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Gold: Stories of a City

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Gold

STORIES OF A CITY

Njanappilly Vivek Vijayan

Contents

Thesis outline *01-04*

Narrative compositions *05-14*

Sources and references *15-16*

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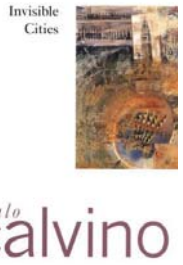
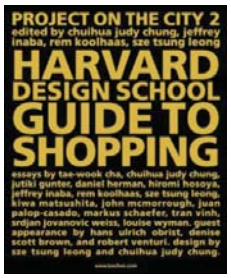
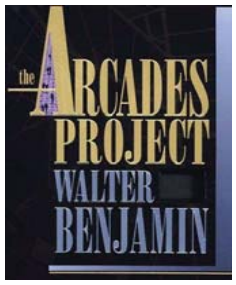


Invisible cities
Italo Calvino

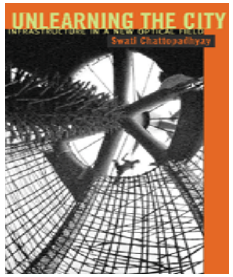


Guide to Shopping
Harvard Design School

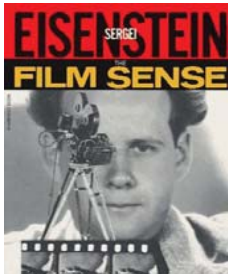


The Arcades Project
Walter Benjamin

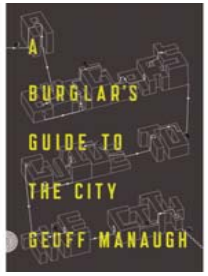
The possibility of an absolute Architecture
Pierre Vitorio Aurelli



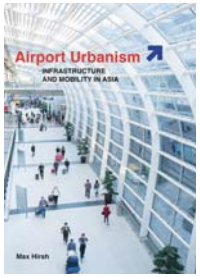
Unlearning the city
Swati Chattopadyay



Film Sense
Sergei Eisenstein



A Burglar's guide to the city
Geoff Manaugh



Airport Urbanism
Max Hirsh

Extrstatecraft
Keller Easterling

Thesis outline

Sources & references

Thesis Statement

The thesis explores the latent influences of gold and its value systems on the urban geo-politics of a South Indian city. It is an anthology of sporadic narrations recording the growth and transformation of a city over time. These narrative compositions contain traces of the past, the city of the present and speculative futures. They indicate change without erasure. Their values are embodied in gold. Malleable, ductile and fungible in its different forms.

Large layered compositions

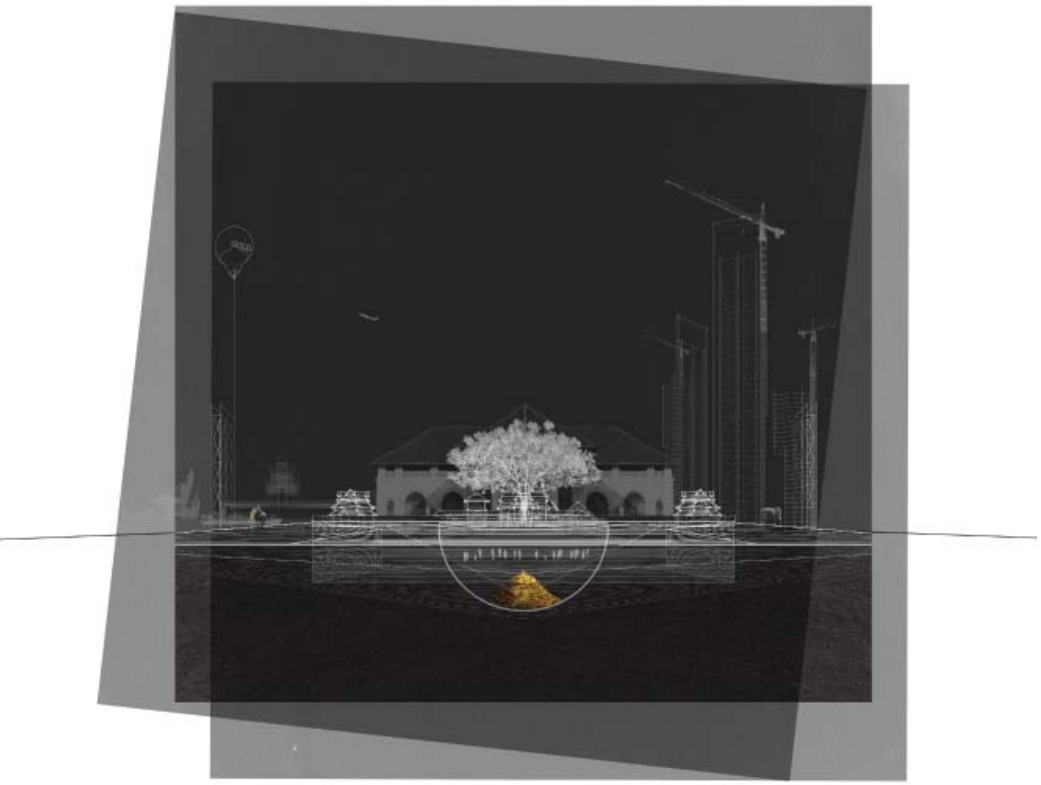
Short movies revealing compositions

Book containing translucent narrative compositions

v

Vaulted museum

An archaeologist sends out a petition to open up the palace vaults hidden under the temple on the hillock. An estimated $22 billion worth of treasure in gold is found underneath the elephant path. The city decides to create a heavily surveillanced museum of gold under the earth. It turns into a global tourist attraction and is a reflection on the city's historic obsession with gold. From time to time protests occur outside the museum on the basis that such luxury is an insult to three hundred million people living under the poverty line in the country. However, the city still moves on. Marriages are streamed live at the wedding round, the elephants roam the city streets, empty towers rise into the sky and all those who visit the city are recorded for eternity.



"Vaulted museum", draft sheet composition, perspective view

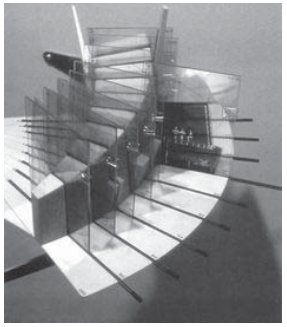
Thesis deliverables

Five large narrative sheet compositions printed on translucent sheets

Movie presentation going into detail of each narrative composition

Translucent book containing collection of narratives

Translucent "viewing" models (*TBD*)



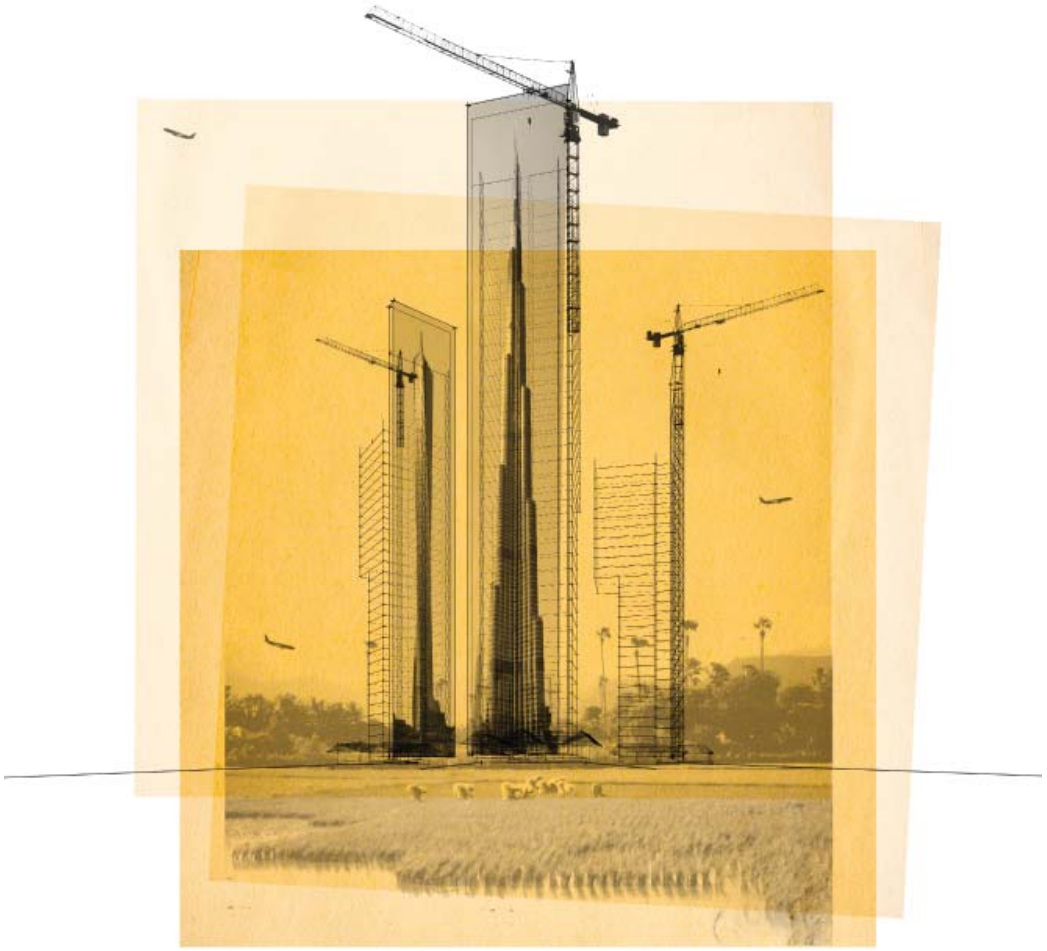
Viewing house, model, Diller Scofidio Renfro

iv

Non-residences

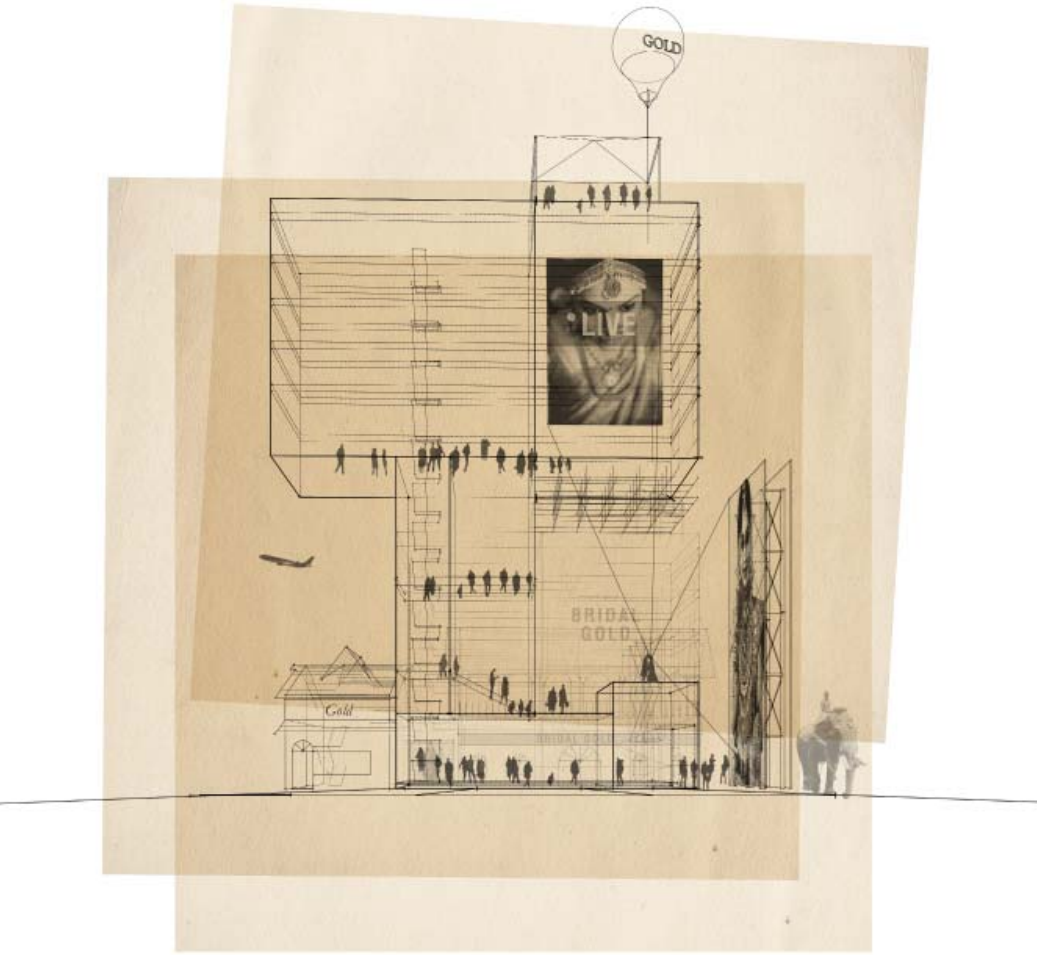
Towers rise as the city grows. Stocks accumulated in gold commodities are reinvested in real estate ventures with FARs that change with fluctuating global patterns. Lessons learnt from the wedding round are applied and the image of iconic towers are slapped onto generic structures. The towering images paint a pretty picture for the (heavily surveillanced) tourist population that fly into the city to witness the elephant paths.

The towers accommodate the suburban dreams of a great Diaspora working in the middle east. They yearn to build cities like those powered by oil in the gulf. They invest in a suburban utopia back home in the hope of a better future, occupying fertile paddy fields that feed the city.



"Non-residences", draft sheet composition, perspective view

Narrative compositions



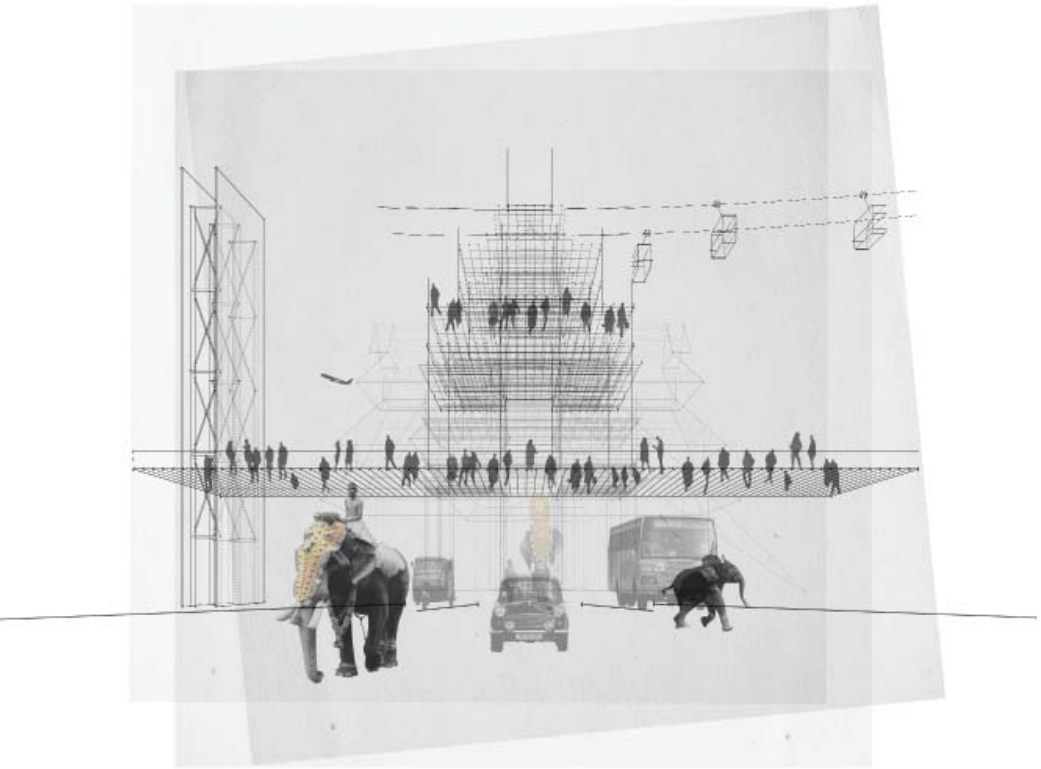
"Wedding round", draft sheet composition, perspective view

iii

Elephant path

The city was planned as a network of elephant paths, converging at a central Temple on a hillock. The elephants are adorned in gold during an annual festival, symbolizing the pride of the participating temples. Over time, the paths turn into roads and scurrying cars, buses and rickshaws take over the elephants space. Every year, however, the temples retaliates; setting up temporary "pandals" made of bamboo that symbolize the sacred temple entries. Elephants pass through the "pandals" specifically designed to jam city traffic. The inconveniences caused by the "pandals" and elephants to traffic spark debate on the appropriation of streets, among city planners. However, the temples rhetoric of the "Elephant path as historic tradition" prevails. New permanent "pandal bridges" are built at the center of the city, accommodating viewing platforms for tourists looking down at the reinstated elephant paths.

(Short draft video for "Elephant path" presented during Thesis preparation final review)*

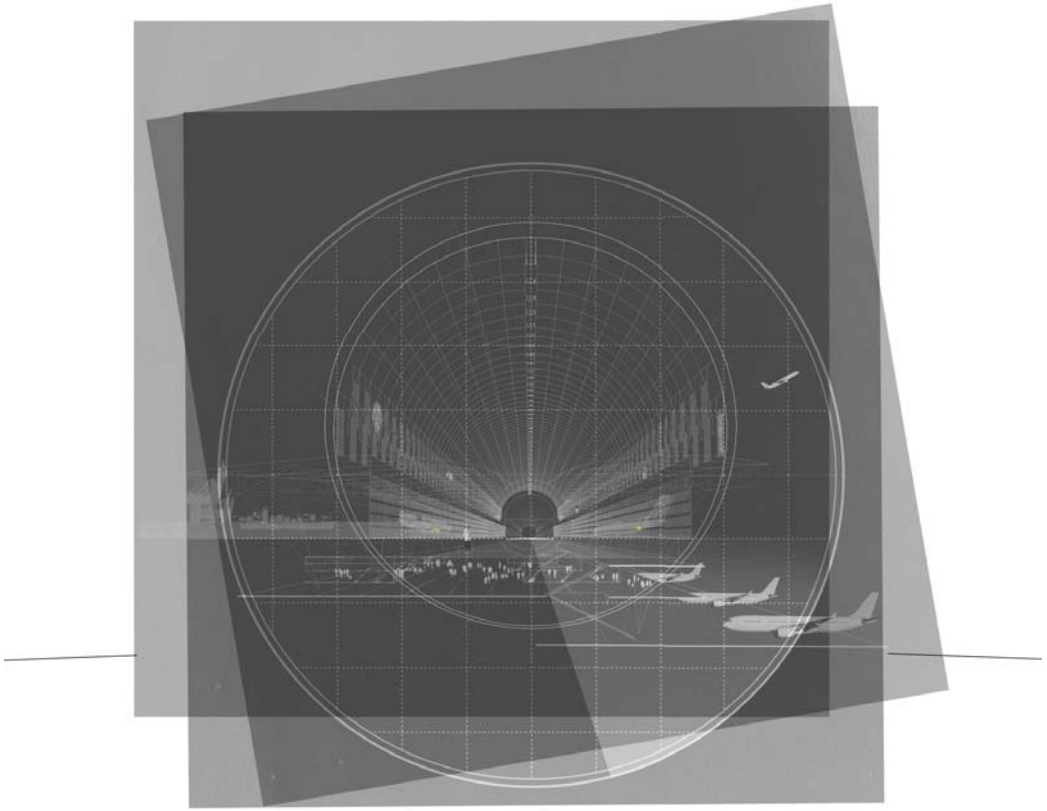


"Elephant path", draft sheet composition, perspective view

i

Wedding Round

Over the last decade, India has been the largest consumer of gold jewelery in the world. This demand for gold ornaments has lead to the establishment of global brands and big box stores that overshadow the smaller, traditional jewelery shops of the city. Through hyper marketing strategies that advertise live marriage and family functions hosted within the massive shopping space, the round of big box stores (the wedding round) manage massive crowds of customers attending events while shopping for gold. The stores engage customers to rate and sell their most personal experiences. Within the commercialized city space, weddings are treated as business transactions and values of beauty and prosperity are publicly monetized.



"Surveillance port", draft sheet composition, perspective view

ii

Surveillance port

An estimated 150-200 tons of gold is smuggled into India every year, this amounts to 5-7 billion US dollars. Smuggling gold from the middle east by sea started in the late 1980s because of the higher taxes levied on luxury commodities in India. Over time, smuggling shifted from seaports to airports, where security measures, even today, are incapable of tracing concealed gold commodities. In response to this, the city decides to invest in a new surveillance system. Powered by state-of-the-art radar and sonar systems the device is capable of scanning all travelers, objects, flights and ships moving in and out of the city. Masquerading as junkspace, the registry diffuses the borders of the city creating an endless field of hyper surveillance. It slows down movements and scans for gold, it records all that it sees for posterity.