

Many small interventions in public space were made, thereby choreographing the kinetic urban elements to revive this area and dramatize its strange conflict between classical urban spaces and the fast, exciting rhythms of contemporary Mumbai. Mehrotra's reversed strategy to first revitalize public space and in the process raise money to conserve the historic buildings has proven more successful than the conventional conservationist's method.

His interest as an architect/conservator/urbanist lies not with physical spaces or architectural history but with the palimpsest of meanings and functions, the contradictory identities of this city. He does not seek or find his commissions or clients in the government or from large real-estate investors but in the "deep democracy" of local NGOs, slum-dweller unions, and informal organizations. Whereas normal, middle-of-the-road architects and planners would tap into the power source of public authority and market forces, Mehrotra has found another source: the players and rituals of the kinetic city, with its temporary but unstoppable presence on the streets of Mumbai. By developing designs and other strategies that use the festive, the ritual, and the temporary, he has paradoxically succeeded in having a lasting impact on the quality and usefulness of public space. Again in Mehrotra's projects, there is an implied megascale that in its ambition is highly Modernist. Cities like Mumbai are to this day dominated not by the top-down planned objects and schemes of middle-of-the-road planners but by the seemingly unplanned and seemingly light presence of the informal, the semilegal, the temporary, and the ritual. For an ambitious planner-architect who wants to get inside the urban control room, focusing on the kinetic city seems only logical.

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The first two examples might suggest that Ditch Urbanism is specifically bound up with Second and Third World conditions of informal urban growth. This would be a mistake, since it is attitudes and methods that these practices share, not contexts. This kind of urbanism is equally visible in the work of some First World practices, like that of the Italian architects' group Stalker, who took the mile-long housing block Corviale in Rome, a rundown utopia dating from the 1970s modeled on Le Corbusier's Unité, as an object for study and regeneration from within. In San Francisco there is Public Architecture,