The Unconsidered Passer-by.

À la recherche de l'espace public en Asie du Sud.

Par Jacques Lévy



The two cities of Chandigarh and Dhaka make sense to everyone interested in architecture. Chandigarh is one of the rare places where Le Corbusier could put his ideas into practice on a grand scale during the 1950s and 1960s; he left some remarkable buildings (especially the Palace of Assembly, the High Court, and the Secretariat Building) all the while influencing the conception of many more[1]. In Dhaka, the famous Louis Kahn built the National Assembly (1962-1974), considered to be one of his masterpieces. The building proposes some variations on simple geometric forms, either angular or circular. The principle building includes some sturdy towers reminiscent of Mogul forts, the remains of which can be found elsewhere in the city. It is enthroned, in a supported symmetry, in the middle of an immense park, which distances it from the city as much as it renders it publicly inaccessible. Chandigarh is yet a stronger statement since it is the whole city the architect designed. It is a project that borrows a lot from Ebenezer Howard's Garden City model, but with Le

Corbusier's own personal interpretation.

Many things can be observed going from Chandigarh to Dhaka. We follow the Ganges until the Brahmaputra Delta. This North Indian area incorporating Pakistan, North India, and Bangladesh is home today to about a billion inhabitants, that is to say, the vast majority of the Indian sub-continent (or South Asia). The southern part, including South India and Sri Lanka, is similar in some ways to the North, but also different since it has a lower population density and is at a less advanced stage of urbanisation. In addition, researchers have often noted significant differences in the social organisation of Northern and Southern India. I have been able to confirm these distinctions during several stays in different cities of the sub-continent from 1978 to 2010. For this reason I have voluntarily set aside the cases of cities from the South, Mumbai (Bombay) included, and Sri Lanka, about which my observations have confirmed this typology. The following text is thus limited in its area of analysis to the Northern part of the ancient Hindustan urban world, which will be, to simplify things, resumed in a text on 'Indian Cities', or 'Cities of the Sub-Continent'. These observations were carried out on-site in the following cities: Chandigarh, New Delhi, Jaipur, Agra, Varanasi (Benares), Kolkata (Calcutta), and Dhaka. Pakistani cities were excluded from the analysis for I lacked a sufficient amount of direct observation. However, keeping in mind the lack of consensus on concepts of urbanity and public space, second-hand data is very unreliable since it lacks comparability. It is nonetheless very probable that Pakistan falls well within the Northern Region of the sub-continent.

Based on the following observations several interpretive reflections are herewith proposed.

A Chain of Brutality.

Let us begin with as precise a description as possible of that which is the most obvious manifestation of the 'public domain' where public space does exist: streets and squares. When you observe the street-scene in one of the northern cities of the Indian sub-continent, you are first struck by the brutality of traffic relationships, whatever be the situation — whether sidewalk or gutter — and the

actors — pedestrians, animals, and vehicles of every sort. Typical types of traffic rules — streetlights, signs, police presence — only slightly moderate the phenomenon. A prolonged observation allows you to understand that the relationships are organised to be this way: relationships of strength, made up of an objective element (mass and velocity), with a subjective element (the actor's involvement) govern all of the movements. This device is translated into the absence of any legitimate external rule (such as 'rules of the road'). Nothing is forbidden. Thus, one can find along the expressways not only mobile bodies technically forbidden on this kind of artery: pedestrians, bicycles, and animals; but also cars, motorcycles, or trucks driving at full speed in the wrong direction, obliging those driving in the right direction to move aside, or even beggars sitting right in the middle of the road. This is including on the recent motorways built according to global standards, with toll stations, supposedly insurmountable medians, and perimeter fences. Contrary to other developing countries, the dangerousness of roads has in fact increased in India following the construction of arteries, which reduce it everywhere else. Traffic mortality has increased at the same rate as motorisation: about 160,000 deaths in 2010 versus 80,000 in 20002. The difference in the tendencies between India and China is striking, for in the latter the number of deaths per capita has been decreasing since 2002 despite a spectacular increase in vehicle ownership.

What can be observed in the street in this part of South Asia? Each pair of actors, human-human, human-vehicular, or vehicular-vehicular, constitutes an acting cell operating in the following manner. Every roadway extension (gutter or sideway) at stake due to the simultaneous presence of at least two candidates for its occupation sets forth the activation of a transitive hierarchy (relation of order) of domination which can be schematised this way: trucks and buses>4x4s>other vehicles>auto-rickshaws/baby taxis>human-drawn carts>cycled rickshaws>pedestrians, animal-drawn vehicles being situated, according to their size, in one of the lower orders of the hierarchy. The logic organising the action is that of the *threat*, the threat of a shock leading to greater damage for the dominated than the dominator. The potential level of threat defines the hierarchy. This is why speed must be added to the above classification, which can in part compensate for the weakness of the dominated parties. Since permanent traffic jams keep dominators from going very fast, there

is good reason for the subjective choice of dominated parties to contest this order to a certain point, thanks to their courage. It is the only purely interactive way to inverse the hierarchy, for neither the ultimate primacy of the most vulnerable (the weak have a right to exist, even if they are in the wrong), nor even the dissuasion of the strong by the weak work here (the strong renounces pushing his luck, for in doing so, he may incur disproportionate damage which would eventually weigh against him). The latter two are characteristic of situations found in the interstices of law in more ‘ordered’ countries. It is to the contrary the strong, who are in charge at every level. A subsidiary norm would certainly recommend avoiding, if at all possible, overturning a vehicle or an individual. Once it happens, there are no excuses, no regrets: it is done.

The interactionist approach such as that developed by Erving Goffman (1971) for other contexts applies well here: the institution, in the sense of a segmented organisation made resistant to the environment, manifests itself with great strength in an interactive relationship. One of the notable consequences of this system of actions is that even moderate density has very constraining effects on the possibility of a given actor making his way in the midst of a network of urban pathways apparently designed for him. One often hears of the ‘Indian Crowds’ commented upon as if every street were overrun by the region’s billion-and-a-half residents. If there is an overcrowding of roadways in big cities because of a lack of public transit worthy of the name, and because of the partial privatisation of sidewalks, this does not mean that, for example, sidewalks are always crowded everywhere. However, the logic of the strong man drastically lowers the threshold above which the self-management of crowds becomes a problem. In fact, every empty space tends to be occupied by the search, not for collective efficiency, but for the dominant position, in which one can temporarily get away from the pressure of yet more dominant ones. Converging trajectories with another pedestrian, which are typically practices to avoid from the perspective of an avoidance-style flow-management, are, to the contrary, the rule here. It is the bumper-car model which prevails: he who refuses the shock must go away. But here it is no game, it is not for fun, it is not for pretend. A comparison with Japan, a country characterised by its vast high-density urban concentrations, is very penetrating. As a side note, the buffer-zones found by Edward T. Hall (1966), which are those spaces surrounding human bodies which politeness obliges to

remain empty, are predictive for phenomena more generally: Japan is the country in the World where actors deploy the most energy and competence to maintain a positive buffer-zone under every circumstance, whereas South Asia is, along with the Arab world and Sub-Saharan Africa, one of the regions where negative buffer-zones (two bodies occupying a lesser volume than the the sum of each of the two taken separately) are acceptable or even sought out. What is even more remarkable regarding the case concerning us is that the caste system defines *untouchability* (and in consequence *touchability*) as a major discriminating criterion, including in some contemporary situations. However, these principles are not in practice applicable to the urban world where it is difficult to identify membership to one group or another. It is to the contrary the practice 'which rubs' which carries the day, suggesting the pre-eminence of a hierarchical principle over certain concrete expressions. In any case, the hypothesis that the density of bodies would cause the brutality of interactions between them cannot be upheld since this point is not specific to the Indian world in comparison with other urban situations.

In all of the observed cities, one can also find a configuration based on relationships of strength in the static use of space. Every stretch that is usable in some stable manner tends to be occupied, the only limit being in the rivalry between different functions, fixed or mobile. Thus sidewalks are to the largest extent privatised and it is very uncommon that more than two pedestrians can get by, even if the sidewalks have been designed to be of a reasonable width. Edges of gutters are commonly colonised by commercial stalls. Moreover, one can see on less-frequented sidewalks tents or other shelters designed to be permanent residences, and where the poorest sleep on the ground even with no protection at all.

In this context, human bodies are found to be widely exposed and vulnerable, for lack of effective rules to protect them. Threatened when they wish to cross a street or because the privatisation of sidewalks obliges them to go onto the road, they are not any better sheltered when they find a space where vehicles cannot forcibly enter. The same logic of domination applies to pedestrians, in this case with a greater number of possible consequences, for differences to the initial situation are minimal. The body of another can thus either be a 'rival' upon which

the threat will assure a dissuasive effect during the time of an interaction, or a simple object to be displaced without a fuss (hustled) if it is in the way, if not used as a support if it can serve to increase one's walking speed. Lines at a counter are opportunities for massive fraud, made even more spectacular since it is done openly, with the reactions of victims being rare. The chain of violent domination tolerates no exceptions.

Working with the heritage from Baudelaire, Benjamin, Simmel, the Chicago School's works and those of Goffman, Isaac Joseph (1984) once named 'the considerable passer-by' that individual who becomes even more of an actor by letting himself get carried away by the prevailing mood. In South Asia, wandering is out of the question for it is your very physical integrity, if not your life, which is at stake with every step. This forces one to be most careful at all times and renders the practice of *serendipity* (Lévy, 2010) or 'drift', as it was conceived by Guy Debord (1997 [1956]), very difficult. The passer-by is *unconsidered*, on the one hand, because he receives no consideration, and on the other, because it is a fearful act to choose pedestrianism in such an aggressive ambiance. This double stigmatisation means that one of the fundamental characteristics of public space, the tension between the exposure of one's body and the discrete yet effective protective compensation offered by the environment, loses all relevance. Here pedestrians fight for survival in the midst of resolutely hostile surroundings, which makes for a disagreeable experience, and which cannot be a reasonable choice. In the same way in which the situation of women reveal, throughout the World, a remarkable indication of the level of a society's development, we might ask whether the pedestrian's situation is worthy of being treated as a whole social event which can tell us much about the observable social universe, at all four corners of the globe.

Objects versus Environment.

Let us define a *public good* as a social good that is, at least partially, consumed (and often produced as well) by the entirety of society, by society taken as a whole. Let us posit that public space is a public good characterised by the possibility of a trend for co-presence, in a small part of the social space referred to, and in all of the diversity existing in this space. The notion of public space is a

sketch, an asymptote, a borderline concept, including a bit of utopia, in as much as it proves difficult to find complete expressions of it in the reality of urban spaces, as its construction generates internal contradictions, which make of it an unstable and vulnerable reality.

We can however discern *gradients of publicness*[3] in a space, and some spaces approach the total actualisation of this concept more than others. Two conditions must be assumed so that public space, as a major component and logical consequence of urbanity, can exist. The first type is *infrastructural*: there must be an appropriate built environment, access rules, and sufficient temporal stability so that actors can consider a place to be a resource in order to institute a space as public. The second type is *pragmatic*: actors must be able to establish specific practices, such as the avoidance of human bodies and latent attention given to others, the availability of the people present to multi-sensorial information coming from the surroundings, and voluntary weak interactions based on the protection of the intimate. This requires the dynamic respect of unwritten political rules (civility) which are always debated but never ignored, and which translate into action upon the previously-stated principles.

We may then formulate the statement that, in the cities observed in South Asia, public space is not present since neither the infrastructural conditions in their ideal component, nor the pragmatic conditions for its existence are reunited. More precisely, we only encounter truncated or interstitial expressions, which are removed to the margins of urban life.

The hypothesis we could sketch out on the causes of such phenomena in South Asia is a paradox of communitarian logic put into practice in a context where, in fact, it cannot work. This kind of community (German: *Gemeinschaft*, French: *communauté*) exists here in a society extremely divided by intangible systems of membership (caste and sex notably) and deprived of robust political solidarity systems. They are organised by the us/them relationship along very clear lines: maximum benevolence and assistance within the group, reduced to nothing or the strict minimum of public support outside of it. The interdependencies between the co-present dominated and dominators are very strong in everyday life. This logic, transferred to the urban environment, engenders a surprising

consequence: although allegiance to one non-chosen group is supposed to allow the individual to exchange freedom for security, here, in an open and uncontrollable urban space, the community cannot weave its protective netting, or at least not in the realm of everyday existence where bodies are exposed to otherness. *Us* is reduced to its incorporation within each individual while *them* is extended to the whole of otherness. In the absence of counter-forces, it is a war of everyone against everyone else, a type of situation which Thomas Hobbes had foreseen when he evoked, in Leviathan (1651), *homo homini lupus* and advocated an absolute authoritarian state.

In fact, it is in the largest cities, where it would be the most necessary for urban social machinery to function well, where there is the greatest lack of ‘public spirit’, and in consequence, where difficulty making public spaces work is the clearest. Whence comes a new paradox: although the effects of mass, sociological mixing, and functional diversity should play in favour of overcoming communal allegiances and engendering maximum urbanity — which is observed in most cities in the World — here, to the contrary, we can observe the strongest tendency towards a violent disorder in which it is very difficult for a given individual to systematically benefit from social co-presence.

This hypothesis can be reinforced through the elimination of other *a priori* foreseeable explanatory principles. Could we discount the absence of public discipline to a general lack of discipline reigning in these societies? We refer here to a common doctrine, also held by researchers, which allows one to push aside everyday experiences to the margins of scientific enquiry in a sort of Indian urban folklore judged more anecdotical than otherwise. This is not what we would conclude when, for example, we note the seriousness with which everyone enters into the system of categories and sub-categories making arranged marriages possible. Nor when we behold the complex ordering of fields by carefully cared-for deltas on the vast northern plain extending towards the east, making several harvests per year possible. It would thus be absurd to stock up the omnipresent brutality of the urban world to an aggressiveness or meanness on the part of the inhabitants of South Asia. To the contrary, cities are marked here by the amiability, and even the goodwill of natives towards strangers as soon as a stranger accepts to entertain with him an explicitly

interpersonal rapport.

Additionally, nothing can give credit to the idea that behaviour in a transportation situation can be caused by one's desire to take out life's frustrations on others. Firstly, because this behaviour concerns all social categories, and secondly because no characteristic attitude of satisfaction can be observed after a 'good strike or the appeasing of vengeance after winning interactions: everything indicates that it is simply the natural course of affairs. It is, as Odette Louiset (2008, p. 266) has said, a "specific management of distance systems" functioning with its modulations, in an impressive continuum at every scale, and according to every system of measure and for all substances. It has all the strength of a hierarchical communitarian system behind it, meaning family, religion, and gender, bolted together by formalised castes: each remains in his own place, and does not complain to *others* nor takes their goods. Nevertheless, there is no longer any place nor any space, literally nor figuratively, as soon as non-communal communities are concerned.

Along with Sub-Saharan Africa (excluding South Africa), South Asia is characterised by a radical disinterest for building preservation. I am not speaking here about social heritage such as that developed in Europe since the end of the 19th century. I am merely referring to the maintenance of a good, real estate in this case, of which the owners can very well be private parties as much as public interests. Facades, building structure, the care of common areas, and street furniture does not benefit from any maintenance worthy of the name, or restoration except in very rare instances. This phenomenon can be explained by a lack of investment on the owners' part. This is because the return assured to them by their good is guaranteed, since due to the absence of social housing policy, renters' weak financial capacities render them captive in these slums. This can also especially be because, keeping in mind laws (notably the Rent Control Acts, of which the amendments since 1992 remain limited) destined to protect tenants, owners cannot impose sufficient rental fees to cover an acceptable maintenance level (Dey & Dev, 2006). Vast neighbourhoods in the historical centres of large cities, in which real estate and land markets are marked by the flight of middle and upper social groups who abandon the territory to impoverished populations, exacerbate this system of functioning. However, we

also note that buildings devoted to administration or private enterprise are not exempt either of this process. In fact, the cities of the Indian sub-continent are, fundamentally in a state of disrepair from the first day of their construction, or, if we wished to be more caustic, from even earlier. There is an underinvestment symmetrical to the over-investment, which, progressively, Europeans developed by inventing the concept of heritage.

However, we could not, such as in Africa, invoke either the extreme destitution, or the absence of an accumulative logic as the framework of social life. In South Asia there exists a well-established and rising bourgeoisie who are developing a dense network of dynamic firms of which the World is starting to hear talk. The growth rates in India, and at a lesser scale, its neighbours, could free up a very comfortable margin for public or private actors to invest in heritage preservation. From the public finance side, compulsory taxes remain low (India: 17.7%, Pakistan: 10.6%, Bangladesh: 8.5%, compared to an average of 40% in the European Union) and remain riddled by corruption, which can be understood as privatisation at the root of potential public goods. In India in 2009, according to W ho[4], public health expenses represent 1.38% of Gdp (Oecd average in 2009: 6.3%). Whether it be by direct tax or, such as in the United States or the Chinese world, through private donations, the creation of goods available to all is very evidently possible in India as elsewhere. Beyond public space *per se*, it is thus the setting up of an economic (and social) model allowing for the production of public goods that is problematic here.

In the Indian world, there is a clear contrast between the treatment of appropriated *objects*, which is remarkable, and that of *environments*, which are systematically neglected. The Indian world is characterised (as in Sub-Saharan Africa) by a great attention given to individuals, even to the poorest; to their bodies, which is also an instrument for work; and to their adornment, at once a sign of their riches and the riches themselves, such as the silver anklets commonly worn by women of humble condition. Textile craftsmanship is remarkable and the gastronomy, as modest as it may be, is of high quality. Conversely, everything happens as if the environment were of no interest at all because it does not have a part which can be immediately privatised.

This permits an understanding that, *a contrario*, if we define a natural, social, or societal *environment* by its contrast with *actors* and *objects*, as an envelope which is influenced by that which is enveloped (Lévy, 2010), then every environment contains a public component. This is why for example space is at once the sum of actors-dwellers' spatialities and something else, the *being-inhabited* (French: 'être-habité'), which cannot exist if conditions for a certain habitability have not been reunited by actions other than living there. This good, which is necessarily shared between the contributing actors in an environment, makes each one, in this regard, equal to all the others. We could say about institutional politics in general (Rawls, 1987 [1971]): having to deal with the production and distribution of public goods supposes, somewhere, an equality in principle among citizens even outside of an institutional democracy and even if, in practice, a part of the citizens do not really have a voice. An absolute monarchy or empire, given that its leaders assume the fact that they are governing a political society, inevitably include an egalitarian component, for example concerning access to food or health infrastructure, education, or mobility; simply because if this component disappeared, it would endanger society's survival and thus its leaders' power. When it concerns environments not immediately readable as societal, a city street, for example, with its sidewalks, gutters, facades, a median or a square, there also exists a necessary part of equality, failing which the street's functioning would be made impossible, for, as a cog of the city, the interest vested in a street is in its transcendental character: it makes possible the occurrence of activities while predetermining them as little as possible. The rules for its use will thus focus on the balance between parking and circulation, but beyond that, neutrality, and thus equal treatment is the rule.

Communalism as a Construction of Radical Egotism.

In this regard, South Asia offers a very useful real-life experiment for the researcher, for it demonstrates sufficiently surprising situations to reveal processes that could seem, elsewhere, so obvious that they go unremarked. In this way, the pre-eminence of strength relationships favours, as we saw, bodies

and vehicles in movement, and on the other hand, the installation of private activities: in spaces of a certain density) remaining immobile in a non-privatised way is practically impossible, which prevents the implementation of a fixed moment for navigation in urban space. This prohibition of *pausing* gives an advantage to both the most determined and the most well-planned actors, preventing newcomers and non-permanent residents from playing their part in these spaces. Thus, communal rationale generates a particular territorial communitarianism, a specific *'parochialism'* (Lofland, 1998) which automatically places all passers-by foreign to the neighbourhood, who do not know the neighbourhood well, in a position outside the caste. It is the caricature of 'small-town life', which, because of a surreptitious injection of common anti-urban nostalgia, sycophants often elude to in its dimension of exclusion. Here things are clearer: the stranger – and we are strangers as soon as we no longer possess in our social capital a necessary stock of knowledge to orient ourselves – is just barely tolerated and cannot claim rights of presence or of use. These settings are constructed in interactions everywhere but there are certain discontinuities and thresholds which merit attention. Those who think that public space is a nice idea but a bit too abstract and elitist, and for whom 'communal' or 'common' would be more practical and adequate expressions, or that, by a pedagogic gradualism, move gently from communal to common, and then from common to public, should visit the cities of South Asia. They would carry out a crucial experiment and realise that a world organised by communitarian logic never generates an intermediate and somehow acceptable level by itself, (syntax) able to protect one from the supposed selfishness of individualist societies. To the contrary, these sorts of communities, when left to their own devices, create in the urban world a paroxysm of egotistic individuals, simply because the ethical figure of 'oneself as another' (Ricœur, 1992 [1990]) does not exist. Inhabiting the same space with multiple 'others' of no status makes of all of humanity a bunch of untouchables who can be touched to no limit. Without a legitimate voluntary act by which a political society constructs the specific public good of *public space*, we cannot hope to see this reality emerge.

We also assert at this point that infrastructure, the necessary basis for a public space to appear and endure, must include precise and consistent ideal realities, which can be summed up by the idea of an *order of civility* without which the

apparently most perfect material arrangement can do nothing to engage or play the role it is meant to play.

Geopolitical States Turning their Backs on Public Goods.

Is it, then, the absence of a state? It is true that, in a world where the rich are more than unwilling to share with the poor, especially when it concerns third objects (education, public health, transportation infrastructure,…), available resources for public politics are limited. However, this does not prevent the means from being there, serving above all the state itself as a geopolitical project, and to be eventually directed against its own nationals. Red tape added to archaic methods ~~and~~ is accompanied by omnipresent corruption, a plethora of militarised army and police, and an obsession with safety: the image of the National Parliament in Dhaka as that of an isolated bunker is not, in this sense, an accident. Countries that ration electricity for irrigation and lighting, public or private, have found the resources to illuminate the Indo-Pakistani border all day long for hundreds and hundreds of kilometres. Seen from above, it is a desperately magical illustration of what man can do to man. India and Pakistan each devote 2.8% of their Gdp to military expenditures, some of the highest rates in the World[5]. Nationalism has cost fifty years of under-development to the countries concerned and it is far from over. The human development indicator of the three countries concerned was between 134th and 146th place out of 182 in 2007, in a group (between 0.54 and 0.62) including several Sub-Saharan African countries, Cambodia, and Haiti. Geopolitics requires a massive tribute from public funds, which are generally pretty thin[6].

Even if there is a minimal level of public funding for agriculture, education, and the distribution of foodstuffs to the poor, we cannot say that the states of this region have entered into a European-style, or even Japanese-style or American-style *Sozialstaat* era. There is no tax sharing but disastrous food shortages are avoided as much as possible. There exist therefore powerful forces to drain significant resources towards the states, as long as they are not used to produce public goods but only to comfort themselves as autonomous structures. Pakistani

president Asif Ali Zardari made a highly publicised diplomatic tour of Europe during the summer of 2010, during which the question was mostly about Afghanistan, at the very same moment as twenty million of his fellow countrymen were suffering the consequences of one of the worst instances of catastrophic flooding ever seen in the history of the country. In observing this region of the World, we can better understand to which point the notions of state power and public service are all but synonymous. We can also understand that, from a certain degree of value given to the inequalities in the implicit and explicit model of society, certain types of objects, such as public space, have difficulty existing.

There is certainly a public scene in its institutional dimension in South Asia (Jaffrelot, 2003), notably in India where parliamentary democracy accompanied by a free press, and dynamics and fragile mechanisms are pushing it towards a rule of law. Nevertheless, if we define *public scene* as a part of the *public sphere* (*Öffentlichkeit*) in which we openly discuss and decide the production and distribution of public goods, it must be acknowledged that this is an atrophied and purely formal reality on the sub-continent, in the measure in which important social organisational issues are not admitted to be relevant, except for rare exceptions. This is notably the case of urban space, which is far from appearing as a major question in political life, despite structural problems and very stressed dynamics (in the region, urban population has increased to about 300 million people in twenty-five years).

It is clear that we are dealing with anthropological realities here, in the sense that they contribute to societal *dominance*, in the meaning Maurice Godelier (1986) gave to it, that is, an ensemble of keystones, of baselines, which are more steadily anchored in a society at a certain given moment. This does not mean that dominance cannot evolve, but that it possesses solidity and resilience, including in the face of strong external events, such as colonisation or the current phase of globalisation. The caste system in the broad meaning of the term (with its simplified Muslim version and peripheral ‘tribes’), can legitimately be invoked. It has survived well into the present, even if it has been gnawed down in large cities, for with its double cleavage into *varnas* and *jatis*, it organises itself in a highly efficient manner, in a fractal way, into a robust, unequal construction, reproducing the same principle at every scale of social organisation.

In any case, the absence of public goods is very similar in neighbourhoods, cities, or Muslim States, where castes are less strongly represented. Inversely and contrarily to a folkloric vision of Hinduism, masculinity is also crushing on the public thoroughfares, whether you find yourself in a Hindu or Muslim zone, and *purdah*, the principle of feminine invisibility, is applied everywhere. Castes also prove ultimately to be themselves the expression of a yet more fundamental reality: it is firstly because it is unthinkable that public space is impossible here.

Two Complementary Ways to Bungle the City.

Let us come back to Chandigarh. We do not find here the Voisin Plan's radicalness Le Corbusier had imagined for Paris, and weak heights dominate in 'sectors' taking up the Anglo-American notion of *superblock* or the Soviet *mikrorajon*. The aim is to create self-sufficiency in these little neighbourhoods and to limit everyday mobility to work-home commutes. The low density (that of a large structure or a medium-density suburban fabric) contributes to the suburban ambiance of the structure.

In its entirety, as an urban space planned from scratch and still more regulated today than other cities in India, Chandigarh benefits from public interventions which prevent wild variations from the public realm up to a certain point, and the degradation of the built environment. This could cause occasion for misunderstanding if one attributed the benefit of this exception to the creator of the *Master Plan*, Le Corbusier, rather than attributing it to the particular manner of making 'the urban' that prevailed in the city's creation.

Conversely, it is striking to see the facility with which Le Corbusier's urban concept was easily adjusted to the Indian city. The radical separation of functions and populations, which are found elsewhere in the Brasilia of his friends Lucio Costa and Oscar Niemeyer, enters into being, effortlessly, in a totally hierarchical society, even more so in India than in Brazil.

There are several cities in Chandigarh, since it is an urban area zoned both from the standpoint of functions and populations. The rich do not mix with the poor and residential areas do not create much activity. There exists some places that

are both central and quiet, with collective green spaces in the middle of the sector. There is also a ‘green corridor’ of good-quality public spaces traversing the city from north-east to south-west. This green axis constitutes an interesting variation on the usual structure found in cities planned by the British Empire. A colonial city endowed with vast parks had been more often built beside the historical city, a super-dense maze of lanes and dead ends. Today, these green zones are frequented by the whole population and constitute a haven of calm and reduced pollution. It is true that public parks are among the only places in South Asia where you can speak of public space: given that they be of a sufficient size, the rudeness of the street is attenuated, and we can find there a significant amenity. Weak links, a certain level of anonymity, a greater individual intimacy, a less-crushing *sex-ratio*: couples and mixed groups can abound. Access certainly is more-or-less limited and the functions solely recreational, but these are places about which the advertising is incontestable. Chandigarh is not an exception to the rule but presents a linear transversal configuration, where in other places it is made up rather of compact blocks, a heritage of colonial urban duality.

One of Le Corbusier’s signature features compared to the sketches of his predecessors is a uniform grid constituted of geometrically identical ‘sectors’ (800x1, 200 m). Different functions had to fit into this fabric, which, moreover, confirm the totally ideological character of the notion of a sector in a context where absolute zoning created major disparities: nothing justifies that the ‘downtown’ sector have the same dimensions as the other sectors since the logic and scale of reference are different. This downtown, located essentially in sector 17, makes its identity nevertheless well known. It tends to overflow into the adjacent sector 22. It is the only one to have nightlife. During holidays, there can even be intense activity and a great number of people, notably young people coming from the rest of the city converging around stores, and especially clothing stores, in this neighbourhood. There you find once again the phenomenon, observable in numerous cities, of a paradoxical reinforcing of the traditional centre, however weakened, while the rest of the urban space is yet more deprived of centrality.

The separation of traffic, which is part of the original idea, is designed in practice for the benefit of automobiles. Cars can drive almost everywhere, but pedestrians can walk almost nowhere for lack of sidewalks, except along the main arteries which are thirty metres wide and where the shoulders are truly forested alleys, inviting to hikers but in practice deserted, for deprived of all urban value including that of a park. Le Corbusier had, taking up the idea of his predecessors Albert Meyer and Matthew Nowicki, envisioned a grid of pedestrian paths (V7) replicating the vehicular network, but this project was never realised. Barbed-wire fences have been recently added to prevent any attempt at jaywalking. The low density translates into an immense quantity of empty lots, including in central sectors, in addition to a considerable amount of parking lots. Some of the empty lots have been transformed into public toilets (for men). It is true that this phenomenon is common in Indian cities, including in broad daylight and in the middle of downtown: every inch of non-built urban territories can be considered by male individuals truly as common *urinals*[7].

In Chandigarh, beyond the specific logic of Indian society, it is inevitable that in the absence of an attractive public transit network, a large supply of roadway in addition to low density gives a decisive advantage to individual vehicles and that, under these conditions, increasing vehicle ownership leads to the endless search for more space to cram vehicles. In fact, Chandigarh has become the Indian city in which the rate of motorisation is the highest. The current underground railway project (a bit strange for a city with less than a million inhabitants in a country which has just begun to equip itself with commuter railways properly speaking) confirms the abandon of surface railways to private transport. Yet, this configuration had already been drawn up in the choices of the initial master plan. Foreseeing no public transit in a low-density context had meant, inevitably, opening wide the doors to the car-city, and a clever mind such as Le Corbusier's could not have denied it.

Chandigarh has often been seen as the antithesis to the usual Indian cities although it is a surrealist caricature of one. Gayatri Spivak, who has contributed a lot to the development of 'subaltern studies', sees clearly (*cf.* Louiset, 2008, p. 282) the causes she considers to be a failure in the incapacity of Indian leadership circles to think of a city for all. At least, in other cities, density partially

compensates for the absence of a public environment: one hardly encounters others while moving, as here mobility is by its very construction excluded from a world of encounters. You take your car, if you have one, to go from one place to another without any possibility to make contact. Chandigarh illustrates this in a brutal manner: the modern Movement transforms the downtowns into '*grands ensembles*'-style, suburban-like landscapes or into suburbs. Working in a country where the dominant logic is profoundly hostile to public space and public goods in general and allowing himself to act as if there was no problem at all, Le Corbusier indirectly contributed to one of the 'crimes against urbanity' of which the followers of the modern Movement are responsible. As we see in East Berlin, the legacy this trend has left behind is mostly irreversible and particularly difficult to reinterpret today. Whereas urban planning in fact consists of the creation of conditions so that something can occur, the modern Movement believed itself capable of directly making things occur, planning without listening and, where needed, contradicting. This non-dialogical logic carries the seed of the same kind of catastrophe as the rejection of all public good.

Solid Concepts for Open Questions.

So that this expression may have meaning in a scientific debate, let us make it clear that Europeans have no 'lessons to give' to anybody, including in the field of urban planning and public space. The example of Chandigarh demonstrates that the incapacity to understand the urban specificity of *society-making* is well shared. Western carriers of a hygienic model, industrialists, and planners have found, as if by accident, Indian agrarians, communitarians, and statists. The idea of public good has worked itself through today's World: health, environment, education, peace, development, rule of law, responsible government… And the idea of public space is working itself through the world of cities. Even so, this tendency is recent and no region in the World can pretend to always have cultivated them. If equating before/elsewhere is always perilous, we could nevertheless say without risk that the jungle of Medieval cities or even industrial cities in Europe were not more enviable that those of the sub-continent today. The hierarchy between rider and pedestrian has long been a basic traffic rule and, as in South Asia today, it also expressed a more fundamental social

hierarchy. Still today, in European societies that have long remained resistant to the rule of law, like in France and Italy, we commonly encounter behaviour negating public goods, notably urban, or hybrid versions founded on the paternalism of the strong versus the weak. Europe certainly invented or at least hatched public space, but at the same time as inventing Europeaness. There is in this domain no everlasting predisposition, no essential incapacity, nothing that escapes historicity.

Conversely something else is no doubt changing in India (see Paquot: 2005): infrastructural work of all sorts is digging up the pavement, subways are under construction or planned in all major cities, notably Delhi which has, in its own way, actively prepared for the Commonwealth Games of 2010 by developing its own commuter train network and is working over its streets and facades. The observation of urban spaces as influenced by members of the Indian diaspora also shows that, as is often the case in similar instances, exposure to otherness changes the migrants. In Singapore's Little India, public spaces very well exist even though the links with India for part of its inhabitants remain very strong. Hybridisation between Indian migrants and Singaporeans, be they of Chinese, Malay, or Indian origin, is manifest. In the United Arab Emirates, inhabitants from South and South-East Asia, which constitute the majority of the population, actively contribute to the emergence of public space that does not depend upon a local established tradition. Mobility there as elsewhere evens the playing field: in removing certain elements and adding others, it makes a rearrangement of sociability possible and, beyond that, sociality. For all of these reasons, we can imagine that a text such as this one may soon be considered as the witness of a time gone past.

There is thus no timeless 'gene' of the public or non-public, which also means that it is possible, if we wish, to make accessibility to public goods a universal right and, notably, in Henri Lefebvre's (1968) wake, to define a *right to the city* as guaranteeing access to an archipelago of public spaces. This also means that it is possible to say, after having carefully described the observable in non-private spaces, that in the Indian world public space is absent for the moment, for the major part of the urban landscape, because the minimal conditions for its existence are not guaranteed.

This statement is empirically supported as well as intellectually necessary. It would be in fact untenable to say that ‘Indian public space is different than ours’, which would mean in other places or other practices. First of all, because we have no reason to assume *a priori* that there must necessarily be public space everywhere and that we should struggle to find it come what may, at the risk of twisting the concept so much that it would lose all communicable meaning. Secondly, because given the definition at the beginning of this text, it is practically verifiable that the conditions for an effective co-inhabiting create weak links, as founded upon the respect for individual integrity of the co-present and on their voluntary interactions, these not being altogether reunited. If one wanted to absolutely conclude in an affirmative manner that *there are* public spaces in South Asia or more precisely that one can observe spaces with a significant level of publicness, one would first have to change the definition not only in relation to that which I have proposed, but even in relation to those, however rare, circulating in scientific works[8], and explain why.

It is entirely legitimate and even necessary to disconnect the notion of public space from its classical European incarnation (streets, squares). It would seem equally useful to ‘disengage’ certain secondary characteristics from the concept, such as its permanent character, in order to concentrate on what is most essential, that is to say the *concentration of urbanity*. Thus the hypothesis formulated by Elsa Chavinier[9] where public space must be approached in India in the form of specific events (such as religious manifestations is most credible since it is situated in the framework of identifying a specificity of the notion, common to all of its concrete expressions. This hypothesis permits us to usefully nuance the ‘stylised’ point-of-view which I have developed here, without removing what is essential: a fully-functioning public space is in fact characterised by its lack of functional specialty. Themed-event realities, such as sport events, see their public component restrained by different types of limitations and are not up to compensating by themselves for the lack of ‘complete’ public spaces. We can also consider more generally that in South Asia, parks, when they are readily accessible, beaches, riversides, or manmade pools (such as the Varanasi or Kolkata *ghâts*), certain river or sea ports (such as in Mumbai or Dhaka), some touristic places frequented by the local inhabitants (Mogul forts, Taj Mahal, Goa…), as well as places of worship (except those

which are objects of overwhelming fervour) constitute many realities which tend to become points of support for a constellation of spaces of more-or-less pronounced public character. On the other hand, statements of the sort: ‘In such-and-such society, public space is only manifest in the private sphere’ are not admissible for they only create confusion and tend, in the end, to empty the notion of all substance.

The sub-continent is certainly not the only place where the presence of public space is problematic: in Sub-Saharan Africa, and to a lesser degree the Arab world, are other examples, Cairo and Alexandria indeed being worthy of comparison, in this regard, with the large cities of South Asia. There exists however in the Indian world a massive radicalness, which comes from social specificities even less regulated by law than in the Arab world even though they possess much more pronounced logics of accumulation than in Sub-Saharan Africa. We can thus observe there with much force the denial of public goods, of which the absence of its balancing role with the powerful presence of private goods is strongly felt. Public space being a particularly visible, and corporally tangible public good, the deficiency of public goods has become, through the absence of public space, particularly spectacular.

Post-Colonial Sciences of the City.

‘Post-Colonial’: Let us take this expression seriously as put forth by researchers, sometimes native to the sub-continent, and which has known no doubt a bit of a superficial success, but which can be promising given the condition that we avoid to transforming it into a revenge stance of the formerly colonised population. The Post-Colonial approach consisted in banning evolutionary condescendence as much as Third-World guilt-mongering. It seemed urgent to understand societies such as they were, with their logics, their actors, and without interdictions to inquire into their deep histories while unashamedly practicing comparison. This leads to the use of universalist notions, if good arguments can be provided which prove that they make sense, including those places where they do not seem to fully cover the empirical reality. In the case of public space, or more generally, public goods, what makes sense is the relationship between notions and *development* projects which societies undertake or plan to undertake.

The notion of development, as we know, cannot at all be taken for granted: it assumes a projection of what is supposed to be developed towards a future considered as the *best* possible. At a societal scale, the notion of development assumes moreover the existence, at least minimal, of a principle of equality, in a manner in which the indivisible part of this improvement, that which benefits each member of society from its very belonging to a whole, must be acceptable to all, and especially to those who will through their contributions make the greatest efforts. Furthermore, the idea of development implies sharing with future generations, who will benefit from what has been accumulated, rather than consumed, by past generations. Societies that do not develop are precisely, on the whole, those for whom this type of synchronic and diachronic sharing is considered to be illegitimate or absurd. We could then ask whether, beyond controversies which the notion has raised and notably the risks of a-historicised culturalism, which it conceals, the opposition *homo hierarchicus/homo aequalis* as theorised by Louis Dumont (1981 [1971]; 1978) is very well at the heart of our subject. The founding and omnipresent hierarchy constitutes an obstacle to development, and notably to the development of cities as cities, whereas conversely the paradigm of equality is at least as much a condition of development as an effect, as modest and tenuous as the paradigm of equality may be, and as it may exist in public space. The absence of public space signifies that this spatial configuration is hardly compatible with a type of society that fundamentally does not want the constraints this space implies. It indicates that, contrary to what we may be tempted to believe in observing situations where public space is more readily present, we cannot really disassociate a purely transactional urban space deprived of a political component, *urbs*, with the political city, *civitas*. The political component of the city creeps into every crevice of everyday life. Every inhabiting of the urban includes a part of citizenry, discrete but fundamental.

Therefore saying that there is no development without *sharing* and that sharing cannot efficiently work at the scale desired by the third *actant*, which is a type of visible and readable politics; saying that something cannot belong to all if it does not first belong to nobody, is not ethnocentrism. At a moment when, in vast regions of the World, the creation and promotion of public spaces as conceived as a positive ‘strike force’ for urbanity are at the top of urban planners’ to-do lists,

this statement provides a cognitive translation aimed at making a situated experience for all humanity understandable and usable.

Those who are involved in a science-oriented approach are not there to repeat *ad nauseam*, albeit in a scholarly transposition, the touristic slogan '*Incredible India'.* Proposing concepts which are sound but not deaf is one of the conditions for the social utility of research. Perhaps we are at the *right* moment when we could, as researchers, and after having taken all the necessary time to explore them on foot, ask the ordinary inhabitants of Chandigarh, Dhaka, and other cities: Is it really *here* that you wish to dwell'

Résumé

The two cities of Chandigarh and Dhaka make sense to everyone interested in architecture. Chandigarh is one of the rare places where Le Corbusier could put his ideas into practice on a grand scale during the 1950s and 1960s; he left some remarkable buildings (especially the Palace of Assembly, the High Court, and the Secretariat ...