

skywalks, to stop and stare¹.

Prajna Rao

address: 1003 Cervantes Ct Irvine CA 92617 USA

phone number: +1 7732456377

e-mail address: i.prajna@gmail.com

This paper explores the politics of *pausing* in an age of increasing desire for speed and efficiency, through a study of the skywalks project in Mumbai. Drawing mostly from an ethnography of everyday life on the skywalks, the paper traces its evolution from being a projection for the swift movement of commuter subjects, to spawning a respite from urban speediness - for resting, reading, smoking, strolling, socializing, studying, writing, fighting, loving, watching and sometimes doing just nothing. In doing so, it argues for a re-imagination of transport infrastructures beyond the mobility imperatives, to include newer narratives for being and belonging in the city.

Envisioned initially as part of a mega basket of transportation technologies introduced into the city to make it 'world class', the skywalks project was intended to efficiently disperse burgeoning crowds at railway stations. These mega visions are to bring in not only a newer range of technologies and mobilities, but also reiterate particular kinds of values, aspirations, aesthetics and epistemologies. A plethora of government and para-statal institutions have been restructured to bypass regulations and allow greater flexibility in accepting and disbursing global finances for project planning and implementation. However, this increase in the number of actors has not improved processes of planning or implementing these visions. On the contrary, the multitude of actors with diverse interests and abilities, entangled through loose contractual obligations in a neoliberal framework, exposes the fragilities with which urban transit infrastructures and subsequently mega-visions, are installed in the city. What can one make of these gaps, ruptures and failures of infrastructure installations in incessantly under-construction urban contexts?

The first part of the paper demonstrates how this grand vision of an efficient and fast paced world class city is actually neither singular nor coherent, rather it is an assemblage of myriad actors, networks, interests, materials, processes with multiple interstices, ruptures and gaps. Making a case for the potentialities of these interruptions, the second part of the paper explores the spatial and affective consequences of these institutional ruptures, and the

¹ Extracted from 'Leisure', the poem by WH Davies.

possibilities it has opened not just for everyday users of the skywalks, but also denizens of the city.

Fallen short in its intended purpose to decongest railway station areas, the skywalks have transformed to become quieter extensions of public life from the streets below. They are now used for studying by school going children, resting by urban commuters, people watching, exercising – in other words, they now offer newer spatial prospects that broaden access to otherwise shrinking public space in the city. In some cases, they even subvert some of the existing spatialized hierarchies of the city. The case of the skywalks demonstrates how people inter-mediate with transit infrastructures not just for mobility but also to create everyday intimacies in the city. These everyday practices relentlessly redistribute urban mobilities and their spatialities in ways that make the city more familiar not just physically, but also affectively. From being a channel for movement to a critical space for sociality, the skywalks offer a newer redistribution of leisure and labour in the city of Mumbai. Arguing for this politics of ‘pausing’, the paper makes a case that transit infrastructures have as much to do with pausing in the city as they have to do with moving through it. These pauses vary temporally, materially, spatially and geographically, and in their diversity, they enlarge the relationship between transit infrastructures and the city.

© by Prajna Rao

Paper presented at the RC21 International Conference on “The transgressive city: Comparative perspectives on governance and the possibilities of everyday life in the emerging global city” Mexico City, 21-23 July 2016.

<http://rc21-mexico16.colmex.mx/index.php>