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DEBATES AND DEVELOPMENTS

'We Are Here Alone': The Ironic Potentials and Vulnerabilities of Mixed (Up) Districts in Central Jakarta

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Abstract

The durability of central city districts in large metropolitan systems of the majority world has largely been attained through intricate intersections of physical, infrastructural, human and discursive materials, as these intersections are continuously remade through shifting constellations of the incremental initiatives of residents. Residents have learned to use the city as a place to continuously explore new relationships among things and extract a wide range of unanticipated capacities from them. This is a collective resourcefulness from which there might be much to draw in terms of using the carbon-driven exigencies of infrastructural transformation as the occasion to reanimate more egalitarian political projects. Although many collective efforts are increasingly being disassembled, the reflections of a single resident of one of Jakarta's most heterogeneous residential districts points to how the revitalization of such efforts might be conceived. The efficacy of political efforts to address intensified vulnerability partly entails replenishing intense mixtures of built and physical environments as provocations and platforms for complex social maneuvers.

The ordinary increments of efficacy

Bahwani, a collaborator of mine living in Menteng Dalam, a district in central Jakarta, repeatedly talks about being in the city alone. This 'being alone' partly refers to his responsibility to look out for himself and acknowledge that his relative successes and failures are his alone to bear. Yet, there is another ironic undercurrent. Bahwani lives in a place where it is rare for anyone to do anything alone. Residents of Menteng Dalam, as well as many mixed-income, mixed-use districts in so-called cities of the South, endure by putting together experimental relationships among the materials, situations and resources available to them. But in the realm of much urban analysis, the efforts he and his fellow residents make to make the city endure appear to count for little. Much about the ways in which cities in the majority world have been built during the last decades on the basis of residents *not* working alone remains relatively invisible, somewhere out there, on its own.

Thanks to the main figure in this essay, Bahwani (who goes by this single name), and research associates Uzair Fauzan and Dian Tri. Likewise to the people who cleared the way to make this work possible, Marco Kusumawijaya and Jo Santoso.

For the near future, widespread urban dysfunction looms, given the lack of adaptation to ecological crisis. Despite the imminent tipping points, the protracted transition period entailed in the development of new urban infrastructure to deal with this crisis provides a window of opportunity to steer urban politics and redistribution in new directions. But making use of this window of opportunity only seems possible by reanimating the capacity of the city to be a place of thick relations — that is, relations between situations, persons, materials and events that cut across sectoral and spatial divides. The remaking of infrastructure in order to reduce carbon and energy loads is not just a feat of engineering, it is also a process of remaking relationships (MacFarlane and Rutherford, 2008).

Nevertheless, while infrastructure attempts to suture, articulate or circumvent, the proficiency of the engineering, substance of investment or institutional support will not guarantee that it will accomplish what it sets out to do. On the one hand, the intensities exerted by things and bodies may generate attractions and repulsions, draw things near or far. But there are no predetermined reasons why things or events should necessarily connect, be in a relationship with each other. Relationships have to be steered and coaxed (MacKenzie, 2002; Coward, 2012).

Relationships themselves constitute an infrastructure for inhabitation. These relationships are not just social events or descriptors of exchanges and transactions. They are not simply embodiments of sentiment or vehicles for organizing work, expenditure, attention and recognition. Rather, they are materials themselves to be articulated in various forms in order to construct circulations of bodies, resources, affect and information (Amin and Thrift, 2002; Nancy, 2002; Virno, 2009). Places like Menteng Dalam, where my colleague, Bahwani, lives, were in many respects experts in relationship making. They exuded a capacity to continuously pursue possible connections among things regardless of whether they seemed to go together or not. Households continuously attempted to associate themselves with new initiatives, economic activities and networks. This is a spatial literacy that the increasing segregation and particularization of urban life would seem to diminish. So it is important to get a better sense of this relational competence and the kinds of thinking and sensibilities that constituted it. It is for this reason then that I concentrate on a long excerpt from an interview I conducted with my colleague in order to convey such sensibilities in the words of one resident himself.

The development of much of central Jakarta was organized in terms of a hedging of bets about what kinds of relationships might be possible, as well as the kinds of relationships with the larger city for which residents were eligible (Kooy and Bakker, 2008). To what extent would households exist as highly individuated units almost totally responsible for negotiating their livelihoods and institutional affiliations? Or, were households to exist as provisional points of reference in much more complex transactions within the ecologies of residential districts? How would infrastructure be designed so as to affect particular kinds of relational organizations?

Central Jakarta was largely the product of auto-construction, where the onus for constructing built environments and livelihoods fell largely on residents themselves. But there were also significant waves of public intervention through land allocation, the provision of a basic infrastructural base and oscillating degrees of regulation and surveillance (Abeyesekere, 1987). Consequently, residents had to continuously navigate shifting terms of efficacy and propriety. What it took to be decent citizens was often simply not compatible with what it took to use the city as a strategic opportunity to make individual lives better. Residents, therefore, had to work out functional relationships among competing norms, practices and expectations.

Jakarta's visionary governor, Ali Sadikin (1966–77), was determined to turn the city into a modern metropolis, an agenda that meant dismantling many pre-existing neighborhoods, but simultaneously providing residents with mechanisms of redress and rights to operate within the city. In maneuvers fraught with contradictions, the poor were to be transformed into citizens by dislodging them from the very places that they

inhabited so that they could then more properly assume a viable place in a city now modernized. But the state could never mobilize the resources sufficient to provide the physical and social infrastructure for these political transformations. In the extensive internal migrations precipitated by the pursuit of modernity, residents had to largely rebuild their settlements from scratch, even when the state did provide some basic physical layout. Sadikin tried to clean up a city that, for him, was not a real city by making it more of a mess. In the process, he discovered that he could not do everything. But he pressured different actors to pick up the slack, particularly in the provision of basic housing developments that anchored self-built housing radiating around them (Silver, 2008).

In Jakarta, only about 1% of land is designated for freehold title, with the bulk of land titled according to the specific use for which it is eligible. As a result, land registration is exceedingly complicated, involving multiple agencies and adherence to rules regarding not only proper use but also eligible materials and size. Nearly 2,000 distinct pieces of legislation exist to govern the disposition of land. But with so many affiliated documents in circulation specifying distinct types of claims and procedures for resolving disputes, with so many juridical backlogs, and with the near absence of judicious regulatory enforcement, any regularization of land transactions and development is largely contingent upon who is able to pay a large amount of money to do whatever they want. Otherwise, residents flood the field with all kinds of materials and uses that are formally illegal — a kind of security through illegality (Santoso, 2011). Almost every effort by the state to provide formal grids, social housing projects, and orderly laid-out single-household bungalows has been transformed by various adjustments made by residents themselves.

Residents place a lot of emphasis on mobility — that is, the capacity to move through various dimensions of urban life, not just mobility across physical spaces. The two notions of mobility have often been confused, however. In the vast central city districts such as Bukit Duren, Johar Bahru, Menteng Dalam or Mataram, land politics during the past 5 decades of their existence have largely centered on where vehicles of certain dimensions, such as pedal bikes, motorcycles and cars, can go. As in many cities, automobility came to embody efficacy in the city. Even if a household had the financial means to acquire a car, it didn't necessarily mean that they had somewhere they could easily put it. The past exigencies of urban residence were — and, of course, largely remain — access to affordable places to live, something accomplished through high densities. Densities not only made relatively cheap accommodation available, they facilitated multiple forms of social connectivity, information exchange and fluid labor markets that created their own versions of mobility and mobilization. The ways in which these densities were materialized did not permit easy access for automobiles, especially if they were to be directly stored within the confines of household space (Hoffman, 1992; Firman, 1997).

In initial spatial layouts designed through government programs or private developments, the usual pattern was to inscribe a few feeder and through-flow roads around which were built the majority of residential plots circumnavigated by small lanes whose sizes depended on the characteristics of the terrain or the extensiveness of the inevitable subdividing and parceling engineered by local residents themselves. Properties on feeder roads escalated in value as cars became more plentiful and, in many instances, areas that had not been accessible to automobiles were replotted, a process that required significant funds in order to assemble the land necessary. Those with access to such resources would usually, in turn, construct large homes, often in accordance with local regulations specifying that certain proportions of land-holdings had to be developed (Ferguson and Hoffman, 1993; Susantono, 1998; Winarso, 2002).

At the same time, cars do find ways of fitting themselves into inhospitable conditions. In the neighborhood where I live, Tebet Dalam, the small crowded houses that are a few steps up in size and quality from the conventional working-class three-room bungalow,

take on a different aura as they squeeze a car into a makeshift frontage. The surrounding lanes barely allow a single car to pass, so herculean maneuvers are always required if more than two cars show up at the same time.

The stereotypical portrayals of automobility as producing less dependence on others — individuals moving around the city according to their own individuated temporality and desires — seem to ring true in Jakarta's car-accommodating areas. Here, a persistent quiet seems attributable to the fact that residents are either rarely at home or have little need to occupy the street as a space of social conviviality or economic necessity. As these car-accommodating streets are by far the minority of pathways in these areas, they have a ghostly feel to them, as they are surrounded by lanes that are extensions of household interiors, themselves extensions of the lanes.

Crowdedness is not just a function of the miniscule size of most residences, their stale or suffocating air, but also a function of the creation of a different kind of mobility. Cooking, chatting, grooming, cleaning, repairing, gossiping and gaming all take place as part of the domestic and convivial neighborhood life. But residents primarily use crowdedness to experience another kind of mobility. They have a sense of enlarging their reach and access into events and territories that having cars wouldn't really expedite. For they mostly talk about what is going on elsewhere, what others are up to who are not visibly present. Sometimes this interest in exteriority is concretized through specific projects — travels to markets or to distant work sites, collective investment in a trading place outside the district, taking over a food-selling operation near the parking lot of a new shopping mall, appropriating abandoned space for storage, or inserting small trades in the fringes along busy thoroughfares, or running protection services.

Whatever form this interest takes, it becomes a possibility for residents of a district to be in relationship to the larger city *together* in ways that do not assume a past solidity of affiliations, a specific destination nor an ultimate collective formation to come (Berner and Korff, 1995; Kusno, 2010). Consequently, what many Jakarta residents misconstrue as poor neighborhoods generate an economic dynamism that enables those with comfortable middle-class lifestyles yet increasingly nervous dispositions to stay put in the central city and thus help ward off the incursions of big developers — for now. The spatial politics of the traditional residential districts of Jakarta dramatize a series of complicities and trade-offs. Contiguous districts of relative wealth and impoverishment offer each other specific affordances. Each covers, hedges, protects and sustains the other in ways that are not clearly just or without manipulation. The penetration of cars for the time being generates money that enables the areas where cars can't go to keep the really big and debilitating money at bay.

This is just one example of the way in which the majority of central city residents in Jakarta have attained a sense of durability through their ability to intersect various initiatives aimed at improving livelihood and the built environment. In a postcolonial era largely without judicious and reliable forms of governance, service provision and social security, durability rested in the capacities of residents from different walks of life to concretize multiple opportunities for complementary economic activity and flexible collaboration. Residents responded to locally honed exigencies to do something — almost anything — to make urban living viable. Since most knew that their initiatives would operate in a crowded field of others, they had to adapt, adjust, negotiate and come up with projects that incorporated the ideas, income and labor of others. These collaborations were mostly temporary, as projects and people would come and go, and so residents would not rely upon one way of doing things or a particular form of efficacy, but knew that they would have to 'spread out', become equipped at working different versions of themselves and their values (Houweling, 2002; Firman *et al*., 2007; Silver, 2008; Barker, 2009; Hutabarat Lo, 2010; Tunas and Peresthu, 2010).

While these orientations and practices are certainly not specific to Jakarta — drawing on accumulating evidence from other 'similar' cities — few cities in the world come to the present time with mixed-income, mixed-use central city districts so intact. This is the case despite the fast growth of mega-development and the consolidation and expansion

of a central business district that has displaced tens of thousands of residents over the past two decades. Still, there is a pervasive feeling across these districts that 'things are over', that ways of life are coming to a close, and that people have to quickly remake themselves in order to take advantage of new residential, economic and lifestyle opportunities that will only grow more prohibitively expensive in the near future. The incrementalism that was at the heart of the confidence residents possessed that they could always do something to improve their situation, step by step, seems to be fast disappearing in discourses that center more on total redemption or transformation (Evers and Korff, 2000; Nas and Pratiwo, 2003; Chattopadhyay, 2006; Douglass, 2007; Dieleman, 2011).

As in many cities throughout the world, residential districts were often settled and occupations built in terms of common ethnicity or place of origin, even though in Jakarta there were so many places of origin and ethnicities that all kinds of proximities and territorial interchanges ensued. But what was more important was the emphasis on opportunistic intermingling, where new affordances and purchases in the growing metropolitan area could be attained through provisionally putting together different backgrounds, networks, identities and practices. After all, cities are by definition volatile settings; they generate effects always in excess of what can be anticipated or governed; they are full of ruptures and accidents. So, in the end, it didn't matter too much who someone was or where they came from; if they brought something potentially useful 'to the table', then residents would try and find a way to make use of it, thus refiguring what they deemed possible or viable.

In part, this is because many households perceived the place of their real belonging as somewhere else. Time after time I have had conversations with residents who have lived in Jakarta for decades, and they will never say that they come from Jakarta, or that Jakarta is their home. This is even the case for youth born in Jakarta and who have rarely ever even visited their place of origin. They seem to always be bored out of their minds when they have to spend any time there. This distancing has enabled residents to focus on using their districts as opportunities to explore various versions of themselves, to experimentally invest in a wide range of different roles and affiliations rather than defending their positions as turf or wellsprings of emotional attachment.

Increasingly, the tables are turning, and emphasis is placed, perhaps not so much on people's identities, but on more definitive self-assessments and the need to individuate and disentangle oneself from intricate, largely implicit collective actions. Since these collective actions were mostly never the outcomes of formal organizations, contracts or deliberations, but rather multiple, always revised affiliations with family, neighbors, friends, co-workers and religious co-congregants, the attempt of individuals to now increasingly go it alone is more complicated.

For example, residents in the central city neighborhood, Tebet, where I live, repeatedly worry about how they are placed for success, whether they are doing the right thing, pursuing the right formula and exuding the right character. They wonder if they should relocate to settings that are more religiously pure or where they have to spend less time tending to the concerns of others. They rightly complain about the pervasiveness of corruption, and about how brashness, impetuousness and imperviousness to the notions of property, exactitude and decorum that were often an integral part of the resourcefulness of districts are becoming a kind of parasitism. They look for cheap apartments in new low- to middle-income high rises or new properties at the periphery of the city where new, but lesser paying, jobs are being situated.

To a certain extent many residents may be jumping the gun, reacting too quickly to a sense of imminent demise — there may indeed be ways to hang on, and to do so through capitalizing on the practices of the incremental long familiar to these districts. Even if their vulnerability is increased, it is important to understand what these long-held orientations have entailed so as to conceptualize strategic maneuvers best suited to enhancing the security of these districts. Again, if avoiding widespread urban dysfunction depends upon infrastructural change, and if infrastructural change depends

on rebuilding the social fabric of the city and effecting a significant redistribution of resources and opportunity, and if that redistribution can only take place if there are social and emotional investments across class lines, then long-honed skills at forging relationships embodied by the central city districts are important assets to these tasks.

Working the central city

A group of researchers, activists and policy specialists have been trying to explore *with* various groups of residents how a selective cross-section of Jakarta's central city districts got to be the way they are today. The project is a collaborative effort among the Rujak Center for Urban Studies (a social action research NGO), a postgraduate program in urban planning at the University of Tarumanagara, postgraduate researchers from several universities who are pursuing individual research projects, and local *Dewan Kelurahan* (*dekels*) in each district. Established in 2000, the latter are locally elected advisory groups to what are otherwise centrally appointed local government administrators. Each partner in the project pursues research activities within its competencies and interests, and these are collectively deliberated in order to attain a coordination of effort and method. The methodological approach has included some 100 semi-structured household interviews across the three districts, as well as an additional 100 interviews with a wide range of institutional actors and individuals pursuing different occupations and trades. Spatial surveys have been conducted across the three districts although they are not yet fully completed; the intent is to organize a comprehensive inventory of the built environment. The irony in a research project pursuing understandings about the relational is how difficult it is to manage such cross-institutional relationships. The critical actors in producing knowledge about urban life — engineers, technicians, big data specialists, ethnographers, sociologists, policy wonks, and so forth — still have great difficulties talking to each other and finding a way to convey their concerns and experiences in a language that others are able to grasp. These difficulties are present in this project as well, not easily reconcilable even when each actor pursues their own specialization. The research manages to persist largely because the terrain itself is such a tangled mixture of diverse materials, personal histories, aspirations, designs and ways of doing things that every effort to disentangle dynamics from the points of view of any one particular expertise just doesn't make sense to either the researchers or, more importantly, the residents themselves.

The intent here is to have one resident of Menteng Dalam, Bahwani, speak at some length about how his residential area is trying to operate within a mélange of potentiality and worry. This is a molecular project — that is, a consideration of urban life at an intensely localized level. I pursue this kind of investigation not simply because analysis of metabolic and spatial functioning of all kinds is more precisely attuned to smaller entities or because the expansion of global capital markets depends upon the identification of more and more singularities. Rather, the capacity to extend the potentialities of what exists, in terms of human resources and material environments, requires intensive and particular rather than generic engagements. The ability to enhance the productivity of what already exists, to coax from it new potentials, requires methods of discernment and enhancement more appreciative of how it actually functions in its environment.

The molecular is important not because of its proximity to authenticity or simplification. Rather, an appreciation of operational complexity — of individuals, households, associations, neighborhoods — requires both a practice of engagement capable of experiencing the interactions of affect, envisioning and dialogue and how different sensibilities and practices are distributed across a particular place. As analysis 'zooms out' this sense of complexity is often lost. It is at the molecular level that resonance — as intensities of interaction of persons, things and their surrounds — is most available to be worked with (Colebrook, 2010; Lury *et al*., 2012; Tsing 2012; Woodward *et al*., 2012).

Thus the molecular is not just *local management*. It is a site of intervention and incentive that attempts to cultivate a range of mobilities, a sense of movement across different divides and sectors even when actual geographic movement might be limited. The emphasis on the molecular is to stimulate both intensive and extensive movement, to propel residents outward from the particular routines of activity or inactivity to which they may be accustomed. This is why regional and molecular are not just points or scales but forms of reaching towards and associating (Allen, 2011; Read, 2012).

Bahwani is a 60-year-old Betawi man who is my elder by one day, a fact he uses repeatedly to instruct me on the way things are. The Betawi are the 'original' inhabitants of Jakarta, a kind of mongrel ethnicity that marks a particular history and way of inhabiting the city more than anything else. I use his remarks as a basis to talk about how entanglement and intersection are not just descriptive of human processes. Rather, the viability of these districts is located in a distributive agency — the intermeshing of matters and materials of all kinds in a reciprocal, conjoint production of capacity and sense; built and social environments are thoroughly enwrapped circuits of causality, feedback and information.

Extending Bahwani's remarks in this manner is important so as to emphasize that the ability of mixed-income, mixed-use districts to transform themselves so as to maintain their viability in face of developmental onslaughts may be more a matter of intensifying the complexity of the meshing than of straightening districts out. (This is a straightening-out in terms of more precise accountings of property ownership, divisions of labor, economic and residential activities.) Local political mobilization centered on clarifying and fighting for rights, or on having residents work collectively and formally for upgrades of built and physical environments and more proficient local government systems, remains important.

Nevertheless, such mobilization may also miss the point in terms of addressing those dynamics that have enabled residents and their complex surrounds to live so far. Part of the success of the ways in which these districts have been built and lived in in the past was that external interference became a tricky matter because outsiders could never confidently predict the implications of that interference. Additionally, the heterogeneity of districts — the fact that residents wanted to do and were doing so many different things — could be made coherent only through residents 'reaching' into the larger city — i.e. finding ways of acting opportunistically beyond their occupational and familial obligations across the wider city, and then folding these involvements back into the district as supplements to what others were doing. Contemporary local political strategies then have to be based on intensifying the ways in which districts seem to exude both ascendancy and decline, laissez-faire individual initiative and intricate collaboration, new built environmental forms and incessant repair and remaking of existing structures, oscillating property values across micro-territories choreographed by a mix of moratoriums on land transactions, collective tenure and speculation. The following are some of Bahwani's thoughts that attempt to explain why.

Bahwani's thoughts

Many of us came here from Angke (North Jakarta) a couple of decades ago, to make way for something, which I am not sure is even there anymore. We came here alone; we are here alone. Of course, we all knew each other, and those of us who remain here in Menteng Dalam continue to know each other; I mean what's not to know; it's not that our lives are so complicated that there are many mysteries. But, then again, many of the newcomers who have come here over the years — mostly we know what they're up to, and they all think that they know us Betawi well. Sure, we look for money any way we can, and we don't usually like to be told what to do. We managed to settle this land, taking just enough to live on and do a little something more, and yes, many of us have

sold off much of what we controlled, but it's not like we're some machine where everyone falls into line or falls asleep every chance they get.

Some of our brothers in other parts of the city — well, they made mistakes; they wanted to hold on to the prospect of high prices, get the most for their property. But you have to let all kinds of people have their chance. The big money people will come in and then it's like everything is gone; you have to know how to pace yourself, you can't just let the big players come in because once they start throwing the big money around they won't need you for anything any longer. You see what goes on around here [Menteng Dalam]*, many got caught up in the popular styles of the time maybe 20 years back, making their houses as fancy as they could with the little money they had. But now a lot of them don't want to look like they're making things too modern because they don't want outsiders talking about what a nice place this area is becoming. Sure there are those who are happy with just letting things take their course or others who are afraid of being squeezed out by all the big developments coming from all directions, but, mostly, it seems the smart thing not to get carried away with any one particular kind of thing.*

You know we live in this city alone; people prefer it this way. Now you probably are going to point out that no Indonesian does anything alone; we are always in groups, and always concerned about what people think about what we're doing. In this area there are many organizations and, like I said, we basically all know each other, and know that things are going to get complicated no matter what we do. I was never in a position to do a lot of things I may have wanted to do; I have some rooms to rent and my son got a good position as head of security in the big apartment block they built up the road, so I am not poor. But it is good to see others here doing different things; sometimes I feel that because they take place close to me that I was able then to make them happen; but it never would have worked if I told those people that they had to do this or that they couldn't do that. Here, no matter what you do, there is going to be a little something left over for others. Now it is not always going to be evident what that little something might be; it's not that the guy up the street who's building this fancy rooming house is paying off the neighbors or promising anything. It's just that there hasn't been anything quite like this around here before in this kind of style; people are going to have to pay more to stay there, for sure, than in the other rooms around here, but they're going to add an extra element to the area. It won't change the larger character of the place, but it will definitely add something; they're going to want some things that others around here don't necessarily want, and that means one of us could get involved in providing it. But it is like this all the way around, nothing happens without someone else moving in to take some kind of advantage. And it couldn't happen if we all had to agree or fight it out; no, it is because we are alone here.

This doesn't mean that people don't help each other out. You see that warung [small shop] *across the street, the woman there couldn't feed her kids if she didn't have some good connections at Jatinegara* (a major market) *so she can keep her prices low, especially with all the Indomarts and 7–11's coming in. Around here something is always going wrong; we all think we can fix things, and sometimes we can, but sometimes we get ourselves into more trouble, so people have to step in; still, you have to show that you are not afraid of letting things be what they are. This place is never going to be the promised land; it has been comfortable to us because we didn't have to break our backs trying to keep things going. Look at this street, look at how many new things are being built up, but none of them are hi-so* [high society] *type things; people are doing things that are just enough for them now; but they can do them because this is a not place where things are now set in stone; all of these people, they made their connections, they put their money together, and they can do things, even though I know for a fact that they don't have certificates and formal permission. You may hear some complaints now and then, but they're on their own, and even those complaining are not going to challenge that. You see, there are a lot things going on in a place like this; it might not seem that way, but there are a lot of different interests and goals, so it would never be easy even when the big money people bring in suitcases full of cash. That's why it's good that some of the*

Betawi that were here are already gone; those of who have stayed have gotten to know the tricks that outsiders want to play on us.

Yes, so we came to this place alone, even though our neighbors before (in Angke) *were our neighbors here. We don't expect much from each other, but maybe that is why we can get along. I know people are going to do what they are going to do, but this way, I can at least hear them miles away. I can feel when a bad wind is coming, so I can step in another direction, let it pass; the thing here is that people have to keep their eyes and ears open, and this is not going to happen if people get too tied down expecting things or getting disappointed when they don't happen. I may not be as smart as the next person, but I can come up with the words or connections necessary to put a little extra on the table when I see something that others around me may not, and around here, as long as you don't interfere, a little curiosity and interest can go a long way. Everyone is putting themselves on the line; it's not easy to have a project that probably won't succeed, so if you can offer a bridge to something that person had considered, well, that's like a line of credit at the bank. Maybe they'll offer something to you next time, but even if they don't, that's not important; this is not about obligations; we are in this place alone. Alright, we're part of things, we're part of this place, but things sometimes go so fast in front of my eyes that I can't always say exactly what I am a part of, other than that this is my land, my house, and I am comfortable with it, and besides, where I am going to go? All this around this place, all of these big buildings, even if it coming, even if it is going to get rid of us, for now, it keeps us from being too exposed; that's why some of these newcomers like this place; no one is paying too much attention, even though we spend most of time looking at what goes on around us.*

The provocations of things

At the end of these comments Bahwani raises a critical question: just who or what is looking at whom? What is it that can be seen and shown? What is the work that gets done in places where the exchanges and entanglements of matters — with objects, bodies, materialities and immaterialities of all kinds — tug at the borders between one urban area and another, and push and pull at both hard-won stabilities and resilience? Whereas organizations of, and intersections among, various manifestations of collective human life may constitute the predominant tools to create sustainable surroundings for residence, work and living in general, what other constellations of endurance and productivity can be brought into political considerations? Here, it is important to consider living and livelihood as involving a wide range of material dimensions.

Land, buildings and infrastructure are continuously intersecting in ways that exceed function and use. Having finally dispensed with the common working illusion that how we use things manages to contain the effects of which they are capable, cities now repeatedly demonstrate multiple circuitries through which built, social and physical environments shape each other. Well-known trajectories of impact, such as the alteration of watersheds through overbuilding or the effects on cognitive functioning of high-density living spaces, also entail a wide range of more textured and immanent potentialities. Here, the convergence of different intensities — for example, flows of resources and traffic, interplays of shadow and light, highly differentiated aural landscapes, exposures of visibility, and patterns of physical and symbolic accessibility — renders specific places more or less capable of various transformative events.

In Jakarta's largely self-built urban districts, the landscape is strewn with reminders, warnings and invitations of all kinds. A cavalier attitude may debilitate many public spaces, the sense that refuse can simply be discarded in public because some public authority should be taking care of it. But, there are more productive aspects of the refusal to clean things up. When the built environment aspires to materialize itself as the model from which it supposedly emanates, things are visualized as in their place. Their integrity

is intact; they are where they should be, serving the concept or the realized whole to which they serve as components. A door is inscribed in the house with specific appropriate materials, emplacement and function. It is not to be used, as sometimes it in fact is, as a makeshift bridge over a small drainage ditch at the frontage of a property. The bricks that are used in the construction of walls are to be consumed in their proper quantity, with any excess devoted to decorative or functional supplements somewhere inside or outside the edifice, and not scattered along the street in piles of varying numbers. Train schedules are not to be used to calculate the prices for sex workers who lounge around scores of makeshift bars lining the tracks, nor the electric pylons which support the cables that power the trains to run the generators that keep the drinks cool and the lights just bright enough to make sure the right amount of money is exchanged.

Things in Jakarta are always spilling over from the uses and models that incorporate them. So they offer something more than what anyone had in mind. In a city where so many residents are captivated by the urgency to do more things than they are presently doing, there are going to be more failed than successful projects. In environments where so many things are strewn around outside of any discernible and appropriate use, there are plenty of reminders of these failures. But at the same time, there is a materialized conviction that accumulated failure doesn't matter as much as one might think. Of course failures are matters of concern, and the ability to forget about them may be important in order for individuals to move on. Yet, at the same time, their lingering evidence also reminds residents that life can go on despite them. Materials from a never finished construction may be used elsewhere, the boarded-up store might be opened again, the repair business that no longer has the tools to fix anything still remains open, the lack of customers is not a deterrent to the owner sitting and keeping watch over the street as he always did. For what was gleaned in the owner's observation was put to work in ways that proved far more lucrative then any repairs that got done. Whatever a thing contains, and whatever contains it, doesn't quite get to what the thing is or what it is capable of doing (Garcia, 2011).

The seeming hodge-podge composition of Bahwani's district of Menteng Dalam, and scores of others like it in Jakarta, is the product of reciprocal adjustments, where the unfolding efforts of one project constitute a series of constraints and opportunities for other projects. A plurality of efforts is always underway. These efforts may come from different places. They may represent the consolidated aspirations of a single household or a formulation that attempts to take competing agendas or needs of household members into consideration in such a way as to offer each of them a certain respect or advancement as a gesture. For example, extra sleeping room is attained by makeshift covers on an existing roof and the extension of household business activities out into the surrounding street. Many different efforts are generated from single individuals in terms of shaping performances suited to the various networks and activities they must negotiate. All efforts also represent a response to other efforts; they never exist in and of themselves as an emanation of an unmediated idea or aspiration.

Thus efforts are situated in complex surrounds. Efforts are manifested through the various shaping of materials, the arrangement of things, and through various devices signaling where meanings are constructed, conveyed and translated. Buildings are built, materials are assembled, scenarios are enacted, things are put to work and sometimes transformed, and speech and gesture circulate, as do objects. The materialization of effort generates a wide range of effects — it enfolds or opens up spaces to include and exclude; it casts shadows and funnels transmissions; it lays out vectors of movement, imitation and contagion. Particular vistas and vantage points are constructed that enable or foreclose particular kinds of visibilities. This process in turn shapes what gets considered as an event. As certain things are kept from view, out of the picture that is framed by the intersection of materialized efforts, each event comes with its own uncertainty about who and what might have been involved and for which it is difficult to make any clear attribution of culpability. These events steer attention toward particular elements and possibilities, while occluding others. As a result, this economy of visibility also provides

a context for how subsequent effort will operate. Some actors and things will come under great scrutiny while others remain under the radar.

The plurality of materialized effort — and the putting of things into motion; getting something out of the effort that has been materialized — can provoke conflict. Some efforts are not easily translatable, and some actors are sometimes not even interested in having their efforts understood, as they try to dominate space and cut off the need to respond to what others are doing. But the way in which the majority of residential areas in Jakarta have been developed over the past 50 years has necessitated mutual adaptation, as Bahwani emphasizes. Such adaptations may not be formally or intentionally negotiated, but rather implicitly entail efforts responding to each other, as efforts try to step around rather than stepping on each other.

These adaptations also entail various concentrations of function: Some spaces are focused on absorbing intensifications of energy produced by the heterogeneous composition of a population or the activities that take place there. For example, the fact that so many new neighborhood mosques are being built may not just be an outgrowth of the particular faithfulness or status of actors, or the fulcrum of a particular approach to Islamic practice. Rather, as many residents have told us, they address the need for a place that conjoins disparate energies in a focused and concentrated activity, such as prayer. Some spaces absorb the disparate schedules, personalities and confusions of household life by providing 'escapes' that are the extensions of households, such as local eating places or the proliferation of 7–11 stores that are profitable primarily because they offer well-maintained hang-out spaces for everybody. Some places absorb the collective anxieties about uncertain futures. Often when we ask some households why they build such large multistory houses, they tell us of the need to accommodate future generations within an overcrowded quarter and not have the property tied down in endless disputes among offspring.

The inclusive speculations of the more powerful

Of course, a certain speculative urbanism tries to follow along these lines in highly distorted ways. In recent years, Jakarta has possessed one of the world's fastest growing property markets. Property developers commonly report near full occupancy rates on most commercial and residential properties. While it is often difficult to verify these claims, even when available records seem to demonstrate their veracity, such rates can be accomplished through various financial sleights of hand. One maneuver entails using holding companies established by the developers to purchase units in bulk, negotiate favorable mortgages from banks in which the developers themselves may be important investors, and then securitize these mortgages with an array of other loans. Some of these loans may include mortgages, but also loans for industrial and infrastructural development, which then pay out at interest rates that exceed the costs of the mortgages themselves. This manufacturing of the success of a given project then allows developers to entice other investors to pay premium rates for space that is supposedly going fast. At times, potential prestige clients are offered cut-rate deals — for example, payment deferrals of long-term fixed-rated leases; deploying lease payments as investments in joint venture accounts — in order to secure their tenancy, which then is used as a means to attract others.

All of these maneuvers, deployed in order to prove the success of a given project, enable developers to secure further funding from banks in a game that requires accelerating expansion. As these developments appreciate land values, then more land must be quickly acquired before the prices get too high. This expansion needs to capitalize on urban sites already won in order to maintain the claims of proximity and locational advantage — the sense that businesses and residences are close to where the action is. As this expansion becomes more and more visible to residents across the

city, the sense of inevitable transformation deepens. In the face of such powerful developmental machines, what can historic mixed-income, largely working-class neighborhoods do?

Historically in Jakarta, shared space, the willingness of people from different walks of life and capacity to share a district, to agree to operate according to their abilities and aspirations without any one group dominating another, has been the precondition through which economic differentiation could take place without substantial spatial segregation. If labor markets had to be elaborated that made use of a variety of different conditions, contracts and temporalities; if different economic sectors of varying scales had to operate with both the autonomy and articulation needed to make them viable; if expansion and innovation required new practices of articulation of what already exists, then these had to have their spatial supports. They had to generate difference without that difference foreclosing the basic use rights anyone (at all) might be able to claim within a particular district.

Across cities of the global South, however, new developments — their financing, architecture, and support by the state — function by acting as if the rich and the poor do not operate in the same space. As Martin (2011) points out, these are investments that seem to magically resolve the structural crisis of the urban question even as they reproduce it. In districts where residents largely responded to each other's initiative with a mixture of envy, disinterest, parasitism, collaboration and inventive rechanneling, whatever a household has — the quality of construction, the relative location in relationship to services or roads, the square footage, the available documentation attesting to length of stay, as well as the ways in which these 'assets' are traded among residents — is now the subject of calculation. Even in our work in Jakarta, residents increasingly think: how much is my situation worth?; how do I hold out for more? In many poor and lower-class communities, the proliferation of mapping exercises, charts that outline risk–reward ratios, increases in consumer purchasing power, the land valuation accrual rates of land-sharing arrangements, and the once vast intersection of discrepant, seemingly incommensurable materiality that was the basis of often progressive accumulation can now be overshadowed by a profusion of numbers.

In the end, there is no way to clearly navigate the expansion of ultimately arbitrary calculations and, consequently, the capacity to change one's situation then approximates to a state of religious conversion, with, as Martin (*ibid.*: 78) indicates, the contemporary city becoming an 'ode to the mathematical sublime of the market'.

The abiding faith in the city

Neil Brenner and Christian Schmid (2012) have rightly noted that the city is no longer, if it ever was, the predominant locus or exemplar of urbanization, which rather operates at a planetary scale and, as such, distributes what made the city a supposedly coherent system of organization across multiple scales and constellations. Yet, if in a fundamental way the city is 'emptied out', its endurance predicated on perhaps more, heretofore, inexplicable dynamics and algorithmic calculations, this may provide an opening to pay attention to residents and their practices that might have up till now been considered insignificant or invisible.

Despite mega-developments and neoliberal necrology, it still may be necessary to maintain some faith in the city. For the city remains a productively dangerous thing. Everything that takes place within it is in an ongoing give and take with its surrounds. Thus pipes, conduits, drains, wires, fibers, antennas, roads, flows are continuously impacting upon each other in ways that are not always directly traceable to clear causes or origins (Parisi, 2012). All of the efforts residents continue to make to repair and upgrade their conditions make up a plurality of materialized efforts. This plurality of efforts is a plurality of effects dissociated from any clear connection to specific

cause–effect relations. While each neighborhood or district may have its name and authorities, its history of settlement, its collection of practices and dispositions or its capture by dark global forces, whatever seems to be the 'story' of the place — its set of reasons for being as it is — is a partial 'line' of connection drawn through this plurality. This partial storyline provides the neighborhood with a working but always provisional sense of where it has come from and where it is going.

While a great deal of effort may be steered in certain directions, such as certain styles of improvement in a living space or the accommodation of economic activity within living quarters (or vice-versa), the speeds through which these efforts are enacted will vary. Some proceed full speed ahead, while others do what they can as their means allow or adopt a wait and see attitude. Even in the pursuit of similar objectives, the gaps in acceleration become both constraints and opportunities for various adjustments, deviations, improvisations and reversals. Actors change their minds, or set off into new directions, especially as these directions are suggested by changes in the surroundings and especially since certain opportunities are time-limited as the surrounds continue to change all of the time.

The heterogeneity of the population that still makes up most of the residential areas of Jakarta is a function of the particular materialization of efforts as they work themselves around and through and with each other. In doing so, a particular built environment is enacted which in turn sets up particular pathways of movement, exposure, interchange and isolation, which recursively generate their own multiple implications, especially on the capacities of actors and things to operate in particular ways. If political action in such a situation is not straightforward, the need of residents to work around and through the hundreds upon hundreds of small initiatives put forward to make livelihoods better produces a wide range ideas, tactics and materials to work with.

So this heterogeneity is not so much a matter of flexibility and openness, not so much a matter of a tolerance to difference, which seems to be fading fast, rather, it is the materialization of a plurality of efforts that have had to contend with a wide range of conditions. For example, these conditions might include a rapidly expanding population, the availability of land at a particular price, the constraints on accumulation through formal employment, or the highly prescriptive and narrowly drawn regimens to generate national economic growth. For the long three-decade rule of Indonesia's New Order Regime, which largely focused on controlling Jakarta's population rather than attempting to develop a viable city for its growing population, whatever sense of development was going to happen was largely the purview of the inhabitants themselves. If they were to make something happen, regardless of the place or the capacity from which they started out, they were mostly going to have to find ways to contend with each other, use each other and, at the same time, not overburden each other with plans that were too definitive or risked too much.

At times there is no clear sense of the risks, no clear-cut deliberation about what works or doesn't work, or how best to defend interests that are also not usually well defined or consistent. For example, recent efforts by the national government to substantially cut its subsidies of fuel consumption prompted widespread protests, especially among workers, students and the poor, who in the end would be least affected by these cuts. Estimates attribute the vast benefits of subsidization to middle-class automobile users, and the government was prepared to assist poor consumers to meet rising prices of foodstuffs and other consumables triggered by rising fuel costs.

Widespread resistance to the policy shift was directed to marked intervention of the government into the issue of consumption in general, the fact that government could be vulnerable in the sheer act of trying to restructure the cost of things. Despite the fact that fuel subsidies exceed the amount the government spends on education and social welfare and despite the intended dedication of fuel budget savings to infrastructure investment and job creation, the proposed action marked a moment of potential vulnerability that could be seized upon in a general way.

If the reactions to this governmental action are any indication, shrinking public resources and governmental autonomy to configure income generation at scale will require urban policies that target the latent capacities of various collectives thrown together either by territorial proximity, historical affiliation or related interest to become the co-affiliates of low-energy cost provisioning systems. These local collectives will have to be imbued with more authority to tend to the environmental conditions in which they are situated. Policy must aim to affect trade-offs in terms of time-savings — that is, to reduce the amount of time individuals have to spend getting to and from work and other key institutions, as well as the time they spend securing a basic basket of material and informational goods and then to use this freed surplus as a series of credits applied to various community services or local economic incubators. You can't simply tell people that environmental management or participatory planning is in their best interest, that it will produce better living conditions in the long run. Rather, the story must proceed on the basis of defining new versions of self-interest; new vehicles through which individuals and households can build platforms that enable them to access worlds and opportunities they have not previously seen as available. Here, policy will require new forms of accreditation and sanction, new ways of recognizing and rewarding efficacy.

Above all, the conditions that promote highly variegated relationships between things, between built and social environments must be more diligently mapped and understood. This will entail more collaboration, if not necessarily formal recognition, with actors that may not be 'on the books' or necessarily doing everything 'by the books'. As indicated earlier, the temptation of much of locally focused urban development work has been to straighten things out, to clarify relationships between people, materials and space in ways that ensure more proficient accountability and security. But there is perhaps a greater need to reinvigorate the plurality of effort that once constituted the path toward durability, this time through a greater plurality of tools and media. These might include multiplying the uses of the existing built environment, creating more extensive feedback loops among individuated initiatives through different forms of publicity, from the use of electronic screens to multimedia transmissions and discussions of specific issues across communities.

Urban development work has prioritized collaboration, and bemoaned the fact that local authorities, civic associations and NGOs have their own programs and turf and usually fail to work together. While the lack of cooperation sometimes leads to the duplication or overconcentration of services, fractured landscapes of service availability or wasteful political battles, it is not necessarily the case that bad results will ensue from letting different institutional actors do their thing in the same place. Part of our work in Jakarta is to try and multiply the relationships among people, things and events within a given context. We encourage many different kinds of activities to take place in the same place, whether it is a school or hospital, market or mosque, shopping center or sports field. The overlaps get messy, and it is important to always work on the transitions — the cleaning-up and leaving the space ready for the next occupations. But the sheer process of negotiating these temporal boundaries has created a wide range of interchanges, accords, deals and learning opportunities that would probably otherwise not take place. In this small way we are trying to reactivate a sense of people being together without everyone necessarily feeling obligated to do the same thing.

Consensus too often becomes its own objective rather than a tool that enables a give and take among actors trying out different approaches. The need to deliver services equitably does not always require homogenous delivery systems; sometimes provoking a wide range of reactions in face of attempted policy interventions can be more productive in incentivizing new forms of consensual collective response than interventions that aim for a general equivalent. As Bahwani reminds us, such an equivalent doesn't create the conditions for people to pay attention to each other and to figure out just how justice can be done to the strivings urban residents continue to make, day in and day out.

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