

Artist Statements

"The Edge", notes by Anagram Architects (Madhav Raman and Vaibhav Dimri)

To begin with, both of us would like to thank KHOJ for the opportunity to participate in our very first art residency. Our one month of engaging in an art practice allowed us, to an extent, loosen some of the shackles of a straight-and-narrow, programme driven process that underscores our design practice at Anagram Architects. At the outset, we were quite keen to move as far away from architecture with its encumbrances of functional, representational and formal constructs. We wanted to use this opportunity to explore rather than state or argue. In our practice, we are constantly intrigued by notions of territory and have discovered the criticality of tangible and intangible boundaries to these notions. This was our starting point at the beginning of the residency. Initially, while trying to locate the project within KHOJ (in a studio), our thinking was drawn towards the relationship of more easily perceivable territories (the indoors and the outdoors). However, we realised that the spatial conversations within KHOJ already explored these in multiple ways. Our own intervention would, therefore, be a stated object within this architectural, "constructed" milieu or perhaps be representational of a different context or could even be metaphorical. Our hunt for a suitable location at KHOJ was driven by trying to identify a site of ambiguous territoriality or multiple territoriality or one that possessed a fluid and wide spectrum of territoriality. We were instinctively drawn to the open entrance of KHOJ.

KHOJ and its relationship with its immediate context of Khirkee urban "village", and the greater context of Saket and Delhi was of deep interest to us. Over the years, our own perception of KHOJ has been that of a deeply relevant platform that sites experimental, contemporary, urban and (as Sudeshna rightly pointed out) global art practices within an unsanitised animated core of the city, a disfavoured icon as it were. To us its open doors spoke of the many projects it has hosted that engaged with its immediate community and context, which as practices connected to the city and beyond. We found the nature of the portal (a wide, visually permeable metal gateway layered with flimsy reed chik), its aspect (recessed and stepped down from the street) deeply provoking. Visually it is unequivocally open, albeit without being bereft of the control of passage and privacy. Yet in its stepping back and down, it gently induces a deliberate action of entering as opposed to an ambiguous transiting. In doing so, it acts as an edge between two vastly different yet connected territories, quite literally a threshold that must be instantaneously crossed to enter or exit. It was this edge that we chose to explore and investigate.

Our first act was to "inflate" this edge into a space by intruding equally into KHOJ and into the street outside. Thus, the recess and stepping down from the street was negated and the single-step act of crossing territory was elongated. We then suspended a combination of transparent, semi-transparent and reflective thin acrylic sheets a few inches of the floor of the entrance "space". The process of crossing the "inflated" edge thus became an act of negotiation, gradually revealing the "other" territory while constantly changing the perception of it by projecting one into the other. In as much as it blurred the portal between the two territories, it perhaps caused an equal aberration to those familiar with KHOJ and to the uninitiated. The suspended sheets reacted to touch, quivering to even a gentle

breeze, exposing their fragility as territory markers without being easily violable. Since it was installed overnight, just before the Open Studio, the transformation of the edge was sudden even to the resident occupants of KHOJ. We laid a bed of loose gravel that not only covered the gap between floor and suspended lamina but also gave the process of transiting a distinct texture and aural quality. Interestingly, when two people simultaneously transited through “the edge”, the gravel announced the presence of the other within the space without clearly revealing them until the very last instant of coming face to face. This was an unexpected, added experiential layer to our project.

While the preceding paragraphs have attempted to describe the installation and the motivations behind it, it does not entirely capture the enjoyable process of arriving at it. We relished this unique chance to debate, argue and discuss a project outside our design practice. These discussions led to numerous iterations and ideations which, perhaps, are not evident in the final outcome but we can see the impact of each and every one of them. Further, our conversations with Sudeshna, Rupali and Prasad have had immeasurable value in not only incubating our project but also engaging our minds in numerous other aspects of art, architecture and urbanism. For this, we would like to thank them. It is this process that will be the most valuable recompense that we take back from our residency at KHOJ.

"The De-Mapping Project", notes by Prasad Shetty

Mapping urban conditions is one of the prominent trajectories of my practice, which started with a critique of the cartographic mapping methods that are generally used by architects and planners to understand and intervene in the city. The biggest criticism of the cartographic map is that it is unable to capture the softer aspects of the city. My practice involved finding other ways to map these softer conditions and thereby conceptualize the city differently so that newer ways of intervening could be articulated.

In the past ten years, technological advancements have created possibilities to map urban conditions in many ways. While the mainstream practices have advanced in developing real-time GIS based maps using surveillance cameras, the alternative practices have flourished through blogs, amateur videos, art practices, discussion groups, documentary films etc. There has been an increasing urge in putting information about lives of people in the public realm. This has created a context of hyper-mapping, where not only issues of privacy have been compromised, but in many cases issues related to people's livelihood and survival have been negotiated. Hyper mapping creates records that force action. Even though the real could have been overlooked, its record cannot be ignored. For example a study that mapped the practice of recycling plastic and celebrated entrepreneurship has been effectively used by groups that lobby to remove the recycling enterprises as all of these practices could be easily rendered unauthorized and polluting.

As a response to the hyper-mapping context, I formulated the 'de-mapping project' for my Residency at KHOJ, Delhi. This project started with a critique of the hyper-mapping context. I soon realized a pure critique was a paralyzing endeavor – it would make me dysfunctional. Moreover, I wasn't against mapping, but was responding to the flirtatious urge of putting information about personal lives into the public realm and creating an archive – a commodity for consumption. Instead of stopping at the paralyzing 'critique', I decided to rather 'engage' with the hyper mapping context.

As I was working at the KHOJ Studio in Khirkee village in Delhi and also since KHOJ has been building a large archive of Khirkee in the past eight years, I decided to work with KHOJ's archive on Khirkee village. The idea was to work with the maps of Khirkee village (in this case the archive) and reconstruct Khirkee – in a way reverse the process of mapping – de-map.

The final work 'Stories of Here' is a de-mapping project intended to engage with the archive of KHOJ on Khirkee Village and tactically reconstruct stories of an urban village from various kinds of mappings that were available in the archive. 'Here' was used to denote several kinds of spaces –an Indian City, Delhi, an Urban Village, Khirkee village, KHOJ, etc. The stories are about a migrant barber, KT who discovers various aspects of politics in property and planning during his effort to improve the street fronting his shop.

The stories were accompanied by a series of seven collages that were put together using various kinds of material from the KHOJ Archive. The attempt here was to smudge the material, overlap them with others, find relationships and playfully reconstruct the 'Stories of Here'. The collages were about description of the village conditions, people and changing landscapes in various works in the archive; discussions on inadequate infrastructure that is prominent in the village; politics of occupying space in an urban village; conceiving the master plan and the standardizations involved; appropriation of plans and planning process; changing activities, work patterns and landscapes; and politics of mapping and representation in works of art on Khirki.

The project was developed with twin agenda – firstly, towards formulating a critique of the hyper-mapping context and secondly, towards opening up ways to engage with the hyper-mapping context.

"Pothole City". notes by Rupali Gupte

The Art and Architecture Residency at KHOJ, began with an attempt at opening up the discursive space of a seemingly neutral discipline of urban design. For me, the work needed to respond to Delhi as the epitome of the Master Plan and a space for urban design to flourish. Control under the rubric of a 'greater common good' is much easier here than in other parts of the country. A perfectly urban designed city with clean infrastructure becomes the goal of all urban professionals and activists. However sometimes in our zeal of urban activism (undertaken by researchers, academics, civil society groups and the media) we miss out on the politics of the situation and often unknowingly aid erasure. Cities are meant to be places of opportunity, exchange; a place for strangers, for intensities and for densities. The question for me was whether urban design tended to kill the spirit of cities; whether one could learn from the urbanity of the unplanned city.

The residency located in Khirkee, corroborated some of these theories. Research on the context showed that several attempts were made at 'cleaning up Khirkee'. Further investigations showed that Khirkee allowed for several people to claim urban space because of its ambiguity and its distance from the masterplan. Efforts at structuring this place would lead to an erasure of many of its claimants. (Prasad had many more stories of this erasure in his work). On the other hand Khirkee itself was an interesting space which allowed all kinds of entrepreneurships to flourish. It was a receptacle for new migrants into the city, a safe haven for families, a lively neighbourhood with all amenities required for a busy urban life.

Architecture has had a tradition of generating models for the future of cities. One such was the Futurama, a miniature model designed by Norman Ben Geddes for General Motors, at the 1939 New York Fair. It exhibited a city neatly zoned into residential, industrial, commercial and cultural spaces, serviced by eight lane highways that efficiently transported people between these neatly zoned out spaces. All public spaces were a function of these highways and zonings. In spite of a sharp criticism of cities that have been built, based on this model, normative ideas of futures of cities continue to be based on these imaginations, whether it is the Shanghai urban development model or Vision Mumbai or the Delhi Masterplan. The idea was to then develop an alternative model for the future, one that learnt from the unplanned city. This new model devised during the residency was called '**Pothole City**'.

Pothole City as a metaphor

Pothole city is a metaphor for the 'unplanned city'. Its logic is located not in the rigid grid of the masterplan but in the madness of multitudinous claims that make this city. In doing so it also becomes a metaphor for Khirkee and Khirkee extension, (where KHOJ is located) which in bypassing the master plan has allowed a much more lively urban form to emerge than the master plan would afford. My friends from Mumbai, Yogita and Nilesh, who have settled in Delhi, chose to live in Khirki because the area gives them the feeling of neighbourhood and security that a dense urban conglomeration affords and also of course because the rents are much lower here.

The roads in Khirkee are all potholed. This apparently is because of the unauthorized status of this area. A large part of Khirkee extension is supposed to fall into the 'green belt' proposed by the master plan. This is the reason that the authorities have never made the roads. So it seems like there are only two alternatives in the planning imagination of Delhi; well paved roads for vehicles to ply with green belts, shopping centres and residential enclaves or labeling areas that do not conform to their standards as 'unauthorised', refusing to provide any services. By this logic the 'potholes' become devices for this lively conglomeration to exist, because the reverse of that would be a highly panoptic green belted master plan.

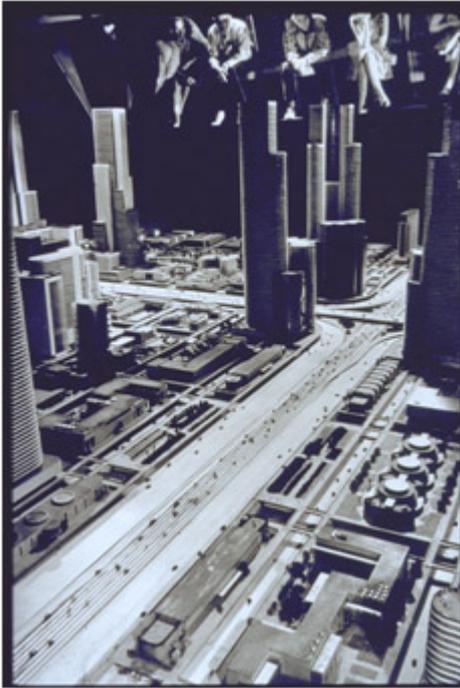
Jane Jacobs has written extensively about the importance of places like this and the phenomenon of 'street' that provide a sense of security and neighbourliness thus avoiding the need for the use of a police force.

A series of potholes then become an allegory to frame a different logic away from the master plan, as a friend Solly Benjamin points out in his description of his journeys in similar areas in Bangalore, "as you drive say on Loni road (as we did some months back, to Abdul Fazal colony) or when I do now every days near Austin town/ Infant Jesus church and it's bazaar-like interstices, the potholes emerge as a continuation of the rich texture of the bazaar as it shapes and wraps around the infant Jesus church and on to Austin Town, not far from where Lawrence lives. We drive there slowly – the body language of the people crossing is very different, assertive, as I mentioned to my fellow car-pooler, we are driving through a lot of people's living rooms".

Pothole City as an urban design model

In 1939 Norman Ben Geddes designed the 'Futurama Diorama', a General Motor's conception of the future urban/suburban city for the General Motors pavilion 'Highways and Horizons' exhibited at the

New York World Fair. Futurama was General Motor's way of selling the idea of a federally funded highway system to the American public. It sold the social benefits of the automobile to the visitors and claimed to make a slum-free society, raising standards of health, hygiene and cleanliness. The city envisaged by Ben Geddes and General Motors was clearly divided into pedestrian areas and vehicular areas and clearly zoned residential and industrial enclaves with large landscaped green belts and public parks.



Futurama Diorama, people on a conveyor belt watching the miniature model of the future city made of highways, greenbelts and residential enclaves neatly separated from workplaces and industrial zones.

In 1941, their efforts fructified when President Roosevelt paved the path for the implementation of a massive highway system that would span the country.

History has shown us how highway planning went hand in hand with urban renewal producing the most unsustainable cities. Highways cut mostly through poor neighbourhoods and destroyed existing vibrant community structures. As a historian in the documentary *Divided Highways* notes, "The interstates gash their way through existing rural landscapes, farming communities, small towns and in many cases it just destroys them. You drive down the interstates passing through farms which are old family farms going back to the 19th century and the farm house is on your left and half the fields are on your right and the farm family that now has its land split in that way if it keeps that land has to commute 2-3 miles with its tractor to get to the other side of the highway to keep farming its land. That is a ripping asunder of old relationships that were present in the landscape and there is a kind of shattering of community that comes with that".

Today, we seem to suffer from a historical amnesia. Our methods of planning cities it seems haven't changed much as seen by the massive Shanghai Urban development model, which very closely seems to be influenced by the Futurama diorama. This vision is not too distanced from the Delhi Master plan or the Mumbai Vision Plan.

2 See the documentary film 'Divided Highways, the Interstates and the transformation of American Life' by Larry Hott and Tom Lewis



Shanghai Urban Development model

Pothole City is contrapuntal to Futurama, to the bigness of cities and to the mega infrastructure projects proposed here. Can there be another future? One that draws from the madness of the city and not from the logic of the grid? Pothole city, in locating itself in a pothole is not simply a counter to the master plan. It exhorts the urban planner and the activist alike to step back for a bit to understand claims, desires and agencies prevalent in cities. As an urban design model it alludes to repair rather than complete renewal.

Pothole City in the courtyard of KHOJ

Pothole city, in locating itself in the courtyard of KHOJ, drives home the fact that this is not an activist led community project, but an attempt to open up a discursive space for urbanism (like the Futurama did in its own way). The installation is a miniature city in a pothole. It is made of cement, a material used to repair and plug potholes. It makes references to Khirkee through details like the Khirkee mosque and some of the actual footprints of houses in the village. But other blocks are cast from daily utensils, children's toys, and the detritus from my friend's house in Khirkee. This miniature city could be any of the hundreds of unauthorized areas in Delhi. The model is deliberately not a rehashing of an existing situation. It is not mapping the real city. It is in most parts fictional. Fiction takes away some of the violence of the implications of fact-finding and the power of the fact finder. Some of the forms in the city are erotic, speaking of the desires and aspirations of thousands of its people who the antiseptic master plan does not accommodate. In addition to the Khirkee mosque, there is also a miniature water tower as part of the ensemble of buildings. This alludes to the need for a decentralized infrastructure. The mosque and the water tank in some ways are both city

infrastructure; while the water tower stands for physical infrastructure, the mosque hints at memory as infrastructure.

The trope of the miniature works at multiple levels. The miniature, as pointed out by Gaston Bachelard in the Poetics of Space, allows a childlike wonderment to persist. Cities are incredible places that allow for situations and spaces for the imagination. They are places of multiplicities, of conflicts, of overlaps and of fluidities. Are our urban designing efforts then erasing these spaces of wonderment towards the creation of boredom, monotony and singular claims? Pothole city is not a vision, but an attempt to look for another way of thinking of the future of cities. Pothole city in exalting the unplanned city is perhaps antiutopic.



Pothole city

The residency for me was extremely productive. I think Pothole city is the beginning of a theoretical construct, which has benefited from the cross over to the discipline of art. I hope to take this idea and resolve it further in future work.