ABSTRACT  This paper addresses the pedagogic and disciplinary challenges posed by the effort to understand urban spatial practices and institutional histories in Bombay/Mumbai, and other postcolonial South Asian cities. Many cities in the region, such as Chandigarh and Dhaka were designed as iconic of the abstract space of the nation-state. The dominance of the nationalist spatial imagination in the understandings of public space, citizenship, and the metropolitan environment – combined with the functionalist perception of architecture and spatial practice – have resulted in an urban pedagogy that regards the city only as a technological or physical artefact. Architectural education and urban pedagogy is therefore unable to address the diversity of social-spatial formations in the city, and its political regime of predatory development, tactical negotiation, and blurry urbanism. To better understand this new regime, we require a collaborative urbanism that treats the city as an extra-curricular space by which we can reconstruct existing institutional frameworks. Drawing on the work of CRIT (Collective Research Initiatives Trust), Mumbai, this paper explores the post-industrial landscapes of the Mumbai Mill and Port Lands as a case study in two extracurricular research projects, which grew into urban design and community planning interventions in the Mumbai Metropolitan Region, where urban spaces became the arena for re-imagining the relations between knowledge production, institutional boundaries, and civic activism on which nationalism has imposed a long estrangement.

KEYWORDS: City, metropolitan environment, illegality, encroachment, development, urbanism, architecture

Blurry urbanism: tactical negotiations and predatory development

This paper attempts to describe a historical and pedagogic context for the emergence of new practices of urbanism in South Asian cities, with a particular focus on the city of Mumbai and its Metropolitan Region and the work of our research collective over the past six years in mapping new spatial practices in the mega-city. Our main argument is that, in the postcolonial urban regime, there are clearly structured gaps between the mechanisms of control and governance of urban populations, the production of urban form and the built environment, and theoretical knowledge and discourse on urban spatial practices. These gaps between the politics, discourse and practices of urban space must be addressed, and their terrain mapped out, through new methods of documentation and pedagogy, which demand a recognition of the collaborative nature of urbanism and the mutual dependence of formal institutions and curricular programmes with their outside – the informal and local economies and institutions of the city as extracurricular space.

While cities in the subcontinent are diverse formations, with very specific and important differences, we can speak generally of an urban discourse in postcolonial India. Its contours have been defined, on the one hand by romanticism – a visible sense of the past and future –
The city as extracurricular space

and on the other hand by fatalism – a discourse of hopelessness and despair. Our experience of the city is, in a way, the hidden story of our modernity both before and after the nation-state. Can we now find ways of mapping and narrating urban spaces and their practices of production to represent metropolitan experience beyond the nationalist poles of romanticism and despair? Our preliminary argument maps practices that produce the urban environment, and which recur throughout the subcontinent. What unites the visual and working cultures of such diverse centres as Delhi, Kolkata, Karachi, Mumbai, Colombo or Dhaka?

There is a common experience of urban fabric and spatial practices. Our urban dilemma is registered in uniquely visual ways. With urban forms organized across formal and informal economies and markets, we do not know whether to regard them as chaotic or organic, as diseased or desirable in themselves. While some would want to erase such conditions to create an abstract space for state planning or harmonious development, others would like to romanticize or embrace this very form in all its chaos. Some claim that it is an obstacle to the rational usage of resources, while others attribute to it qualities of flexibility, mobility, and democracy. This is the condition of **blurry urbanism** – where ownerships are contested, domains are undefined or overlapping, and architecture is temporary. Fluid and uncertain, yet vibrant and energetic, these spaces continue to exist within our dilapidated historic cores, in encroachments on public spaces and in our natural eco-systems, and in other unplanned parts of our cities. Typically, these spaces are regarded by architects and planners as diseased and to be removed or excised. Yet while trying to avert or remove them, they conspire in their growth and recurrence. When confronted with the real conditions of our cities as an object of understanding and intervention, many forms of practice are engulfed in crises that reproduce this estrangement from the city, this blurry urbanism.

Take, for example, the classic image of the Third World slum. Governments from colonial times to the present day have developed a series of rehabilitation and housing policies, and parallel regimes of demolitions and upgradations (with a bias on rehabilitation, as it creates a cleaner residential environment). Such policies are obsessed with the visual impressions of urban spaces, not the practices by which the environment is actually produced. For urban decision-makers, slum housing, mixed-use economies, and informal settlements are visually repulsive. Their vision, along with that of the practitioners of such housing policy, is almost always an imaginary model located somewhere else, outside present conditions – at one time London or New York, Hong Kong or Singapore; the present obsession being Shanghai. It becomes impossible, within this logic, to think of these chaotic/organic blurred urban conditions – recurring as they do in every city of the subcontinent – as a successful response of the built residential environment to income-generation and employment within that built-up unit. If one were to push this view even momentarily, it would be the modern office complexes, shopping malls, and high-rise residential towers that fail the test of our cities. It may be necessary to draw attention, in framing any future policy, to the way in which our cities work through mechanisms and tactics that often lie outside the legal domain of formal laws, in which basic survival and livelihood means innovating with the urban fabric and form in a piecemeal manner.

While, to the romantic, such a process presents opportunities and flexibility, it also leads to a mode of production that is predatory and expansionist. The sanitary and visual biases of practitioners and decision-makers combine with the vulnerability of the extra-legal to generate a new urban form in which the immediacy of spatial practice is registered outside the domain of legal or visual order. This form is represented visually as chaotic and/or organic, depending on your bias. But its logic is consistent with the production of space through speculative, predatory practices. Master planning – the statist attempt to control urban economies through directive policies and central strategies – has long been abandoned to the new forces of private builders, politicians, and practitioners who control the forces of urban development (see Figure 1).
To understand and explain this new urban form, we must understand how the ‘informal’ is rendered as chaotic and/or organic by the ‘formal’ regime of predatory development. A recent study by Dr Solomon Benjamin, of the elaborate political and tactical mechanisms of housing finance and delivery in a Bangalore slum, explores the growth of an informal housing and work unit which sought piecemeal recognition against the various state policies aimed at either destroying the unit, or deriving extra-legal rents and payments from its occupants. Similarly, in a recent study conducted by the Collective Research Initiatives Trust (CRIT) for a city corporation in the peri-urban areas of Mira Bhayander in Mumbai, it was noted that public spaces and amenities reserved under town planning reservations had been simply disregarded by private builders as they took over earmarked lands for housing and commercial development in the town centre. These violations were only brought to public attention after their takeover by builders. We can no longer ignore these tactical negotiations in informal space, or extra-legal patterns in spatial practice, as simply a deviation from formal, institutionalised systems of housing, if we want to comprehend and intervene in the urban form produced by a new constellation of forces, actors and agencies in the new South Asian city. To explore this predatory form we require both a positive concept of equity to counter the misuse and appropriation of common resources, public lands and spaces, and the natural and human ecology of the city, as well as an understanding of the institutional history of the new urban regime of tactical negotiations and predatory development across formal and informal spaces.

Ideas and institutions in postcolonial Mumbai

The complex of institutions that control urban development continues to reproduce these vivid contradictions in our urban imagination – between slums and high-rises, between chaos and order, demolition and construction, formal and informal spaces – and remains structurally similar to the regime of the city inherited from the colonial state at Independence. As argued above, this split imagination of urban conditions is structured around gaps in our perceptions and understanding of the city, and it is this split that enables the ideology of
predatory development to continue. While the diverse institutions involved – the civic and local authorities, development agencies, the legislature and judiciary, universities and professional bodies – operate relatively autonomously from each other, they nevertheless play a collective role in producing our imaginary of urban development, often informing each other and disseminating knowledge of urban conditions.

While such public and private institutions are entrusted by the state to uphold civic interests and equitable development, they betray their genealogies in the strongly colonial antecedents to the present regime of predatory development. To understand the connection between the nature of present-day institutions and the construction of urban imagination, we must first note that the basic nature of civic governance in India remains largely unchanged since Independence. In many modern South Asian cities, the municipal corporations and councils created by the British in the late 19th century were the first institutions of self-governance by rate-payers, and were primarily addressed to revenue collection, and law and order functions within their jurisdictions in the colonial cities. From these bodies developed a limited formal economy of civic services like water, sewerage, transport and electricity, a system created largely in response to migration to the cities and conditions of disease and overcrowding (Dossal, 1991). In the early 20th century, the various industrial and housing development schemes that were initiated by improvement, housing and land planning agencies, such as, in Bombay, the Bombay Improvement Trust and the Bombay Development Directorate, were modelled on similar American or European institutions. Again, these agencies responded to a perceived crisis in the availability of sanitary dwellings, e.g. after the outbreak of plague in the late 19th century, typically through regarding slums as part of the disease.

After Independence, while the franchise for municipal corporations was democratized, and local housing boards subsumed into state and national ministries, the institutional structures governing the city remained untransformed. As in colonial times, bureaucrats, engineers and experts remained the invisible hand controlling land use and planning, housing and infrastructure development. In India, this tendency was only strengthened with the promulgation of the first Development Plan, ten years after Independence, the creation of regional and metropolitan planning agencies in the 1970s, and the entry of donor agencies such as the World Bank in the 1980s. Urban development remained, before and since, largely driven by external impulses and technocratic responses to urban conditions, rather than from internal needs or democratic priorities. The official discourse about the city continues from colonial times to regard spaces as chaotic, unplanned and in need of greater control. This regime is chronically unable to address patterns of urban growth except as crisis conditions demanding an authoritarian response.

To create new forms of civic knowledge and eventually a new urban imagination, we must develop new structures from internal conditions and immediate practices of space in the city. In this we must critically investigate the perceptions of the city embedded in the frameworks of urban and architectural education in South Asia. After the birth of the institutionalized education of architecture and town planning, British India underwent major efforts to create a new model of urbanism through its experiment in the Presidency cities and in the formation of New Delhi, and after independence through founding a new breed of capital centres such as Chandigarh, Bhopal, and Gandhigram, and industrial town complexes such as Jamshedpur, Rourkela and Bokaro. Even Pakistan, after independence, though the development of new urban formations like Islamabad, launched the programme of building new edifices that would incarnate a new national identity. While earlier city structures were more directly transplanted from European models, the later ones were mediated by the need to create a national imagination for what urban life and work in a post independent society might now look like. It is, however, the earlier models that have captured the imagination, and which have indeed in many cases continued to form the basis for the creation of the later imagination. Thus, the garden suburbs planned by the
British in Mumbai and Colombo become the basis for the creation of new towns even after independence.

The problem can be, in part, identified in the colonial origins of the discourse that governs our knowledge systems and our pedagogic frameworks. Both paradigms on which architectural and urbanist education is based – the technological and the historical – are, for example, profoundly an outcome of this postcolonial discourse which valorizes the abstract space of the plan over the social spaces of our cities. Although there have been reconstructions of other disciplines, formal architectural education has not been able to address this question, primarily because of its basis in the field of technology and engineering, as opposed to the humanities, social sciences or cultural studies. Aijaz Ahmad (Ahmad 1994: 109) has pointed to the difference of formations of knowledge systems between the colonizer and the colonized – between one who can make histories as against one who is a mere object of history. Technical biases in conceiving architectural education as a curricular space – as opposed to the city as an extracurricular space – have led to these gaps in reconstituting our experience of the city. There may well be no framework available to address the problems experienced in our immediate urban context, and our redefinition of the formal curricular space of education must then proceed from an understanding of processes, and not objects, of production of the urban built environment (see Figure 2).

While the kind of imagination that underpins the planning paradigm is substantially informed by models derived from advanced technological societies, there has also been another influential strand informing policy – that of the creation of a traditional society with a rich historical past. Although these may appear as contradictory, the basic premise informing both remains the same – the need to create an ideal model for urbanism, based on the notions of a nation, now that one that has gained independence from a colonial power. Both technology and history are mobilized into a national imagination. This model, once established, could be then replicated all over the region to meet the requirements of newly independent, democratic nations/societies. Therefore, new metropolitan models and urban plans in the postcolonial had to assert strong national identity. Ahmad (1994: 109) makes a similar point about postcolonial literature, where he goes to argue that ‘all third world text are, necessarily, allegorical, and in a very specific way: they are to be read as what I will call national allegories, even when, or perhaps I should say, particularly when their forms develop out of predominantly western machineries of representation’. Most of our endeavours in architecture and town planning were created through such machineries and individuals – Le Corbusier to design Chandigarh, Louis Kahn for Dhaka Capital Complex and Constantinos Doxiadis for Islamabad. These legendary architects created icons for client countries inspired from their rich historical pasts, while also seeking to direct these societies towards technological and industrial advancement.

These experiments in urbanism and architecture created academic imaginations that, we might suggest, function primarily as national allegories. They have worked towards constructing what we might call an abstract or ‘ideal’ space, one that spectacularly fails to address the specific conditions of urban life more than 50 years after Independence. To cite an example, middle class housing in the city of Mumbai is often constructed along imaginations created by the builder and perpetuated by the omnipresent veil of the mass (Holl 1994: 40). This also seems to be the case of Dhaka and Karachi, where intense urbanization has led to speculation and to the rise of a significant group of developers/builders who shape the urban form. There appears to be no alternative within educational institutions or the curriculum to address this peculiar dilemma, other than one based on the kind of predatory development that characterizes the property and housing market of our cities. At best, the academic imaginations of middle class housing are based on familial meta-narratives created from historical spatial practices, or visions of socialism which, it was thought could be replicated throughout the region, irrespective of specific environmental and cultural
differences. One of the best examples of this is the Artists Village in Navi Mumbai and Arnya in Indore, both surviving as ‘role models’ of housing in this region (see Figure 3). The actual performance of both these seem to be far from the perception with which they were constructed. It is, however, the case that not all projects of the region have similar consequences. In Colombo, for example, where the government has played a very active role in designing and providing low middle income housing based on traditional patterns, there have been significant successes, such as the Summit Flats constructed in 1976 for the Non-Aligned Conference, and later passed to government servants. It is interesting to note that, in this case, the recipients were the government servants and not the open market, as happened with both Mumbai and Indore. It would appear, from all such instances, that the academic imagination of our cities has been primarily in the realm of idealism, and has failed to critically engage with the realities of habitation and spatial practice, and failing, similar, to articulate models for sustainable, market-driven practices to address the gap between ideal space and the social life of the city.

There remains, within this history, the interesting possibility of exploring precisely how a reconstitution of our academic imagination may actually be able to engage critically with the immediacy of urban spatial practices. Any such history would, however, raise numerous questions. The primary question would be one of locating the present conjuncture, the institutional crisis of higher education in India. A functionalist perception of the problem can be gleaned from institutionalized architecture education which, in India, comes under the purview of centralized bodies such as the All India Council of Technical Education (AICTE) and the Council of Architecture (COA). The thrust defining both the AICT and COA is towards conceiving architecture as a part of technical education – a conception with several major implications for architectural education and architectural practice in the country. In most schools of architecture, questions of technology are usually counterbalanced by the

importance given to history and issues of traditional cultural practice, as each tries to grapple with the issues posed by the metropolitan environment. It is likely that schools functioning under the aegis of central bodies may be incapable of addressing the immediacy of specific environments and contradictory spatial practices – the kinds of issues raised by urbanism and architecture in a diverse metropolitan centre such as Mumbai. This in turn implicates the centralized formation of national agendas for architectural education. While there may be a need for central bodies to control education – given that the lack of such centrality might lead to ‘anarchy’ – the primary question is how such control may be defined. Our argument is that conceptualizing the sphere of the curricular in a new urban education compels an engagement with the field of the extracurricular – the complex, changing landscapes of the contemporary mega-city.

The space of the Mumbai metropolitan region

The Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR), covering a space of 4355 km², is one of the most populous urban agglomerations in the world, and contains within its boundaries the old Island City of Bombay, the Western and Eastern Suburbs of Greater Mumbai, the twin cities of Navi Mumbai and their suburbs on the mainland, and adjacent parts of Thane District. The MMR as a whole, and in particular the Greater Mumbai area comprising the Island City and Suburbs, has undergone massive restructuring of urban space, of land-use and of employment patterns, and its overall economic and social geography in the past 20 years. According to the Draft Regional Plan of the MMR Development Authority (MMRDA) published in 1995, the share of employment in manufacturing industries in Greater Mumbai reduced from 36% in 1980 to 28.5% in 1990, whereas trade, finance and service industries have increased their share of employment from 52.1% to 64.3% in the same period. Parallel to this shift in the employment base of the urban economy has been a decline in total employment in the old Island City, from 71.8% in 1971 to 55.7% in 1990, due to the flight of manufacturing. The Plan also established the growth of office sector employment in Greater Mumbai from 3.52 lakh units in 1980 to 6.29 lakh units in 1990, and the mushrooming of smaller establishments and production units employing less than five people was established as an overall trend in Greater Mumbai (MMRDA 1995).

Bombay had first developed as an industrial city through the growth and expansion of the cotton textile industry from the late 19th century to the 1940s. The textile industry was located in the central districts of the Island City, north of the old Fort and Native Town, in what have now come to be known as the Mill Lands. After World War II and Independence, through the 1950s to the 1970s, the industrial base of the urban economy diversified into petroleum and chemical production, and then into petrochemicals, pharmaceutica, consumer goods and engineering industries, managed by Indian business as well as by subsidiaries of multinational businesses. These new industries were mostly located on the eastern fringe of the Island City, in the Eastern Suburbs, and in the 1970s and 1980s expanded to Thane and its surrounding district, as well as the Thane-Belapur belt flanking Navi Mumbai (see Figure 4).

Beginning in the 1980s and accelerating through the 1990s, the city and its surrounding region suffered waves of closures of manufacturing industries, leading retrenchments of organized sector workers in these industries, and spatial dispersal and decentralization of production to peripheral areas both within the MMR, and outside of it. This historical process of the deindustrialization of the city is leading to the emergence of what many now recognize as a post-industrial urban economy. This new economic landscape is increasingly dominated, on the one hand, by capital-intensive service sector industries such as finance and producer services, software, mass media and entertainment, communications and information technologies, and residential and commercial real estate and property development. On the other hand, the new economic landscape is also enveloped by labour-intensive
and casualized production of electronics, garments, plastics, consumer goods and other commodities in small workshops, markets, households and in slums and informal settlements scattered across the city. With the closure and dismantling of the old manufacturing industries, this ‘informal’ sector has emerged from the interstices of the urban economy to become the backbone of mass economic production and employment generation in the city and region. These low-income occupations, with exploitative working conditions, casualized labour, and flexible production, contrast with the high-income occupations in the emerging service sector industries. These two models of employment and production are the opposite ends of a continuum whose intermediary occupational strata – organized sector industrial employment and middle-class service employment – are being polarized in the class structure of the post-industrial, global city.

Figure 4. Historical Land use patterns in Greater Mumbai. Produced by CRIT (Collective Research Initiatives Trust), Mumbai, 2003.
There were several larger phenomena that fuelled this historic shift in the 1980s and 1990s, six of which we outline here. First, this situation was compounded by years of financial mismanagement, and neglect of upgradation of plants, machinery, and technology, across many industries in Greater Mumbai and the MMR. This was combined with a narrative of ‘industrial sickness’ (Shroti and Daur 1995) propagated by industrialists as a public alibi for restructuring and closure in the 1980s, as well as a ruse to attract financial incentives for modernization through institutional mechanisms like the Board for Industrial and Financial Reconstruction (BIFR). These funds were often diverted from their intended purposes, and tax breaks granted under BIFR and other sanctioned revival schemes were in many cases used to siphon off money for other enterprises and uses by businesses intent on restructuring and diversifying.

Second, the 1970s and 1980s witnessed a shift in the urban labour market, and an overall decline in new recruitment and employment in manufacturing industries. In the 1950s and 1960s, a time of expansion and growth, industrial relations had been institutionalized through legislation, protection, and a collective bargaining structure for the organized private and public sector industries and their trade unions. However, from the 1970s onwards, larger changes in the regional labour market resulted in a decline in recruitment, and a contraction of permanent employment in the 1980s through non-filling of vacancies and natural wastage, combined with increased outsourcing of production (Banaji and Hensman 1997). This set the stage for a wave of voluntary retirement schemes (VRS) and large-scale retrenchments that became common in the mid-1990s, eroding the basis of organized labour and foretelling the era of cutbacks and closures in most of the city’s organized manufacturing industries – textiles, pharmaceuticals, chemicals and petrochemicals, engineering and consumer goods.

Third, as a result of the above phenomenon, a new period of industrial relations emerged in the 1980s, with the collective bargaining power of trade unions being rolled back, and the balance of power shifting to management after the union expansion of the 1960s and 1970s. The decade after the Bombay Textile Strike in 1981–1982 marked the height of this management offensive against organised labour, with a wave of illegal lockouts called by managements across the city, resulting in prolonged disputes with workers, strikes and general unrest across industry, and heightened rivalry between unions within the same industries. A new style of management – intent on restructuring their units and ‘flexibilizing’ production at the expense of previous negotiated settlements with unions – was matched by a new style of unionism, increasingly strident, spontaneous, and defensive of its shrinking base in the organized sector workforce. The most well-known example of this new style of union leadership was that of Datta Samant during the prolonged Bombay Textile Strike in 1982–1983. By the beginning of the liberalization era, the old system of industrial relations had largely broken down, and trade unions entered the 1990s lacking in direction and strategies for growth.

Fourth, from the 1970s onwards, the introduction of development controls and policy instruments by planning authorities aimed at the decongestion of Greater Mumbai. The Industrial Location Policy of 1974 prohibited the setting up of new units, or expansion of existing units – except small-scale industries – in the Greater Mumbai, Thane and Mira-Bhayander zones of the MMR. However, this policy was obviated by the decline of manufacturing industries in this area, which – contrary to the projections of planners – had, rather than growing to the envisaged 14 lakh employed by 1991, stagnated at about 6 lakh employed. Revisions to the Industrial Location Policy in 1992 dropped the old classification of industry on the basis of scale and size, and adopted environmental and value-based criteria for regulating location of so-called ‘non-polluting’, ‘high-tech’ and ‘high-value’ industries. The Office Location Policy notified in 1977 by the Government, and made part of the Development Control (DC) Rules in 1991, sought a ban on new offices in South Bombay, a measure which was similarly belied by illegal conversions of existing establishments, and
by the unexpectedly rapid growth of the office sector throughout the city at the rate of 78% from 1980 to 1990. A speculative boom in the property and real estate markets in the 1990s undermined manufacturing units in former industrial lands, emerging as new commercial and residential suburbs. The most renowned case of this form of redevelopment has been in the Mill Lands of Central Mumbai. However, suburbs like Chembur, Mulund and Bhandup have also witnessed a flurry of middle-class and upper-middle class property development in the late 1990s, accompanied by a demographic shift noticed in the latest census round, where the Eastern Suburbs have recorded a significant rise in population. In many of these cases, the myth of ‘industrial sickness’ became a device for exploiting the property values of these lands under various revival schemes which provided for redevelopment of portions of lands previously reserved for industrial use.

Finally, the phenomenon most central to the processes outlined above, the decentralization and informalization of production processes across industries in the city and region gained pace in the 1980s and 1990s, with industries opting to subcontract stages of the production process either to temporary (badli) labourers inside the space of the factory, or to outside contractors and agents, to get the work done more cheaply or efficiently than their own workforces (Shrouti and Nandkumar 1994). The time, space and organization of industrial production has thus been dramatically transformed. Processes formerly housed in a single space, such as the composite textile mill, which contained every stage of production from raw cotton to finished fabrics, were outsourced to spatially dispersed subcontracting chains. The growth of these chains is underpinned by the emergence of new forms of casual and contract labour, and the rise to prominence of labour-intensive small workshops, households, slums and informal settlements beyond the pale of the legal protections and regulations that govern the formal sector economy.

The new forms of wage labour on which these subcontracting chains of productions thrive – with insecure employment and unsteady rhythms of production, poor working conditions and low wages – has sharply eroded the bargaining posture and strength of the unionized workforces from what it had been in the 1960s and 1970s. On the one hand, this phenomenon has divided workers in the same unit between permanent and badli workers, introducing new antagonisms within the organized workforce. On the other hand, these subcontracting chains removed control of the production process from the factory workforce through outsourcing, prompting the closure of departments within a unit, and rendering uncertain the future of the entire unit and its workforce. This was most clearly seen during the Bombay Textile Strike, when managements were able to maintain textile production in the powerloom sweatshops in the urban hinterland at Bhiwandi, while the organized sector mill workers went on strike. Today, this ‘informal sector’ – inadequately conceptualized and vastly under-investigated in the research literature on the urban economy – has eclipsed and enveloped the more privileged and organized working-class of large-scale manufacturing industries. With a large supply of cheap and flexible casual labour, the continuing relevance of an organized workforce and institutionally governed industrial relations, has come under question and attack by urban planners, policy makers, and businesses. Earlier legal regulations, protections, and state supports to the industrial sector and its workforces, are now represented as obstacles to growth, competitiveness and investments (Hensman 2001). While globalization has provided an added impetus to the phenomena described above, it has certainly not been the case or origin of any of these processes in Mumbai, which are clearly rooted in a longer-term historical geography that goes back to the changing culture of industrial relations in the wake of the Bombay Textile Strike. The subcontracting chains for outsourced manufacturing production developed in the city and region in the 1980s, undermining the older system of industrial relations and collective bargaining, and allowing managements more freedom to engage in the extensive downsizing of workforces and restructuring of land as real estate – the sign of the new global city economy in the Mumbai Metropolitan Region (Banaji 2000).
Re-instituting the city

The Mumbai Metropolitan Region as a terrain and laboratory for exploring new spatial practices presents numerous opportunities for pedagogic experiments both within and outside the space of the curriculum and classroom. The rest of this paper will be largely concerned with describing two action-research projects on the post-industrial landscapes of Mumbai, in the Mill Lands and Port Lands of the decaying industrial core of the Island City. These projects – which originated in academic interests and grew into concrete interventions in urban spaces – based themselves on an extra-curricular practice that uses the city as a pedagogic device for the creation of a new inter-disciplinary urbanism. Narrow vocational or technical instruction, by simply satisfying the norms of central bodies (or the desires of professional practice), cannot substitute for the work of the imagination – which makes technical skills and tools useful and exciting outside both the classroom and the workplace, in the public sphere of citizenship and civic action. Many recent pedagogic initiatives have intervened directly in the space of colleges – taking advantage of weak conditions prevailing in many educational institutions – to introduce new courses and means of certification. This conjuncture has opened spaces of opportunity for bold curricular initiatives such as those at the Design Cell of the Kamala Raheja Vidyanidhi Institute of Architecture in Mumbai and at the Centre for the Study of Culture and Society in Bangalore, as well as extra-curricular initiatives such as those of our group, CRIT (Collective Research Initiatives Trust), Mumbai.

Owing to the centralized controls of the AICT and COA, it became necessary for us (the KRVIA Design Cell, which later registered independently as CRIT) to define a theoretical practice by which the Mumbai Metropolitan Region could be addressed to wider bodies of architectural and urban theory. From the outset, our work has sought to recognize that, notwithstanding its similarities to other regions and to the wider applicability of the issues, Mumbai may well be a unique case, whose urban experience may not constitute a body of knowledge that can be identified ‘Indian’. It is likely that the knowledge generated from Mumbai may be relevant only to this city in its peculiarities and specificities. Such an approach challenges the assumption proposed by the title of book by Sujata Patel and Alice Thorner (Patel and Thorner 1996), that Mumbai can be a metaphor for modern India. Although we recognize that there might be overlaps in conditions with other cities in the country, we suggest that this should not lead to the formation of a universal or uniform body of knowledge for all our metropolitan centres. Such a belief succumbs to the idealism of the abstract space of the nation, lately mutated into the predatory capitalism of the private city builders. The attempt must be seen at two levels – one of trying to address the present structure of institutionalized architectural education and curricula, and the other of possible strategies to form new knowledge systems and local imaginations for equitable urban development.

Mumbai mill lands: planning without the people

Much of the public debate on deindustrialization in Mumbai has been articulated around the fate of Mumbai’s historic cotton textile mills, whose vast empty compounds in the city centre are iconic of the economic transformation in the city and region. The Mumbai Mill Lands comprise the central districts of the Island City of Bombay, from Mahalaxmi and Byculla in the south, to Worli, Lower Parel and Prabhadevi in the west, and Parel, Lalbaug and Dadar in the north (see Figure 5). Dotted throughout these areas are 58 barely functioning or closed composite textile mills: 33 privately owned, one managed by the Maharashtra State Textile Corporation (MSTC), and 25 of which are managed by the National Textile Corporation (NTC), the public sector textile company formed in the early 1970s by Indira Gandhi’s programme of nationalisation. The network of textile mills, residential chawls, neighbourhoods, markets and maidans nestles in the heart of Mumbai, and is known by its residents as...
‘Girangaon’, the ‘village of mills’. In many romantic and scholarly accounts, Girangaon is hailed as the birthplace of the India’s industrial modernity. Its working class was central to the growth of the trade union and nationalist movements in India (Chandavarkar 1994; Menon and Adarkar 2005), and this district was the fulcrum of Mumbai’s working-class culture and politics until the twilight of the textile industry in the 1970s and 1980s.

The Mumbai textile industry had peaked in productivity, employment, and competitiveness by the 1940s, and its decline became evident by the 1960s, accountable to many of the phenomena sketched above. From the 1950s onwards, the textile production process was decentralized and subcontracted to the powerloom sector in the town of Bhiwandi in
Thane District (and to other towns in Maharashtra like Malegaon and Ichalkaranji), reflecting both a change of technology and industrial organization, as well as a spatial shift to the suburbs and hinterland. By the time of the Bombay Textile Strike in the early 1980s, the powerloom sector had long eclipsed the composite mills in efficiency, profitability, and prospects for growth. From 1955 to 1989, the output of the powerloom sector of the textile industry had grown from 299 million metres to 3680 million metres of cloth, at the rate of growth of 7.9% per annum. In contrast, the mill sector’s share of total production of textiles went from 74.2% of all textile production to 21.5% in the same period.

The steady rise in production in the powerloom sector compensated for the decrease in the mill sector’s output, and total production of textiles in the country continues to rise. Taken along with the ready-made garment sector, the market for which expanded in the 1970s and 1980s, textiles remain one of India’s prime sources of foreign exchange and export earnings. The rapid growth of the powerlooms over the composite textile mills is accountable by several factors – low wages and sweated conditions of work, minimal overheads and capital investment, evasion of protective labour laws and excise duties, and other concessions which the industry enjoyed before the Government’s New Textile Policy in 1985, and the industry’s overall flexibility in responding to market swings and consumer demand. This flexibility of production is ensured by a casualized workforce in the powerloom sector, which enjoys no security of employment or other amenities and welfare measures, unlike their counterparts in the mill sector of the industry (Uchikawa 1998: 96–97,104, 161–162, Goswami 1990 2429–2439, 2496–2505). Unlike in the mill sector, whose workers were amongst the most powerful and privileged in any industry in the country, the powerloom sector works entirely on contract and casual labour, and is organized around small-scale workshops employing less than 50 workers per unit, again unlike the large-scale textile mills which employed organized workforces numbering into the thousands.

With the rise in real estate values through Greater Mumbai, which began in the late 1980s and peaked in the mid-1990s, the Mill Lands emerged as more valuable for their potential redevelopment as a new commercial and residential district in the heart of the Island City, than as a centre for manufacturing and textile production. The steady attrition of workers by mill managements, and shifting of production out of the Mill Lands, after the inconclusive end of Textile Strike in 1983, accelerated with the skyrocketing of real estate values in Mumbai in the 1990s. Twenty years ago, the Mill Lands had a population of around 2.5 lakh people, and many activists now claim that this population has now dwindled to around 50,000 or 60,000. According to the latest census data from 2001, Parel and Dadar have recorded the sharpest decline of population of any of the census wards of Greater Mumbai. The combined market value of the 600 acres of real estate in the Mill Lands in the mid-1990s was estimated at around Rs 5000 crores. The vestiges of the industry and the swathes of land that the mill compounds occupy soon came under the combined pressure of down-town businesses seeking to shift out of the congested districts of South Mumbai, and a nexus of property developers and criminal mafias, politicians and party-affiliated unionists of the Rashtriya Mill Mazdoor Sangh (RMMS), and mill owners turned landlords, all sought to profit from vast properties in the Mill Lands.

Land-use and development policy began to spell out some of these changes, with the amendments to the Development Control (DC) rules of the city in 1991, specifically in rules 58.1 and 58.2, which addressed the Mill Lands. These new rules permitted portions of the ‘surplus land’ within mill compounds to be redeveloped, and under rule 58.2, the funds accrued from this redevelopment was to be invested in the revival and modernization of production, and in generating employment for mill workers. Alternatively, under rule 58.1, the spaces of the mills which were completely unviable were to be divided into thirds, one third for low-cost housing to be developed by the Maharashtra Housing and Area
Development Authority (MHADA), one third for to be developed for civic amenities like schools, educational and cultural institutions, housing infrastructure and open spaces, by the Municipal Corporation, and the last third was reserved for development by the mill owner.4 A few mills were developed under this rule, e.g. the Phoenix and the Matulya mill; however, it was being seen that the redevelopment of the mill land itself had no coherent policy and it was seen as piecemeal.

After many years of chaotic and piecemeal redevelopment by private mill-owners and builders, on 29 February 1996, the Government of Maharashtra established the ‘Study Group on the Cotton Textile Mill Lands of Mumbai’, chaired by noted architect Charles Correa, to prepare an integrated development plan for the textile mill lands of central Mumbai. Under the recently revised Development Control Rules, the Government of Maharashtra felt that an opportunity for releasing space for public housing and urban space could be meaningfully generated through this planning exercise. The Study Group, which henceforth was known as the Correa Committee, appointed the Design Cell of the Kamala Raheja Vidyanidhi Institute for Architecture (KRVIA) to assist in preparing the integrated development plan, for which I was the project manager in charge.

The Correa Committee was allowed access to the mills owned by the National Textile Corporation (NTC) – a public sector undertaking formed in the 1980s to nationalize and modernize ailing private textile mills. The Committee was not permitted access to the privately-owned textile mills by their owners. The Committee undertook physical documentation of the NTC mills for their buildings’ historical importance, structural condition and present use, landscape features and physical transformations over time. The Committee also carried out a visual analysis of the midtown mill districts, analysing their existing movement pattern, open space structure and urban form. The immediate imperative of the Committee was to formulate a broad land-use plan for the city, and their methodology did not at all address the local working-class communities and their relationship with this part of the city. The final episodes of the workers’ struggle against closures and retrenchments in the textile mills was the backdrop against which the Committee conducted its work in 1996–1997, but this did not figure at all in the Committee’s deliberations.

The Committee worked with the broad assumption that visibility, accessibility and space–movement relations would create a system of inclusive public spaces serving the local communities and the city as a whole. While old buildings and other physical markers were seen as possible symbolic links to the local community, the possibility of exploring these historical relationships was never seen as an important part of the integrated development plan. Interestingly, the Committee suggested that these structures were of heritage value, and needed to be conserved and re-used for commercial or institutional purposes. By retaining these markers, the Committee argued that the history and memory of the textile industry would be retained in public consciousness. In this context, an industrial or textile museum was also proposed by the Committee, behind which there was a tacit assumption that the struggle of the workers had conclusively ended. This plan, created with the lofty intention of making inclusive public spaces, thus was neither able to address the community’s feelings and aspirations, nor gain their support or wider public endorsement for the plan.

The Mumbai Mill Lands have witnessed a rapid transition in the past 20 years from an active industrial and manufacturing centre to a new frontier for real-estate expansionism, gentrification and land profiteering by builders, mill-owners, criminals and politicians. The objective of the Correa Committee – to coordinate and promote integrated development of these areas with the city and community – has been subverted through haphazard commercialization, which has continued apace in the seven years since the Committee was formed. The proliferation of elite office and residential complexes, shopping malls and retail outlets, diskotheques and bowling alleys, and new flyovers in the Mill Lands are creating an exclusive elite enclave in the former industrial heart of the city. This urban form derives its logic
from the speculative real estate market, and is systematically erasing all traces of history and memory, driving the local community out of their homes and livelihoods.

The Government has been unable to lay out any clear policy, guideline, or overall strategy for the area and the transformations it is undergoing. The Correa Committee Report was shelved almost immediately after its completion, without any public discussion or debate on its limited findings. However, various activist groups, unions and public intellectuals have continued to fight for the local community’s rights to work, housing and new economic opportunities. This movement has transformed from one of strikes and protests against closures – agitating for restarting of the mills – to fighting for workers’ rights to compensation and rehabilitation for their lost jobs – mostly through litigation in the courts – to the present struggle over tenancy and housing rights of the local community, faced with displacement by the physical and demographic transformation of the Mill Lands.

While there is now a widespread acceptance of the decline of the city’s textile industry, the future presents a complex scenario. Responses to the commercial exploitation and redevelopment of the Mill Lands, while critical, have been disparate, polarized between groups with sharply different views on the status of workers and the industry in relation to the city. However, whether one believes that industry must be restarted and employment provided to the locals, or one feels that the community must be rehabilitated through service employment, all groups engaged in the debate have considered the process of documentation as important to articulating the future of the Mill Lands in the Mumbai Metropolitan Region.

Many mill-owners in the city refused to cooperate with the study group and denied them access to the privately-run mills to conduct their survey and study, which was aimed at the framing of an integrated development policy for the entire Mill Lands. The scope of the group’s work was thus restricted to the mills owned by the public sector NTC, which only covered one quarter of the total area of the Mill Lands. The committee report has, to date, not been circulated publicly, and is widely regarded by architects and planners as a failure in design and policy terms (D’Monte 1997). The recent announcement by the NTC of its intention to dispose of its lands in Mumbai has given new relevance to this report, which had been consigned to the dustbin of Bombay’s urban planning history. However, the NTC’s appointment of a consortium of foreign-run property and real estate consultancies to advise on valuation of its assets and division of its lands continues to frustrate those individuals and groups that have campaigned for years for the integrated development of the Mill Lands precinct, but have seen it more as a physical than a social problem.

Meanwhile, private builders had a different strategy for the Mill Lands. Following the promulgation of the new DC rules after 1991, cases referred under the Sick Companies Act of 1985 to the BIFR for tax breaks and financial amnesties for ‘sick industries’ swelled, requesting permission to allow new development in the Mill Lands, under the guise of industrial revival and modernization. What in fact occurred was further downsizing and closure of what was left of the mills and their workers, and siphoning off of funds and incentives earmarked for investment in the industry. This phenomenon of illegal redevelopment, throwing up sharp contrasts between mill workers losing their jobs and mill managements aggressively promoting gentrification, was the site of protests and mobilization by the Girni Kamgar Sangharsh Samiti (GKSS). This workers’ rights group, which, when formed in 1989, campaigned and litigated for re-opening of closed mills, later agitated for a monitoring committee for the revival and redevelopment of the Mill Lands, and state intervention to support displaced and unemployed mill workers. The GKSS organized workers, middle-class activists and intellectuals, and prominent cultural and political figures from Girangaon in defence of the working-class character of the area. The GKSS upheld the rights of displaced workers to employment and housing, against the mill-owners, builders and political mafias intent on turning Girangaon into an ‘elite paradise’ and cashing in on its real estate (Adarkar 1998: 151–161; Adarkar unpublished). After prolonged agitation and negotiations with the
government, many of these groups’ policy recommendations were enshrined in new policies for monitoring of sales of surplus land and escrow accounts to safeguard workers’ livelihoods, which were announced by the Government of Maharashtra in late 2001.

Amidst these struggles over space, the skyline of mid-town Bombay, dominated for a century by the chimneys of the textile mills, soon sprouted several high-rise skyscrapers, and the Mill Lands began to emerge as a post-industrial and strangely post-modern landscape – with offices of finance companies, management consultancies and multinational banks, advertising agencies and media firms, and art galleries, discotheques, entertainment outlets and restaurants sprouted in the former working-class strongholds in the Mill Lands, signs of an uncertain growth amidst a general landscape of dereliction. This is the predatory pattern that developed amidst the failure of political will and civic imagination through centralized planning in the Mill Lands. One of the most notorious instances of this type of high-income gentrification can be seen in the Phoenix Mills, at Tulsi Pipe Road in Lower Parel, whose transformation from dying textile mill to upmarket retail and real estate destination was documented in a study by the Girangaon Bachao Andolan in 2000. While the workers’ community and their union representatives were never able to fathom the core of the integrated development plan, the mill owners were similarly unable to perceive the use of their lands as open or public spaces for the city, regarding them only as their private property for real estate speculation. The analytical failure of the Mill Lands project was in our lack of recognition of how competing interests and aspirations shape the urban built environment, along with wider economic and technological changes. Our plan failed to gather any support from anyone, and this prompted reflections on our methods of documentation and intervention, which while based on a public interest, was unable to use conventional instruments to achieve a public good. The Mill Lands project indicated that the aspirations of various actors and agencies are not only essential in articulating an intervention, but also in providing support for implementation.

Mumbai port and dock lands: from documentation to intervention

The second project discussed here was an effort that began at the KRVIA Design Cell and has continued into CRIT. Incorporating lessons drawn from the Mill Lands project, we sought to conceive new methods and tactics of intervention in the post-industrial landscapes outlined above, which avoided a master planning approach and which instead sought to map the conflicts and desires of different actors and agencies in a specific area. An opportunity for a new study of the Bombay Port Trust and its lands in the Island City presented itself to the KRVIA Design Cell in 2001, through a collaboration with the UDRI (Urban Design Research Institute), a local urban design advocacy group. Non-modernization of the antiquated port infrastructure in the docks, deindustrialization of the city, and the development of new container ports in the region had substantially reduced shipping and cargo activities in Mumbai. While there was an opportunity to utilize the Port Lands to reduce pressures of increasing development and densities in the city, these lands were locked in a larger political, institutional and administrative muddle with sharply conflicting visions of their future role in the Metropolitan Region.

The Mumbai Port and Dock Lands (see Figure 6) cover the entire eastern waterfront of the old Island City of Mumbai, stretching from Colaba in the south to Wadala and Chembur in the north; it forms one flank of a larger arc straddling the Harbour of Bombay, with the planned twin city of Navi Mumbai facing the Island City on the mainland opposite. These Dock Lands include the Sassoon Docks in Colaba – devoted to fishing and trawler activities – and the contiguous stretch of operational port areas at Mereweather Dry Docks and Hughes Dry Docks, Alexandra Docks (Indira Docks), Prince’s and Victoria Docks, and Mazagaon Docks. These Lands also encompass the non-port waterfront areas in Colaba at
The city as extracurricular space

Apollo Bunder and the Gateway of India, the Naval Dockyard, Mint House and Old Custom House in the heart of the old Fort, Ballard Estate and Ballard Pier business district, and stretches further north at Ferry Wharf (Bhaucha Dhakka), Mazagaon, the Darukhana ship-breaking yard, the bulk cargo storage facilities at Cotton Green, Mazagaon and Sewree, and the oil and gas terminals in the northern area of the Dock Lands, in Wadala and Chembur.

Figure 6. Mumbai Port and Dock Lands Map. Produced by CRIT (Collective Research Initiatives Trust), Mumbai, for A study of the Eastern Waterfront of Mumbai, published by the Urban Design Research Institute (UDRI) the Kamala Raheja Foundation and the Infrastructure Development Finance Corporation (IDFC), Mumbai, 2005.

The Bombay Port Trust (BPT), founded in 1873 as a trust managed by business, government and labour, and today managed by the Ministries of Surface Transport and Shipping, is the sole custodian of this vast urban precinct. These estates comprise an eighth of the land of the entire Island City of Bombay, 1800 acres of prime urban real estate endowed with the infrastructure of ports and docks, warehouses, naval and military establishments, ship-breaking industries, scrap metal rolling mills and workshops, petroleum and oil industries and other functions related to the port, shipping and other industry. The Dock Lands are situated adjacent to the Mill Lands, and are intersected by both the Harbour Line of the Central Railway and the now defunct Bombay Port Trust Railway, which once served the transport needs of the docks, and lies disused.

In addition to the old port, the space of the Dock Lands is also occupied by many other industries and forms of economic activity. These formal and informal industries once articulated with the other industrial spaces of the city, which like the Dock Lands, lie in near ruins, evacuated of production and empty of workers. There is a belt of closed or nearly idle manufacturing industries in Sewree, including multinational plants belonging to Colgate-Palmolive, Hindustan Lever and Firestone, many of which closed down in the 1980s and 1990s. While most of Sewree is an industrial graveyard, it is otherwise occupied by the petroleum industry there as well as in Wadala and Chembur. The northern part of the Dock Lands in Sewree and Wadala contain large areas devoted to the storage units, stations and refineries of public sector oil and petroleum companies Indian Oil and Bharat Petroleum – sites and infrastructure inherited from the original refineries developed by Burmah Shell, the Indo-Burma Oil Company, and Standard Oil in the interwar and post-Independence. This petroleum refinery complex is connected to the Pir Pau Jetty at Chembur, where servicing and fuelling of petroleum tankers takes place, and connects to the other activities related to the storage, transport of petroleum and natural gas of the public sector Oil and Natural Gas Company (ONGC) in the Bombay Harbour and at Nhava Island. Spread throughout the estates of the Dock Lands are large godowns, weigh stations, warehouses and storage facilities for commodities and food grains, such as at Wadi Bunder, Elphinstone Estate, Cotton Green, and Frere Basin in Mazagaon. Vestiges of the textile industry can also be seen in the space of the Dock Lands, most iconically in the grand Cotton Exchange next to Cotton Green Station, the trading floor erected in the 1920s by the East India Cotton Association as a monument to the city’s prestigious place in the global
cotton trade and textile industry. One of the city’s old textile mills, now closed, is located in the Dock Lands – the Mukesh Mills (Sassoon Mills) on the waterfront at Colaba, adjacent to the Sasoon Docks.

The Port and Dock Lands also contain many informal and ancillary economies, either tangentially linked, or unrelated to the formal economy of the BPT. These activities include a large truck driving and transport trade related to cargoes coming in and out of the city, a large scrap metal industry connected to the ship-breaking activities at Darukhana, fishing and ferry trade at Ferry Wharf in Mazagaon, and at the Gateway of India and Sasoon Docks in Colaba (see Figure 7). There are many other forms of casual and contract labour, and informal economic activity, in the household and slum economies located on the encroached quays of Lakri Bunder, Coal Bunder, Tank Bunder and Hay Bunder near Sewree, such as cleaning and packing, sex work and vending. The workforce of contract and casual labourers occupying the Dock Lands is estimated at around 100,000 people, although, like elsewhere, we have no solid figures or accurate representations of this population and economy.

This vast infrastructural complex in the Dock Lands, connected to the thriving textile industry in the Mill Lands, propelled Bombay’s growth as the commercial and industrial gateway of western India from the late 19th to mid 20th centuries – the cosmopolitan world city which became an icon of India’s national modernity. In the past ten to 15 years however, the BPT has been confronting a crisis that threatens its survival on the bases of these economic functions in the city and region. Since the 1970s, the containerization of cargo traffic and increasing mechanization of ports, and growth in the size of vessels, integrated with the communications and information networks developed by businesses in the 1990s, have completely transformed the business of ports and shipping globally. Smaller,
private ports on the western coast in Gujarat and Maharashtra, such as Kandla, which employ flexible workforces of contract labour, offer more competitive rates, better facilities, faster and more efficient throughput of cargo than Bombay, and are thus more attractive destinations for regional shipping traffic and trade.

In the mid-1980s, in an effort to position Bombay more favourably in this rapidly changing business climate, the BPT and Central Government jointly financed the construction of a new modern and containerized facility, the Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust (JNPT), located on the mainland side of the Bombay Harbour in Nhava Sheva, near Panvel in Navi Mumbai. Mired in bureaucratic delays, JNPT was stillborn by the time it became fully functional in 1989, and could not compete favourably with other ports in the region. Lack of policy coordination between the old and new ports in Mumbai resulted in a vicious downward spiral of competition between the BPT and the JNPT, which undermined both ports, rather than promoting the growth of both ports in tandem, and compounding the structural crisis of the BPT, because of a diversion of traffic.

In 1998, the Central Government invited tenders for foreign companies to invest in port and shipping infrastructure, and the JNPT leased several of its berths to what has now become the Nhava Sheva International Container Terminal (NSICT), which is 95% owned and managed by the multinational shipping firm Peninsular and Oriental (P&O). In the less than two years that the NSICT has been open in Mumbai, its management claims to have diverted more than 70% of container traffic previously bound for the BPT or JNPT. NSICT, operating as a node in a global network of shipping and container traffic dominated by P&O and similar global shipping lines, has more than twice the throughput time for cargo than JNPT or any of its rivals in India or the region, has a deeper draught for berthing the largest of container vessels which the BPT cannot accommodate in its shallow draught basins, is completely computerized in its operations, and has a total workforce of less than 700 people, inclusive of staff and workers. P&O has established a similar container facility in Madras, and is bidding for further sites at Cochin and in Sri Lanka, confident of expanding its container operations despite the global economic downturn. Within the MMR, planners in CIDCO and the State Government are positioning the JNPT-NSICT Port as part of planned investment zone which comprises the Mumbai-Pune Expressway, a proposed second international airport at Panvel, and the export-oriented Special Economic Zone (SEZ) to be located at Dronagiri – one corner of the State’s planned economic Golden Triangle of Nashik, Pune and Panvel.

In the past several years, with the liberalization of the national economy, such regional and global shifts in technology, investment and economic policy have begun to unravel the old Port of Bombay and the space of the Dock Lands. Similar to the industries in the Mill Lands and the Eastern Suburbs, the BPT has suffered lack of upgradation of, and investment in, its antiquated docking facilities and port infrastructure, which is only semi-containerized and can only service small feeder vessels, not the large mother vessels that can be serviced at JNPT or NSICT. High octroi rates and other tariffs and levies on moving goods through the city have discouraged businesses, and diverted ships to JNPT, NSICT and other ports in Western India. Additionally, years of political interference and mismanagement by the public sector bureaucracy have compounded these phenomena and driven the BPT into a financial crisis that has become acute in the past three years, for which BPT is now seeking loans for restructuring from several financial institutions and the central Government.

Labour inspectors with the Bombay Dock Labour Board (BDLB) also allege that an irresponsible trade union leadership in the two recognized unions, the Transport and Dock Workers Union led by S.R. Kulkarni, and the BPT Employees Union led by Shanti Patel, has been less interested in improving working conditions, and the quality and productivity of work, than in protecting the wages and employment security of their workers. Reflecting the general contraction of employment through the city and region, the last de-casualization
scheme for dock workers was passed in 1983, after which a ban on employment was imposed by the port management. Employment in the BPT showed an overall decline in the 1980s. While increasing at a rate of 8% from 1980 to 1983, from 1983 to 1990 employment declined by 16% in the Port Trust, and by 15% in the Dock Labour Board – the tripartite scheme of shipping agents, unions, and the port management under which all permanent dock workers were registered and were guaranteed regular work. Parallel to the unionized workforce, the employment of unregistered contract labour on regular shifts increased through the 1980s and 1990s as employers and shipping agents flouted the employment norms established by the BDLB, and sought greater flexibility. With lack of availability of work for its 8,000 workers registered under various welfare schemes, mounting financial deficits and a precipitous decline in revenue since the late 1980s, the BDLB was absorbed as a department of the Port Trust in 1994 (Noronha 2001: 4851–4858). Additionally, through a VRS scheme announced in 1992, and two further schemes in 2001, the entire organized workforce of the BPT has been reduced from about 35,000 to 23,000 in the past ten years.

Our study of the Mumbai Port Land initially had two tasks. First, to undertake a routine survey of the physical space of the Port and Dock Lands and, second, to understand the interests that contributed to the muddle. On the basis of these preliminary studies, our study group received support for a larger, detailed project on the Port Lands and eventually the Government of Maharashtra appointed an official taskforce to visualize scenarios and planning strategies for future development of these lands into public spaces, commercial and housing complexes, and transport hubs for the region. Ironically, with the establishment of the government task force, our study group never found a role or a place in it, with senior bureaucrats, planners, and the sponsors of the earlier study claiming to represent the project, the next phases of which would be sub-contracted on a consultancy basis to CRIT. Although we continue to attempt to map the actors and negotiate their interests through the plan, these groups, including the Port Trust, continue to contest the authenticity of their representation. In fact, since the circulation of the study group report, the port authorities now fiercely guard their documents. While negotiation of often irreconcilable interests remains a dilemma, the most important issues raised by our research have been the articulation of a public interest in equitable spatial development, and location of such a ‘public’ when powerful agencies seek to appropriate projects based on community interventions, in the name of the public.

Conclusion: collaborative urbanism and collective research

While both the Mill Lands and Port Lands projects have clearly expressed the inadequacy of centralized, formal planning processes by the state, they have also sought to bring something contradictory into focus. In the absence of the political will or state legitimacy for central planning, predatory forces take over the processes of urban development. While institutionalized research work can help re-imagine our cities in fundamentally more humane ways, the formal academy fails because of its structural inability to respond to the kind of mutant realities that may permit a conceptual restructuring of the spaces being contested by new private actors and interest groups. It is therefore vital that we work out new frameworks for knowledge production in architectural education, which emerge from, as well as record and reflect on, our immediate experiences of the city’s institutions and spaces beyond the limited formal sphere of professional practice or institutionalized curricula.

While the historic industrial and spatial changes in Mumbai’s Mill and Port Land are common to cities across the world, locally their articulation in the public sphere remains deeply contested and polarized. In the 20 years since the Bombay Textile Strike inaugurated a post-industrial era of social and spatial restructuring – in which nearly a million factory workers lost their jobs in various industries – political and cultural responses to urban change are divided. They range from the celebratory rhetoric of the utopia of finance and
services, styled on Singapore or Hong Kong, to the passionate protests of activists and community groups against the destruction of livelihoods and homes, in factory closures and slum demolitions. The new politics of space and work in post-industrial Mumbai has yet to be comprehensively documented, much less re-imagined.

While practitioners such as historians, architects, activists and artists each have their own powerful ways of imagining the city, it is only recently that their isolation from each others’ ways of seeing and understanding has been loosened. Wider economic and technological changes are breaking the sway of a generation of institutions that established the postcolonial nation-state as the dominant form of cultural and spatial imagination. The breakdown of these forms – so far experienced largely as crisis and decline – presents an opportunity to re-imagine the relations between knowledges on which nationalist institutions had imposed an estrangement, in the name of disciplinarity and expertise. Amongst these alienated forms are such institutions as universities, museums, and archives, whose present crisis holds out the possibility of forging new forms of interdisciplinary knowledge, which arise from the deep disjunctures between different practices when they address the city as an object. Indeed it is in only in cities and urban contexts that practices are compelled to recognize their complex interdependence when confronting crises of public spaces such as institutions, environments, and markets. The highly polarized and contested nature of the debate on Mumbai’s Mill and Port Lands, and the future of the Metropolitan Region, demands such a recognition of the collaborative nature of urbanism.

Notes
1. Solomon Benjamin, Presentation to the Emerging Urbanism Workshop, organised by SARAI and the School of Planning and Architecture (SPA), New Delhi, August 2004.
2. Parts of this section are based on interviews and research carried out from August to December 2000 in manufacturing industries in the Mumbai Metropolitan Region, facilitated by the Trade Union Solidarity Committee, an umbrella grouping of non-party and independent employee’s unions in the MMR. The unions that responded to the questionnaire circulated, all located in the Eastern Suburbs, were: Ramon-Demm Employees Union, Thane; Franco-Indian Workers Union, Byculla; Bio-Chem Pharma Industries Employees Union, Vikhroli; CIPLA Employees Union, Vikhroli; Gabriel Employees Union, Mulund; Siemens Workers Union, Kalwa, Thane District; Voltas Employees Union, Thane; Nicholas Employees Union, Deonar; Hindustan Lever Employees Union, Sewree; Mukund Kamgar Union, Kurla; Otis Elevator Employees Union; and Modistone Employees Union, Sewree. This research stint was supported by Mihir Desai, of the India Centre for Human Right and Law, Mumbai.
3. During a period of participatory research and fieldwork in Mumbai from October 1999 to June 2000, Shekhar Krishnan worked with the Girni Kamgar Sangharsh Samiti (Mill Workers Struggle Committee), Girangaon Bachao Andolan (Movement to Save the Village of Mills). During this time, he wrote and published Murder of the Mills: A Case Study of Phoenix Mills (Krishnan 2000a), as well as several articles and short essays on the situation of textile mill closures in the Indian Express Newsline, Mumbai, From the Lawyer’s Collective, Mumbai, People’s Reporter, Mumbai. During his fieldwork, he also provided editorial assistance to an oral history project by the leaders of the Girangaon Bachao Andolan, Menon and Adarkar (2005).
5. See http://www.crit.org.in/projects/girni to download and read the report by the Girangaon Bachao Andolan. See also Note 13 of this report.

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The city as extracurricular space

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CRIT (Collective Research Initiatives Trust), Mumbai, is a group of architects, scholars, technicians and artists who have worked together over the past seven years in Mumbai. CRIT was founded in June 2003 with the aim of undertaking research, pedagogy and intervention on contemporary cultural and spatial practices in the Mumbai Metropolitan Region. CRIT regards this vast urban realm as its laboratory and terrain for articulating a critical urbanism. Our understanding of urbanism is based on the recognition that everyday exchanges between disciplines and across sectors is the basic condition of metropolitan environments, and that collective research is essential to transforming urban spaces and civic life. For more information, please visit http://www.crit.org.in

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