen as dangerous. The same goes for the passive female archetype: a womb can become a dungeon if the protection is claustrophobic. In the centre of the axes is the point of perpetual stillness, or death – the place where all stories end. With these three variables, we get a list of eight possible vertices – each representing an archetypal character that has a spatial/typological mirror.

These archetypes exist like apparitions in the city. They appear when we call them from the deepest recesses of our desire. They haunt the landscape of the city and form the material for the stories we tell of the city. There are an unlimited number of such stories that can be told. In each, new patterns and relationships make and remake what we know of our city. Thus all stories of the city, in a certain sense, are mythologies. And these myths affect the ways in which we imagine and make our cities. With a spiralling movement outwards, each myth evokes another against the one it confronts. This is what makes the narratives of the city. In the city these narratives are dizzying, half-formed images that speak to each other to make stories.

Let it not be assumed that this diagram with its neat compartments and vectors claims to be all-encompassing. It is unfortunately the curse of the map to try and clarify, no matter how simplistically, a landscape. These archetypes cannot be so easily separated and need not necessarily act in the ways we presume. For example, there is a scene in Luis Bunuel's *The Phantom of Liberty* (1974) where two girls are handed a series of obscene photographs in the park by a strange man. When the parents of one of the girls find the photographs, they are shocked by the corruption their innocent child has been exposed to. At the same time, they are aroused. The photographs turn out to be photographs of architecture. Architecture here, or rather the image of architecture here, is a phallus – obscene and desired at the same time. It allows for the expression of pleasure within and through the family unit in a bourgeois home. It is this frisson that constitutes the erotic.

Another example of the erotic controlled and created by architecture can be seen in the classic short film by Jean Genet, *Un Chant D'amour* (1950). Two prisoners in adjoining cells fall in love and the wall between them works not only to separate them, but also to join them. They communicate with each other through the wall – it becomes a medium. When one of the lovers smokes in his cell, the exhalation that penetrates the thick wall becomes a way for the second man to take in the other's breath. Meanwhile the jailer watches, unseen by the prisoners, from outside the door. He walks from cell to cell watching the men undress, sleep, masturbate. His pleasure is that of the voyeur. Bound by the role assigned to him by the order of things, the only way he knows to participate in the pleasure he witnesses is through violence – he breaks into the room of one of the lovers and thrusts a gun into his mouth. The two lovers dream of togetherness only in a docile forest outside the city. Towards the end of the film we see a bunch of flowers being passed from one room to the other through the windows of the cells while the jailer watches from outside. Here, grids become repositories of desire, forces of control become generators of desire through the erotic.

THE SPECTRAL CITY

There is a battle being waged on the streets of this city – a battle of representation. As rival groups claim authority over the city, they stake their claim by plastering the city with images of their patron-saints. Printed on cheap disposable mediums and mounted on wooden frames, inanely grinning faces gaze down beatifically on crowded traffic signals. Each poster is an image, making a myth. These are powerful forces in shaping the city – who it claims as its own and who it discards. Identities are made and discarded rapidly as they become tools to access the possibilities and opportunities of the city. These images become methods to construct identities, political citizens – perhaps not surprisingly, given the complicated and difficult task of constructing uniform identities out of so many disparate parts. Our relationship with these images is far from simple. At one level they seduce, at another they frighten. The material of the city is distorted, made grotesque, through them. The city cracks wide open, revealing fissures and rifts, pouring out its innards, letting violence loose on its streets. Linear narrative, clarity, disintegrates into claims screamed out from within, irrupting anything that might hold it together. Within this violent upheaval we also make images as escapes into idealizations, retreats into pasts and futures. Architecture too, or at least the image of it, is invoked by this force – whether it is a temple whose existence, it is claimed, will give credence to the Hindu *nashtra*, or a hospital that is claimed to have been built because of a generous political benefactor.

Architecture carries with it the burden of hope. It cannot but be embroiled in the utopian project of 'anticipatory illuminations'. Its domain is that of building for better-ness. Architects and urban planners are as involved in the telling of stories as filmmakers are. They tell their stories through images that are drawings, their own tool. To make their arguments, architects present the existing city as a problem to be resolved or an artefact to be preserved. This is what allows them the authority to intervene. They evoke idealizations – retreat into a mother's arms, the logic of science, the pleasure of a garden, efficiency and cleanliness, freedom and liberty – as escapes from the labyrinth, dungeon, prison, chaos of the city. They call upon archetypes as images to make arguments regarding the state of the city. These too get consumed in the clamour of images shattering the city into parts. They are at best provisional paradises whose spectres join the innumerable ghosts that haunt the city.

The cinema city map was a project that tried to make sense of these ghosts. But the image was too difficult to hold. It allowed too many impersonations – sometimes a being pretended to be itself, sometimes something else. In the city where the image is all-consuming and ubiquitous, the impersonations are innumerable and countless. Cinema city is a limitless terrain of self-representations assembled by folding reality, folding image and materiality, in a never-ending process – an origami of mirrors. The map of cinema city attempted to make sense of this terrain – to find a way to capture these ghosts, to 'fix' them. It was a project bound to be impossible.

