# What you see is not always what you know

## Struggles against re-containment and the capacities to remake urban life in Jakarta's majority world

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*Abstract:* **Although Jakarta seems to follow in the footsteps of other major Asian cities in its determination to flood the city with mega-developments, there are hesitations and interruptions along this seemingly smooth path. In the majority world, the onus of developing a viable place in the city largely fell to residents themselves, who then proceeded to elaborate intricate social and economic architectures of collaboration whose logics and operations were not easily translatable into the predominant categorizations employed by urban elites and authorities. These elites then attempted to disentangle these relationships, prioritizing the need for visibility, even as their own methods for retaining control were, themselves, usually opaque. This article explores how these ambiguous modalities of visibility are being reworked in contemporary Jakarta.**

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Jakarta is replete with spatial products of varying durability, imagination, memory and efficacy; some seem to endure forever, while others seem to dissipate before or upon completion. It is a built environment littered with projects of all kinds, full of consolidations, fragments, remnants and repetitions. Any discrete built environment and territory may embody clear trajectories of ascendancy, normalization or decline. But what is also striking, using the analytical artefact of Jakarta's administrative districts, is the capacity for residents to interweave a diversity of these temporalities – different trajectories of emergence, decline and endurance. This interweaving of temporal rhythms creates spaces of manoeuvrability and experimentation, concretizing the capacity of residents to make the city.

The interweaving is also incremental. It refers not just to small progressive additions to the built environment, but also includes a wide range of provisional practices which enjoin, differentiate and entangle bodies, materials, histories and actions, readjusting the ways in which residents pay attention to and engage each other, and which enable widespread participation in a process of people adapting to and sometimes provoking the often volatile changes of urban life.

My intention in this paper is to draw on my experiences as a resident and researcher in Jakarta over the past several years to reflect on how this weaving of temporalities takes place within the mixed residential–commercial districts of central Jakarta, where diverse settlement histories, social and class identities, occupations and ways of life continue to endure.

What people call 'Jakarta' has expanded substantially to include several other peripheral cities, making the region one of the world's largest urban agglomerations. A growing periphery thus includes vast suburban residential tracts, industrial zones, middle class new towns and low-cost, mass-produced settlements in a diverse patchwork of uses, land values and future prospects. More space in the urban centre is converted into high-end and high-rise commercial and residential property. But between these trajectories remains a significant swathe of space and population that simultaneously retains the complexion of long-term practices of intersecting lives and economies, even as they continuously transform them.

Most discussions on cities of the South focus on the poor, the emerging middle classes or the specular remaking of the built environment. But between the superblock and the slum, the ascendant middle class and the poor, is a 'majority' of which much less is known, perhaps because there is no essential coherence that characterizes it. Still, salaried workers in public and service sectors, traders, artisans, sojourners, petty bourgeois entrepreneurs, industrial labourers, racketeers, teachers, service workers of various skills and low-level technicians and professionals make up the bulk of the population in cities such as Jakarta, Cairo, Mexico City, São Paulo, Karachi, Ho Chi Minh City, Delhi, Bangkok and Manila, as well as in scores of secondary cities. Various professions, kinds of work, backgrounds, economic capacities and livelihoods are entailed (Bayat, 2000, 2009; Benjamin, 2000; Chatterjee, 2004; Eckstein, 2000; McFarlane, 2011; Telles and Hirata, 2007). As such, the concept of an 'urban majority' seems suited to tracking the modulations of a city that seems to undergo radical reshaping yet persists in its capacity to support the many different small-scale efforts of its different residents.

For the last five years, I have been part of a group of researchers, activists and policy specialists trying to explore *with* various groups of residents how a selective cross section of Jakarta's central city districts grew to be the way they are today. The project is a collaborative effort of the Rujak Center for Urban Studies, a postgraduate programme in urban planning at the University of Tarumanagara, postgraduate researchers from several universities who are pursuing individual research projects, and local village councillors, *Dewan Kelurahan* (*dekels*), in each district. 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 intention is to organize a comprehensive inventory of the built environment.

## The incremental, the everyday and the built environment

Jakarta largely worked. It worked not because it constructed a particular kind of person, inhabitant or citizen, but rather through the way the city's everyday practices created spatially dense and materially heterogeneous environments. These densities not only involved those of bodies. Density also refers to ways of doing things and a wide range of technical devices that put things into a plurality of different relationships – with different scope, degrees of visibility and duration. The sheer diversity of the overall built environment and the activities that took place within it, and in close proximity to each other, precipitated discussions,

compensations, repairs, alliances, trade-offs and short-term pooling of informa-tion, contacts and resources that supplemented official income and earnings. At the same time, such density does not make for one big, happy 'family'. Such dense built environments also affirm a sense of separateness among residents, the unavailability of any overarching reference point of easy commonality. As such, lines of articulation had to be continuously reworked to deal with the fractures.

To keep pace with uncertain changes in the larger city, residents had to have a large measure of autonomy to pursue their own ways of working, building, deal-ing and networking. These practices opened up many different conduits between the district level and larger urban spaces. But the results of these openings were concretized in different styles of accumulation and putting things in place. Frac-tures in the physical and social environment opened up all the time, and so people's efforts focused largely on drawing lines of connection between them, trying to find ways to relate different styles of work and building, finding ways to make them 'talk to each other'.

The everyday, of course, could not be enacted, could not serve as the substance of life-making without at least the appearance of coherence offered by the na-tional, municipal, state and other institutions. They continuously demarcated boundaries, lines of authorities, laid out and managed physical infrastructure, and deployed particular practices of rule. National and municipal projects of moder-nity, which sought to define and embody collective aspirations, as well as to posit a sense of how people should live in cities and their responsibilities to each other, provided a critical framework through which decisions about legitimacy and eli-gibility were made. Regardless of their efficacy and the state's relative ability actually to administer urban life, the state was always a critical point of reference, even when residents were marginalized by or disengaged from it.

The enterprise that emerged from everyday initiatives became not simply a matter of profit and price, but of collective experimentation that was not officially insti-tutionalized for these purposes. Rather, it ensued as a by-product of situating a large number of economic activities between various logics of control. Making it in Jakarta was more a process of experimentation than of following the right pro-cedures.

Collaboration and reciprocity, then, are largely experimental devices whose aim is not usually to cohere an emergent social body or concretize a collective-to-come. These practices do not produce a zero-sum game of clearly identifiable winners or losers; nor do they necessarily work towards enhanced levels of soli-darity aimed at securing clear political objectives. For these forms of collective mobilization usually require representing who residents are, what they are doing and what their responsibilities and contributions will be.

Over time, everyday initiatives – incremental, individual, collaborative, short- or long-term – have exerted a substantial effect on the built environment. In some areas of Jakarta, for example, each street and lane is characterized by a hotch-potch of the old and the new, the single- and multistorey, with all kinds of materials and design styles being put to use. While districts may contain mixtures of resi-dences, single rooms for rent, commercial, storage, recreational spaces, churches and mosques throughout, these mixtures take on variable forms and emphases block by block. Residents are thus embedded in a built environment that facili-tates or constrains particular comings and goings, visibilities and vantage points,

soundscapes, inputs and evacuations of raw materials and waste, along with public exposure and private containment.

As is evident across cities of the world, the heterogeneity of the built environment has been substantially altered. The conversion of land from multiple registers of use and ownership into the exclusive prerogatives of private property has long been considered by liberal economists to obviate the need for the regulation of externalities. Private property, rather than simply an assignation of specific rights, was to be a modality of clarity that need not engage in the messiness of negotiations and transaction costs (Blomley, 2004). Above all, the expansion of urban private property regimes constitutes a mode of making the city visible, a means of structuring the view that residents have when they look upon it and what they then consider possible to do within it (Davies, 2014).

In the massive performances of property development in Jakarta, the domestication of inhabitant behaviour is just as important as the mobilization of property as a means of generating value or as the medium through which heterogeneous activities are parcelled up and organized. This domestication upends practices of endurance, which have largely been a matter of proliferating intersections between affordability and affordances. A probable majority of those who continue to reside in the urban core of Jakarta live with small margins. They are compelled to provide for basic consumables whose costs inevitably rise, and to put money away simply in order to maintain their place as this supplement is invested in education, small enterprise, one-off opportunities, essential repairs or strategic social relations. How to keep the costs down is coupled with opening new windows of opportunity. Even if households become the integral unit of accumulation, management and expenditure, the balancing of plural needs and aspirations requires intricate collaborations with others, and thus residents turn at various times to a full suite of modalities, from place-based affiliations to kinship to occupational clusters or shared school attendance. The gradation of space into clearly delineated functions and ownership can impede the elaboration of such collaborative work.

For example, keeping food expenditures down requires circumventing conventional commercial mediations, acquiring commodities in bulk and arranging appropriate storage spaces. Entrepreneurial experiments require low-cost workshops, low-risk deployments of venture capital raised through aggregating small household surpluses, warding off extractive intrusions from authorities and police, securing sufficient markets, disseminating information and arranging trade-offs with potential suppliers. Built environments need to be repaired; they often need to be infused with additional value without rendering them unaffordable. Particularly important, built environments become the objects of reshaping so that they may mediate the multiple provisioning of various affordances – to act alternately as residences, markets, community centres, workshops, storage spaces, retail outlets and social hubs.

Take, for example, the central city district of Utan Panjang in Jakarta. There are some areas where buildings snake around each other, twist and turn their walls and spaces such that it is difficult to tell whose place is whose and where the entrances and exits might be. There are areas where stately suburban-looking homes have their anteriors jam-packed with makeshift dwellings, where you have to walk sideways to navigate the connecting lanes, while the frontages of these same prop-

erties are profusely decorated with greenery and open air. Contiguous households often contain very different compositions – a conventional family, the employees of a single commercial enterprise, the self-grouping of individuals in similar oc-cupations but working for different firms, the sellers at a nearby district market, as well as residences being used for completely commercial purposes.

Within a single lane, then, a wide range of different actors and resources are put into possible play. Each household continues to live a 'separate' life, but the prox-imity also induces sufficient contrasts that precipitate the need for everyday negotiations in terms of managing the immediate area, and it is these negotiations that open up the possibilities of mutual discovery and tentative collaboration. The diversity of the built environment reflects the multiplicity of land statuses, the consolidation and dividing of plots, the possibilities of supplementing household incomes with additional rents, and the elongation of holdings to include work-shops, small factories, restaurants, stores and storage spaces.

There are areas where people have built above-ground extensions across lanes and adjoining buildings; there are entire blocks of 3–5-storey buildings where it would appear from the front that the insides correspond with a standardized neat row of aligned front doors – but once you enter one of those front doors you zigzag in all kinds of directions, as residents have tunnelled their homes into each other in all kinds of strange designs, but still manage to live and work together. These arrangements of the built environment reflect the accommodations that have been made to cause affordances and affordability to intersect, to intensify the complementarity of residents with different backgrounds and access to opportu-nities and resources. The makeshift quality of these arrangements also reflects the incremental character of such intersections – that various labours have been un-dertaken over time, adapting to each other's relative usefulness and inadequacy.

## Tebet's ambivalence

The atmosphere in Tebet, the district where I live in central Jakarta, is suffused with a sense of ambivalence. This mixture of feeling includes a sense of confi-dence in individual and collective capacities continuously to 'roll with the punches of urban life', a sense of intense uncertainty about the future, and a sense of pride in what has been accomplished, but one accompanied by a pervasive sense of dissatisfaction over the conditions of the living environment.

This ambivalence is manifested in the frenetic conversion of residential into commercial property with few structural alterations, the circumvention of already ambiguous spatial planning regulations or, more inventively, in the consolidation of contiguous plots where the original cottages are torn down and replaced by small town-house developments in which the original owners also reside.

Tebet is a district characterized by intricate complementarities, deal-making, trade-offs, compensations, mixtures of long-term and very provisional collabora-tions, based on both ethnic and sub-neighbourhood solidarities and the inclusion of various others across ethnic, class and residential lines. These practices in part stem from the fact that Tebet is largely the product of a displacement of almost 3,000 households nearly five decades ago in nearby Senayan, when a new gov-ernmental and sporting district was built. Intricate social and economic relationships had to be reiterated and adapted to new conditions in a melange of familiarity and

strangeness. This process of rebuilding, left largely to the displaced inhabitants themselves, engendered the freewheeling attitudes for which the district is known and partially mythologized.

The ambivalence is partly rooted in the sweeping changes taking place across Jakarta's urban region and in regions across South East Asia, changes driven by substantial growth in property markets, cut-throat competition for inward invest-ment, and the accelerated convergence of rural dispossession and expanded urban middle class consumption. But it also reflects the district's success in deploying its locational advantages and social mixtures to elaborate a capacity for the lower strata of residents to remain within the central city. In part this capacity derives from a fairly standardized articulation among a combination of youth culture, fashion and the arts to spawn concentrations of artisanal production, services, entertainment and training, while providing relatively low-cost office space to a vast range of professional and technical services. At the same time, the district maintains a large stock of social housing, traditional markets, small-scale cottage industries and integrated networks of different services specializing in repair and the distribution of foodstuffs and other assorted consumer goods.

The ambivalence that pervades the district today comes in part because suc-cessful local economic innovations and entrepreneurial practices are typically appropriated in many cities by large property developers, speculation and gentrification processes; but also because many residents are uncertain how to assess what it is that they should do, how they should decide where to put their limited yet growing savings, how either to deploy the increases in value of their accessible assets or keep up with escalating costs, and the extent to which their particular assets, whether they be property, skills, businesses, social networks or status, are fungible in the context of new forms of calculation. If, for example, a household runs a thriving recycling operation in a lower middle class area, to what extent is this activity viable if that area is converted into medium-scale apart-ment blocks? Should they be looking elsewhere or get involved in a different form of activity; should they look to try to hold on in Tebet or go somewhere else? The same dilemma might apply to those who run small *warung*s (eating places) around Tebet's main market, which is losing customers to both the large super-markets *and* the growth of informal night markets providing substantial discounts on basic provisions.

The substantial commercial strips of markets and restaurants are losing cus-tomers to the large shopping malls, or are compelled to develop more specialized, niche activities. For example, down the road from my house is a small beauty products store across from a large traditional market. There is a constant traffic jam on the street, not because of the market, which is often empty, but because the beauty products store manages to sell the best stock at some of the cheapest prices in the city. Similarly, round the corner, on a street that houses 62 restaurants with sporadic customers, a small shop over a photocopy store supplies cheap second-hand iPods and iPads to the thousands of housemaids and house guardians in the district who earn barely the equivalent of US$100 a month. While these margin-ally viable businesses may have bought their properties outright years ago and make enough to cover their wage bills and inputs, most are simply waiting to see what happens. At the same time, professional services of all stripes are paying big bucks to rent residential properties for offices, even though most of Tebet is not

zoned for such use. This adds to the already substantial problem of too much traffic, and there are several times a day when I am unable to leave my area to go to other parts of the city except on foot.

While the retailers in the traditional markets may hardly be making a living during the day, the more enterprising simply congregate informally on the streets, where the youth hang out at the cheap coffee shops and eateries at night. The mushrooming of the highly corporate 7–11 franchises across the city is in large part due to the fact that they provide well-lit places for people to hang out at all hours without being compelled to buy anything. The difficulty is that there are few institutional mechanisms to manage this melange of things barely hanging on, of things mushrooming with potential and energy, and of things stabilized for decades. All of this stability and hanging on takes place in intensive proximity to a process of such rapid change that I am surprised to see new hotels, housing complexes and office parks when I have been away from home for a few weeks – projects that seem to have magically appeared overnight.

In the past, local government was either excessively ceremonial in its performance of routinized bureaucratic functions, limited in its authority and capacity to generate revenue, or marginalized by the plethora of extractive, extrajudicial operations managed largely by military and policing personnel. But today, local governments simply do not know how to manage the complex changes that are under way. Even if they successfully fold in the participation of the various representatives of the district's heterogeneity, as they are trying to do, residents and entrepreneurs are not accustomed to forms of consensual decision making. Consensus making, too, needs to be learned.

This is not to say that democratically based local governance cannot be an essential ingredient in the management of urban change, but is simply to point out the difficulties entailed in even conceptualizing who or what would constitute a clear-cut representativeness of Tebet's heterogeneities. Associational life does coagulate in discernible geographic territories, economic sectors, religious affiliations, commercial interests, and so forth, and local government institutions have little choice but to work with these visibilities. But they must also be cognizant of the degree to which these visibilities have not been the dominant force in Tebet's socioeconomic organization. This is particularly important when a range of predatory groups, as well as ethnic and religious associations, make strident claims over space, including assertions of control over the behaviours and thinking of local residents. If Tebet's heterogeneities are to be maintained, if Tebet is to remain as a district capable of absorbing and sustaining various walks of life, then the question is how they are to be judiciously accorded their space in the face of the surging mega-developments seemingly at Tebet's door.

How such space can be maintained is then a key component of this atmosphere of ambivalence. In my neighbourhood, a mixture of well established, middle class homes and small cottages of the upper poor and lower middle classes, there is a prevalent assumption that residents should put their savings into the massive new high-rises being built explicitly with an emerging and/or anxious middle class in mind. For example, several of my neighbours have bought small (50 square metres) two- and three-bedroom apartments in one of the 22 towers at Kali Bata, a 10-minute drive (with no traffic) south of Tebet. For now, the intention is to buy

and rent out, but they worry that even though the value of their investment has doubled in less than three years, the general shoddiness of construction may force them to sell now or preclude the plans of some eventually to move there.

There is a sense that the power of much larger external forces will eventually far outweigh their capacity to reinvent themselves continuously as they were able to do in the past, and that they must act quickly in order to secure an affordable and viable future. There is also an assumption that now that they are middle class – a designation that circulates with greater frequency in popular vernacular, the press and officialdom – a specific range of behaviours, protocols or scenarios is expected of them (Dieleman, 2011).

They must increasingly and exclusively think of the future of their own households, and be more cautious and careful with regard to those with whom they collaborate, talk and share information. Some of these concerns may be warranted by the parasitism of particular neighbours in infringing on someone else's water or power supply, or brash religious proselytizing, or the insistence of some residents simply to take up too much space with their demands. Such instances have taken away some residents' interest in paying attention to the neighbourhood altogether. But it appears that this limiting of vision to the household, of what and who should be given attention, reflects the surfeit of ideological 'instruction' on how households should live.

At the same time, residents in Tebet still try to find and explore different ways to live alongside their neighbours, participate in multiple networks of association, calculate their chances, tactically keep open multiple futures and maintain the information-rich environments necessary to adjust continuously how they survive and accumulate resources and how they contest specific constraints on their manoeuvrability. The challenges of constituting social and political solidarities sufficient to the task of negotiating viable forms of justice become increasingly complex. Until now, the residents I have come to know have at least made gestures towards figuring out an inventive practice of maintaining their creativity while warding off the impediments this creativity has faced. However, increasingly, they are also saying that they do not know what to do and that collaboration is a lot of work for uncertain or very limited gains. There is less time available to negotiate the growing intricacies of individual and collective lives.

The growing power of various instruments and venues of Islamic devotion in Jakarta has been due to their emphasis on the cultivation of a moral persona as the means through which individuals make themselves eligible for a successful life. They offer a seemingly clear road map of what it takes to navigate the complexities of urban change and, again, it is a focus not simply on the individual, but on the existence of the collective as guarantee and witness of such a persona, a means of mobilizing social attention, rather than 'playing the field' through which multiple positions and personas could be explored.

Areas such as Tebet thus hang in a knife-edge balancing act. There is plenty of evidence of both decline and vitality, which make confident predictions difficult as many alternative prospects could be anticipated, at least in the medium term. As the vitality stems largely from what Tebet offers the larger city, the local economy is not very local. Rather, many residents grow anxious over the ways in which articulations with the rest of the city are hammered into a limited number of forms.

## Mega-development and the creation of an abstract common

The scale and rapidity with which changes in Jakarta's built environment are affected and the brazen way they attempt to dominate the horizon crowds out and homogenizes various trajectories of a future. The acceleration of such scalar leaps tends to obscure the different speeds at which residents of different districts operate. It obscures the way in which incremental adjustments are not simply spatial mechanisms but ways of balancing out varying capacities and aspirations that seek to concretize themselves in their own time – in other words, the give and take of consolidating and separating plots, elaborating entrepreneurial activities but also maintaining viable places to live that characterize many districts of Jakarta.

In contrast, the speed of developers is the rush to do things now, the sense of things always perhaps being too late, which feeds the urgency to make big moves. Such speed compels developers to bypass careful assessments about the viability and implications of projects, their impact on traffic flows, water tables, flood plains, power generation and other urban services. Speed sometimes leads to the patching together of unsuitable partners with various expectations and bottom lines – when some invest for quick profits, others for long-lasting income streams, access to collateral, legitimacy for finances of an uncertain legal status, or simply prestige.

Most of the time, developers are simply allowed to do their own thing, regardless of whether it fits into existing spatial development plans, municipal by-laws, zoning requirements or resource management guidelines. This practice prevails in part because it results in living environments where the complexities of the city's material articulations and disarticulations do not have to be adhered to. With their recessed and vertical optics, an overview of the city becomes an aesthetic dimension that obscures the messiness on the ground and underneath it. This ocular politics sustains the illusion that as long as the creative, professional, political and expatriate class is housed and serviced in environments vulnerable to only minimal interference from the larger city, then the larger city's effect on the burgeoning super-modern city is reduced.

The slums, the working class districts and industrial zones will become less important. The new developments will become a site where actions in the larger city do not much matter. As Dina, a communications specialist in the Jakarta Provincial Government, pointed out, 'Foke [the nickname of the recent Jakarta governor] was so determined that Jakarta have its own Orchard Road (a major upmarket commercial area of Singapore) that no matter how many problems it would create that it would magically make everything alright'.[1]

In the recessed environment of the mega-development, there are theoretically no messy neighbourhood management issues to solve. In their imaginary, the experiences of other residents will have little impact on how individuals conduct their affairs. The potentialities inherent in the intense densification of residential experiences are heavily codified through the very acts of withdrawing the development from the local surrounds. Conversely, just how the development is to be articulated to its surrounds is specified through strictly delimited modes of access and by folding in most of what residents need to consume within the confines

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[1]    University of Tarumanagara/Rujak Center for Urban Studies, Urban Lab interview, November 2011, Tanjung Duren, Jakarta.

of the development itself – the usual supermarkets, cinemas, coffee outlets and retail stores. The potentialities of density are also structured through the specification of available spaces, where very little in terms of possible use is left to chance.

While developments are marketed as a way of living in the midst of a chaotic, vibrant city by enfolding the security, tranquillity and ease associated with suburban life, spillages of all kinds seep across the lines that attempt to divide inside from out. While mega-residential complexes may withdraw from entanglements with the larger surrounds, they do so in part to affect a heightened connection with the larger global urban world – a world whose specificity rests largely in the simultaneous proliferation of such residential contexts. A resident of Jakarta seeking professional mobility and status competes not only with fellow Indonesians but with a larger world of urban professionals whose relative capacities are important criteria for the circulation of investment, services and opportunities.

The more such professionals distance themselves from the vagaries of day-to-day negotiations with family, neighbours and associates over different obligations, expected reciprocities and involvement with the problems of others, the more they are able to concentrate on better positioning themselves in a larger world of increasingly abstract work whose participants include larger numbers of people. The contours and conditions of these people are not readily available to be scrutinized directly. But by situating oneself within the enclosed world of a mega-residential complex, it is possible to anticipate what they are and what they are capable of doing, because what they have in common is a highly standardized residential environment.

Professionals in Bombay, Taipei and Jakarta do not actually need to deal with each other directly to acquire a confidence that each fundamentally shares a similar world, and that their actual transactions, if they were ever to take place, would be informed by an equivalent set of aspirations and commitment to particular practices and an ethos of self-presentation. Residents of such complexes then implicitly know that the specific conditions of history, culture and politics that characterize their individual cities – while of course influencing individual characters and possibilities in many ways – are not the overarching determination of who they come to be. In perhaps a new form of imaginary community, without direct evidence of who people are, convictions about their characters are a matter of speculation. Day-to-day transactions in how best to provide for one's household, take advantage of new opportunities for information, material inputs or potentially important social connections – which used to dominate everyday life across Jakarta's districts – give way to speculation. They hedge their future possibilities on how well they are able to conduct themselves in a world where most of the people they need to know, in the long run will never know them directly. Instead, they must act as if they were all in the 'same boat'. But without evidence of who they actually are, they can only speculate about their commonalities, so then the mega-development becomes a relatively 'safe' venue through which such speculations can in a sense be grounded.

If you sit in almost any coffee house or restaurant where upwardly mobile young people gather, people grouped and sitting together will spend more time engaging with various external venues on their Smartphones and iPads than they do actually interacting with each other. This engagement with the 'out there' would seem

to reinforce the sense that knowing how to perform in this larger abstract space is more important than honing specific ways of dealing with the particular place in which one is 'concretely' embedded.

Mega-developments, coupled with their closely interlinked support of social media and the concomitant ethos of self-promotion, transparency and doing the right thing, may thus contribute to a relational deskilling – that is, mitigating the capacity of residents to engage with each other in ways that bring into the relationship different experiences, backgrounds, practices and aspirations. If this is increasingly the case, then the convergence between the long-term work of residents to explore new trajectories of living incrementally for their districts and a broad range of current and possible municipal projects that emphasize intensive local governance, context-specific infrastructural renewal and 'development-from-below' in general will tend to weaken. The conundrum may be that larger, 'right-to-the-city' political mobilizations capable of changing the conditions of deskilling, however necessary, may not always complement the kinds of everyday practices that residents have relied upon to ensure the give-and-take, often rough-and-tumble, complementarities among different ways of doing things that characterized many of Jakarta's districts. Even though residents would often demonstrate a sense of responsibility to each other, in part by taking each other's varied ways of being present seriously, not much effort was made to work out chains of command, clear divisions of labour or clear ways of representing what was taking place. Today's municipal politics valorizes ways of holding people and processes accountable, and the struggles to attain 'rights to the city' often have no direct correspondence to the actual experience of living out those rights.

## Volatility and the everyday

When I first moved to Jakarta and had no place to stay, a colleague at the University of Tarumanagara rented me his wife's 'investment' apartment on the 39th floor of one of the towers of Podomoro City, made up of various complexes, shopping malls and commercial centres. On the surface, my building consisted of many well-behaved, mostly young Indo-Chinese households doing their middle class thing. But on my floor it was evident that homogeneity was the last word you could use to characterize much of anything. Even the internal spaces of the apartments, all built to be the same, had over the 10 years of the building's existence been modified (or transmogrified) in a variety of ways. One simply had to count the number and the styles of the shoes lined up outside each apartment to realize that these apartments, intended for stable, nuclear families, were not, for the most part, occupied by them. Instead, single individuals involved in various sharing arrangements occupied many apartments.

While the international mix of residents was only of some brief initial surprise, the abiding curiosity was in the constant provisional rearrangements of 'households', how in some apartments people of similar occupations (such as flight attendants) may have shared an apartment, but how in others people claimed to be relative strangers who preferred to live this way, risking the uncertainties that come with such provisionality in exchange for the new avenues that might be opened up for them as a result. I had dreaded having to live in what I assumed would be a homogeneous complex, but little did I realize that it would prepare me

to look at the older, more apparently heterogeneous districts of the city in a par-
ticular way. For instead of ensuring a kind of stability and security, the complex,
at least the floor I resided on and came to know, was more a venue for managing
volatility, particularly for younger people on their own, either new to Jakarta or
trying to set out on life trajectories that sought to combine the imaginaries of
newly minted, individual urban existences with some of the skills acquired by
growing up in more street-oriented districts.

Such developments as these seem to promise a sense of freedom – freedom
from the social mores that in Jakarta still largely dictate the subsuming of indi-
vidual behaviour by the pragmatics of household and neighbourhood cohesion.
They promise a degree of anonymity, and thus an escape from scrutiny and judg-
ment, as well as the opportunity to pursue idiosyncratic lifestyles, particularly as
these developments lack a sedimentary history and, because of their scale, expe-
rience a constant turnover of residents. But the plurality of these enactments of
residency also work to the extent to which people do pay attention to each other,
if only as negative references. Residents secure just enough space to perform the
minimal degrees of freedom necessary to be what they want, knowing that within
such large projects, it is nearly impossible either to impose your points of view on
others or to attain any hegemony over the use of space, particularly as apartments
are individually owned and usually rented out for varying periods.

If people of all kinds of backgrounds and aspirations are now thrown into close
proximity, without a real opportunity to engage in any kind of explicit collective
projects, then coexistence becomes its own practical objective, rather than an in-
strument for mobilizing other possibilities.

As the research and my place of residence moved into the older districts of the city,
I increasingly recognized that, here, volatility was actually cultivated as a means of
keeping things fluid and making actors available to participate in different schemes
and collaborations. In these districts, one's anticipation is of scenarios that are not
well understood, that diverge from everyday performances of fellow residents to
which individuals may be accustomed. It is a way of seeing that deflects possible
threats and sustains the willingness of residents to pay attention to each other even
when they do things that would otherwise be alarming. For example, when some
residents in our research were asked what happened when their neighbours did
something out of the ordinary or contrary to what was expected, this did not usually
cause excessive alarm. As Wita, a 37-year-old local government clerk indicated,
'Sometimes we are so surprised that we think what is going on is taking place
somewhere completely away from where we are, at a great distance'. Or Ahmadi, a
40-year-old bus driver stated: 'When I see these neighbours usually so conservative
in their dealings bring all kinds of strangers into their house for God only knows
what, I think that a new family has suddenly moved in, and probably won't be staying
long, so it piques my curiosity'.[2] In other words, this is a capacity to witness events
in different ways – seeing something potentially troubling as literally occurring
somewhere else, or thinking that the people doing it are not the people you live with
on a day-to-day basis. Here, anticipation is not so much a game of ruses as a means
of staying close to events and actions that might otherwise be distancing.

[2]    University of Tarumanagar/Rujak Center for Urban Studies, Urban Lab interview, January 2012,
      Kebong Kosong, Jakarta.

This modality of witnessing is important because the ways in which residents conceive of the 'right way to do things' are not always effective for the aspirations they may have. This does not mean that people actively change their personal values; rather, they conclude that they may have to find ways to deal with others different from themselves as part of their project to improve their own conditions. Others anticipate this possibility, actively bet on it, particularly by pointing out to those who have businesses or other economic responsibilities that they have skills, connections or information that could help them out.

Conversations among people working in Jakarta's markets – carters who deliver boxes of goods, mobile hawkers selling wares across various commercial landscapes, journeymen looking for part-time work in some new workshop, factory workers talking to their supervisors about various aspects of work on the factory floor, minivan drivers ferrying workers back home from an office, low-level local officials collecting fees from market stalls – are replete with such appeals for inclusion. Similar to people in many other cities across the world, those who make these appeals try to steer routine transactions into an opportunity to be included in some yet to be clearly defined project (Fawaz, 2008; Guyer *et al*, 2002; Lindell, 2010; Peters, 2009; Wu *et al*, 2010).

As a result, much of Jakarta's built environment is very difficult to read. It is often unclear in which direction it is heading. In order for the very different material textures, designs and resource inputs to work, there must be multiple ways in which residents can make claims on each other, on space, on land and on what is built. Cadastral systems attempt to rationalize these claims by trying to assign clear ownership and value and, in doing so, standardize a sense of what works, of what is viable. But any definitive determination is difficult to make when plots are being continuously agglomerated and divided, when commercial and residential uses of space are continuously being interchanged and mixed, where rights of access and use are renegotiated outside of the strict formulas of property ownership.

In Jakarta, as in many Asian cities, residents increasingly value mobility, circulation, provisional engagements and the dispersal of attachments, aspirations and time across more varied dimensions of urban life. This has a significant effect on the shape and nature of collective life. Still, despite growing dissatisfaction and the concomitant uncertainties in everyday life, much of Jakarta still exudes the desires of residents to be in and to engage creatively with the city. Many of the manifestations of this desire are restless and provisional. They concern less the aspiration to put down roots or to institutionalize a particular kind of presence in the city and more a need to find out as much as possible about what is taking place in the city, how to get an angle on it, how not to get pinned down and to find the right kind of niche. While segregations may expand, there are also multiple boundary crossings and a new determination among residents from different walks of life to find ways of intersecting.

As cities everywhere experience a declining industrial base, an enlarged labour market of both educated and low-skilled workers who are unemployed or underemployed, and underproduction in relation to the available material base, where work will come from is a critical question, especially for a growing youthful population. This is a population almost entirely born and raised within Jakarta, with few connections and references anywhere else. Over the past decade there has

been an explosion in the provision of short-term accommodation geared largely for youth. Not only does such provisioning supply a concrete platform for a more individuated trajectory of experimenting with the city, and fostering more provisional and plural engagements with specific places, networks and employment, but it also buttresses the economic capacity of districts to prolong their hold over their long-honed ways of life and implicit collaboration. Whereas the inflation of land values made residents vulnerable to pressures to move to the periphery of the city, the conversion of any available space to provide accommodation for others not only provides some leverage against external speculation, but also implicitly connects these districts to a wider range of inputs through the occupations and pastimes pursued by new residents whom the district need not worry about incorporating over the long term.

If work was once generated through the very spatial enrichments of urban inhabitation – that is, the possibilities for residents living in heterogeneous environments of layering different associations among what was available to them, of interconnecting different activities, needs, aspirations and spaces – as these possibilities through residency decline, more intentional mobilizations of effort will have to be generated. Mobilization of available assets and skills – in training, care, repair and service provision – will be required. Rehabilitation and retrofitting of spatial assets, local environmental and community management, plus various forms of service provision, are areas to be developed. These areas require new forms of knowledge, sociality and individual capacity in order to facilitate them. They require an ability to circulate throughout different facets of city life and, indeed, such circulation is increasingly pursued by youth. Local economies emphasizing the provision of affordable short-term residency provide a concrete platform for it.

So what districts such as Tebet and many others in Jakarta are doing is not so much defending themselves against the processes of transformation represented by mega-developments, but rather interweaving them into other, more familiar projects of making economies and ways of living, as a kind of 'popular response' – to take the matters of cultivating a more mobile, diffuse and individuated way of being in the city into their own hands, and to make it supportive rather than destructive of long-honed relational skills.

## The ambiguities of mega-developments as lived-in spaces

Although replete with corruption, cheap construction and broken promises of affordability, the several-year-old Kalibata City complex in central Jakarta is one site where young working class residents are trying to mediate between acting on individualized aspirations and reproducing legacies of relational skills. Part replication of the now standardized middle to upper middle class all-in-one apartment blocks combining residence, shopping mall, leisure zones, schools and social services, and part low-cost, densely packed towers of small flats, social class divisions are built into the very spacing and composition of the dwellings. Class divisions are also reinforced by the availability of parking spaces and other amenities. One section of the complex was meant to subsidize the other.

Roughly 30,000 people live in the complex and, unlike in many other similar developments, there has been some effort to landscape ground levels with scores

of small shops, restaurants, coffee houses and public spaces. As residents are thrown together in an environment with limited history and situated in a context where relations of authority and civility can no longer rely on the mores and practices of long-honed, thickly enmeshed residential/commercial districts, those who live in Kalibata are still trying to work out ways of working with and around each other. Lower-income residents (in the 'lower' zone) find ways to take advantage of their proximity to those middle class residents (in the 'upper' zone).

Here, residents enact various performances, not so much to anchor themselves in specific positions and reputations; rather, they use the nascent character of the complex as a platform for opportunist ventures across the surrounds. Young men pay particular attention to various pieces of equipment carried by young women living in the 'upper zone' – phone chargers, pens, mobile phones equipped with particular applications, books or laptops – as a means to initiate conversation, requesting the temporary use of such items for purported exigencies. Young women pay particular attention to gatekeepers, such as security guards, managers or maintenance personnel, offering cigarettes and conversation as a means of cultivating the ability to cross boundaries, particularly to gain access to the amenities or services of the 'upper zones'. There is particular attention paid to those who have some kind of power, and, in the deployment of various games of facilitating proximity to opportunities, the nature of power itself changes. The powerful may continue to be those who have money, good jobs and the latest consumer goods. But they also include those who may not have direct access to those items but know how to put others, whose identities and backgrounds may make them more eligible to affiliate with such resources, in touch with the people who control them, through duplicity, stealth or tact.

The small shops and cafés attract and curate niche groups and audiences at different times of the day – for example, older men living with younger women, older women living with younger men, women in polygamous marriages who want to have 'legitimate' sex and children but who do not particularly want the burden of living with a full-time husband, and other couplings of various genders and sexual preferences. The commercial and public spaces are aligned in such a way as to separate out lifestyles and sexual performances that might clash, but to keep them in a mutual view sufficient to satisfy curiosities, permit tentative forays across thresholds, or at least temper the inclination of any one constellation of actors to impose their codes of propriety on the others.

For many residents of Kalibata there is a plurality of conditions left behind. Some entail complicated familial dramas among households who can at least afford to displace them through taking up residency across the varied landscape of high-rises. Some entail complicated histories of designation, in which one family member has been implicitly selected to venture forth into the 'new world' of a comprehensive professional lifestyle while the rest of the family remains ensconced in the messiness of self-produced livelihoods and their incessant dance with foreclosure. Some entail escapes from troubles of various kinds in other parts of the country or the world. Others opportunistically pursue highly paid expatriate jobs or the exploitation of various loopholes or niche markets. But equally important in significance, if not necessary volume, are the exits produced by the *workings* of Jakarta's historic and working class central city districts themselves.

## In-between temporalities

Residents of the mega-complexes that grew up in Jakarta's working class districts identify various affective qualities associated with their former life. Some feel an intense sense of dejection about where they came from; that somehow all of the effort that residents expended to make a viable life amounted only to a capability to reproduce the game continuously – that is, to maintain the flexibility and resilience required to roll with the punches, grab opportunities as they arise or make opportunities out of almost nothing. But instead of this resilience accruing in substantial accomplishments over the long term, it only kept people going around in circles. Aisya, a 25-year-old commercial designer lamented,

> 'People from my community were really smart and they accomplished many things from when I was a child, but they don't have the confidence that they have accomplished something. They are always worried that everything is going to fall apart, and instead of using what they have gained to build more solid communities, they still are hunting for the small opportunities here and there.'[3]

Even the gradual improvement of homes, living conditions and consumption was sometimes dismissed for being precisely what is was – incremental. It was as if the incremental were a sign of concession or defeat that promised no prospects of significant transformation. It was as if transformation would only come through sweeping acts and, as such, even if most of these residents did not view their current residence as the culmination of any dream – far from it – they at least considered it worthy of the designation 'transformation'.

Still others viewed these districts as repositories of wisdom before its time. They appreciated being immersed in this kind of urban life, but felt that its real capabilities had yet to be discovered; that the time was not yet right for this experience to reach fruition. They did not dismiss its limited accomplishments or the ambiguities entailed in its moral practices. Rather, Jakarta was not yet ready to be a city of such reciprocities and intersecting initiatives. First, it had to pass through other phases; it had to develop greater overall economic capacity and political autonomy. It had to have more effective and judicious structures of governing and planning in place before it could incorporate these productions from below. As such, they were simply participating in the 'trajectory of the moment': they pursued the kinds of careers and residential situations that would expedite the development of such larger political and economic capacities as would make them eligible to be taken seriously as the makers of the potentialities piloted by earlier generations.

Across these varying viewpoints of past life in the historical pluri-districts of central Jakarta, many different temporalities are at work. In alternating viewpoints, these districts are anachronisms, the essential kernel of now generalized neo-liberal sentiment, or a future in waiting. These districts are then filled with apprehension and, as such, vulnerable to the expansion of mega-complexes across the city. In part, the vulnerability of the city as a whole is relocated away from the hegemony

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3   University of Tarumanagar/Rujak Center for Urban Studies, Urban Lab interview, June 2012, Citywalk, Jakarta.

of the major property developers to characteristics that are fundamentally those of the interior life of these districts. In the end, it may not matter whether they succeed or fail, whether they work or not. It may not matter whether they create thousands of new jobs and residential opportunities for those with limited means, or simply warehouse the majority of residents in substandard conditions.

Working class and lower middle class districts may count for little, not because they produce something of little consequence, but rather because the stakes are so high in whatever it is they do. The stakes are high because there are no clear maps or trajectories about how to respond to a situation in which urbanization increasingly becomes a force in itself, autonomous from industrialization and production, and in which collectively enacted auto-provisioning systems are transformed from living to abstract value, thus rendering populations expendable or valuable only as a locus of managerial experimentation (Hardt and Negri, 2009).

If they try to continue finding ways to detach themselves from the predominant games of middle class attainment, through holding on to seemingly depleted residential and commercial areas, or by trying to add a limited supplementary value to the assets they control without inflating property values beyond what they can afford, this now frequently means increased dependence on opaque and often highly manipulative clientelistic relationships. If they attempt to join the game of investing more in middle class consumption, economic and social practices become increasingly individualistic, and residents lose the relational skills that enabled them to participate in a variety of incremental collaborations with others. Here, the exigencies for accountable and transparent governance, performance management, interoperable urban indicators and the rationalization of land and economic markets through clear frameworks of ownership and transaction practices, largely supported by Jakarta's middle class, would seem to undermine the ambiguous status and thus heterogeneous deployment of urban resources – such as land, public facilities and space – which have been key components in the economies of the urban majority.

For the poor, the city offers a multiplicity of interconnected harm, from environmental hazard, criminal and domestic violence and punitive violence by bureaucracies and police. For these districts, the fundamental ambivalence of their economic and social practices is itself the source of endless harm, even if their historical position in the city has itself been an ambivalent one. In other words, it is difficult to wade through the complexity of the social, psychological and economic operations of working and lower middle class districts with a clear lens or with clear judgments.

Yet they are also important because they operate against the grain of common assumptions about the comprehensive neo-liberalism of Asian cities as well as too easy dismissals that collective work and collaboration no longer matter. Their incremental evolution, both problematic and fruitful, always entailed multiplying spaces of manoeuvre, so that in no way could they be reduced to the local idiosyncratic or as bastions of parochialism. While they may not embody a clear vision of what a city should be, or how it could work unequivocally, in a world where transparency, accountability and efficiency are considered by some to be important values, as is the need to make determinant judgments about things, the ambiguous capacities of the urban majority remain a critical resource for the re-imagination and remaking of urban life.

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