

DETACHMENT DOWN SOUTH

On salvage operations and city-making

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The urban Global South seems to presently exist in a kind of parallax view. On the one hand, it acts as vernacular shorthand to refer to long-term parochialism in the formation of urban theory. Thus, it is a means to make the case for the need to consider a broader multiplicity of places, histories and processes. In this way, the urban South assumes an enhanced view, whose consideration becomes the key resource for the replenishment of existent, depreciated urban theories or the basis for new theorizing (Watson 2009; Edensor and Jayne 2011; Bunnell and Maringanti 2010; Parnell and Oldfield 2014; Connell 2013; Miraftab and Kudva 2015).

On the other hand, the Global South once acted as a trope for a divergent urbanism, an ontologically distinct amalgam of urban zones constituted by shared subjections to colonialism and underdevelopment. Additionally, it pointed to a process of city-making in the interfaces among culturally dystonic impositions of planning, infrastructure, policy and local vernacular practices. These functions now seem to rapidly fade from view or perhaps never should have been envisioned in the first place (Santos 2001; Therborn 2003; Roy 2009; Williams et al. 2009; McCann and Ward 2011; Varley 2013; Wilson and Swyngedoux 2014).

Empirical explorations of an urban South may continue to have some purchase in accounts of geopolitical trajectories, the pragmatics of international political organizing, or in analyses of economic inequality and precarity (Escobar 2009; Reihbein 2010; Mignolo 2011; Garavini 2012; Prashad 2013; Jaglin 2014; Roy 2014; Derickson 2014). But the salience of these explorations is largely grounded in the ways in which a multiplicity of interchanges, economic flows, governance regimes, national histories and regional alliances actively shape and reproduce disparities across urban

areas (Mignolo 2000; Brenner and Schmid 2015; Vasudevan 2015; Wylie 2015). How salient territories get made may have little to do with being enfolded in any semblance of a univocal 'South' or even in an extensively textured one.

What I want to do in this discussion is to think about the terms through which notions of detachment might be useful as a way of continuing to refer to a South. The point is to consider what kinds of distinctive city-making processes formerly embodied in a conceptual detachment of South from North can still be culled as resources for a new urban political imagination. How might these processes be strategically detached from the more hegemonic processes of global neoliberal organization? I initially take a quick look at the remnants of that urban South in contemporary discourse, consider its various conceptual conundrums, and explore the comparative possibilities opened up by Jennifer Robinson's (2013, 2015) groundbreaking work. I follow this by outlining the tactical underpinnings of the use of 'detachment' as a device, pointing out some of the concerns entailed in contemporary emphases on relationality.

I then move on to focus on particular mechanisms of detachment, primarily in Jakarta. These include: the way young people turn themselves into logistical instruments; the massive profusion of affordable housing projects; and, the remaking of markets as 'irregular' vectors of the political. I do this to think about urban processes which are no longer (if ever they were) evidence or embodiments of an urban South but which are neither strictly exemplars of neoliberal or planetary urbanization. What look to be practices and processes that mirror the neoliberal fragmentation of social collaboration and promote entrepreneurial selves might also instigate new forms of collective life. These forms may not be easily subsumable to abstracted forms of agency and time of capital accumulation. In other words, I want to relocate the urban South as a kind of *elsewhere* at the interior of a seemingly hegemonic trajectory that converts urban space in a uniform everywhere.

I recognize that any manoeuvre emphasizing detachment is fraught with all kinds of dangers, particularly in a time where solidarities are disentangled, citizens are disenfranchised, and the entrepreneurial selves are condemned to sleeplessness. Yet the detachments from social anchorage and public deliberation effected through neoliberalism feed off a complicity with a range of other detachments undertaken to both update the capacities of collective life and to explore new forms of sympathetic collaborations. These are collaborations not tied down to reified forms of labour and social reproduction (Lazaratto 2014; Read 2015). So how might we stay with these manoeuvres of detachment and take advantage of the particular ways of seeing that detachment affords as a component in the re-composition of a common world (Stengers 2010).

On detachment: some conceptual manoeuvres

A variety of thinking and sentiments about urban politics have been predicated on steering unmapped intersections of disparate urban forces into new directions. Here, the emphasis was to bring the formal and informal, legal and illegal, local and macro-economies, the grassroots and the state, institutionalized pedagogy and street wisdom into some kind of generative crossroads. Think about enhancing the mobility of justice and good urban practice by putting places in greater relation with each other (Healy 2007; Jacobs 2012; McKirk 2012; Bunnell 2015). This impulse toward policy mobility and integration is sometimes viewed as a conceptual exigency in light of the contemporary emphasis on planetary urbanization. Planetary is understood here not so much in Lefebvre's sense, but in Nancy's (2007) – a planetary that drifts along in its own incessant differentiation rather than as a globe or a coherent congealment. Nancy draws us toward the co-appearance of all that relates so that 'living with' is at once both more and less than 'relation' or 'bond'. This is especially the case if such relation or bond presupposes the preexistence of the terms upon which it relies. In Nancy's thought, the 'with' is the exact contemporary of its terms. But Nancy's sense can be easily inverted – where the crossroads of co-appearance become a form of mutual capture, rather than captivation.

For example, the augmentation of urban economy increasingly centres on the remapping of the city and the generation of new value based on the proliferation of intangible infrastructures. But these infrastructures are rolled out in the name of the exigency of transparency and legibility. A form of time is introduced that closely couples the mundaneness of the everyday with the anticipation and experience of rupture and crisis (Barry 2013; Bear 2014).

Databases are agglomerated, information on consumptions practices are correlated with demographic indices, and inhabitants are 'sliced and diced' according to affective inclinations, behavioural regularities and non-standard deviations. Inhabitants are turned into tendencies and potentialities that all have some calculable relational value. These channels of data collection become the locus for the intersection of the ways in which people are affiliated to particular networks, places and circuits of movement, to different forms of regulating the city (Crandall 2010; Bratton 2014; Kitchen 2014).

The design of buildings, projects, budgets, capital investment plans, strategic visions and inter-calibrated infrastructures of material flow – water, power, waste, information and transport – are generated through constantly updated recalibrations of the relationships among increased volumes and types of data. Subsequently, a space of deep and extensive relationships

is being created that impact upon the ‘real city’, but which is something else ‘besides’ it, even as it is a ‘part’ of it. Here, the interfaces are uncertain, even as the pragmatics of these calculations emphasize the sense of stability and order brought to bear on the ‘real city’ (Galloway 2012).

In contrast to the emphasis on deep relationalities, Laruelle (2011) proposes detachment. Here, detachment is not a countervailing, but a complementary move in grasping how reality remains something removed from any manoeuvre that would associate with specific empirical evidence, chains of association or overarching infrastructure. It doesn’t mean that such chains or associations are not inevitable. Rather, it allows us to think about how things like infrastructural arrangements, which are usually seen as combining, reticulating, representing and enjoining, can be viewed also as a process of detaching. Instead of seeing detachment as simply exclusion or segregation, we might also see it as grounds for viewing urban spaces in new ways. We might see it as keeping things out of analytical connections, and to think of the potentials of the supposedly useless, marginal or anachronistic in different ways, subtracted from their usual associations.

No matter how the details of city experience and its components might be explained, Laruelle (2011) would insist that these explanations remain insufficient to what these details might be and how they might act. It doesn’t mean that anything we might identify as an entity or actor has a capacity or being on its own separate from other things. It doesn’t mean that it is impermeable to being affected by and connected to all kinds of arrangements and structuring. Rather, to detach experiences, practices and persons from the explanatory frameworks in which they are usually accounted for potentially allows for a re-description of the details, a way of seeing in them the germination of other vectors of urban political change. I will talk about this more below in terms of the details through which new affordable housing projects are actually occupied.

The strange affordances of affordable housing

Much has been written about the ways in which standardization in the complex of built environments operates as a means of suturing discrete and discrepant places as nodes within larger infrastructures of commodity, financial and informational flows (Urban 2012; Kennett et al. 2013). Here, the creation of spatial products looking as if they could be anywhere is a particular materialization of the everywhere. It is a means of capital penetration and expansion. In this sense, such spatial products can be seen as impositions, ways in which violence has been scorched into the urban landscape – various expulsions and erasures – which ‘undo’ specific interweaving of vernacular, buildings, corridors, code, sentience, sacrifice, impulse,

enchantment and risk. This is certainly evident in the tremendous volume of purportedly affordable housing being built across many parts of Asia and Africa. In Jakarta, nearly half a million such units are underway.

What is of particular interest here is to consider how the imaginaries and procedures of implementation entailed in the realization of the housing projects go beyond their homogenizing impacts, standardized forms and sometimes seeming obliviousness to the specificities of the local dynamics in which they are situated. It is also important to consider how they seem to actually invite, even instigate, a more singular set of dispositions. These may replicate the by now expected detachments from the textures of long-standing neighbourhoods. But projects of this kind also detach themselves from the anticipated outcomes that such standardization would seem to imply. In talking to a wide range of project managers, real estate and labour brokers, fixers who mediate between various government authorities and construction companies, there is an anticipation of something happening as a result of the project that cannot be predicted. The projects implicitly seek out different synergies with the local surroundings in ways that will, as one broker, Hari, puts it, ‘energize all kinds of possibilities’: ‘We want to act fast, get this thing [building] up as fast as possible, get people in living here, bring new blood to the area so that this part of the city can really discover what it is made of.’

In conversations with actors involved in these projects, there is a sense of the project as some kind of magical instrument that will be eventually changed by the ‘magic it works’. These projects are purveyors of speculation, emplacing capital flows and instruments that disentangle long-honed practices of inhabitation and reassemble residents into new forms of obligation and control. Yet, these projects *also* detach themselves from those functions, seeking to create spaces that could not only be *anywhere*, but also to piece together a very specific, even idiosyncratic *somewhere*, constituted through particular combinations of the project with its surroundings.

While these housing projects may indeed act like impositions, the process of putting them together does take into consideration the contingent nature of their very possibility, as well as the shifting terrain of the locations, materials, politics, regulatory systems and effort needed to actualize them. Nearly 500,000 units of purportedly affordable housing will come online in Jakarta by the end of this decade. These are mostly being inserted into green fields within and outside the urban core. They are almost all prefabricated off-site and assembled in large clusters usually ranging from eleven- to twenty forty-storey tower blocks.

Many are also being situated in the midst of ‘popular neighbourhoods’ that have evolved over the past four to five decades. These have contained highly textured local economies based on heterogeneous ways of life,

ethnic and class composition, and long-honed complementarities among residency, commercial activities, and a wide range of social practices. This heterogeneity is enumerated through various extractions exerted by an array of officials and brokers who constitute not only a particular modality of ‘governance’ based on choreographing different commercial activities and residential configurations, but also sculpting specific kinds of subjectivities capable of navigating across seemingly disparate institutional landscapes and moral economies.

Value is calculated in terms of a wide range of provisional sutures, where spaces created to accommodate the simultaneity of divergent ways of doing things, securing livelihood and consolidating basins of particular collective identities, ‘warrant’ various taxations. The quantity of what is extracted and the procedures for doing so must constantly be recalibrated in terms of their debilitating impact on what is to be facilitated or protected.

The relationships of popular neighbourhoods to larger urban regions have grown more volatile and uncertain. It becomes difficult for local ‘regulatory agents’ to attune the calculations of extraction to the actual capacities of the economic activities through which rent is extracted. As authority claims spread and intensify, along with competition and crowdedness within particular economic sectors, extractions can often become impediments to action and collaboration, ushering in a need for more precise calculations as to the value of everyday labour, available assets and expected profitability. This in turn becomes a motivation for some to acquire apartments in these new projects.

The majority of units on offer are 32-square-metre one-bedroom apartments, with smaller 16 square-metre studios and, at their largest, 46-square-metre two-bedroom apartments. The bulk of financing is generated from Indonesian developers, although increasingly other major Asian companies are entering this market. Typically, almost all of the units are sold prior to construction, with project developers offering their own financial schemes, as very few bank mortgages are involved. These schemes usually require a 30 percent down payment, with the balance paid in consecutive monthly installments ranging from 10 to 28 months.

Mobilizing finance for the acquisition of units crosses a wide range of practices and strategies. Extensive lateral networks of borrowing are configured across family networks and other associational ties. Businesses and institutions buy units for their staff or with the intent to rent. Sometimes assets are traded, as when older residential properties are rented out unofficially for commercial purposes and where the owners then take one to two years of rent upfront in order to purchase clusters of contiguous units on a given floor in a new project. These units are often, in turn, rented out to extended families that cluster together in a series of

individual apartments. These projects can also become the destination of various financial diversions, where money is basically laundered in the acquisition of an asset that can be used to access formal lending institutions. They are also the vehicles through which collective accumulation – earnings that are the result of collaborative efforts, such as non-formal markets, integrated production assemblages, savings groups and improvised pension schemes, which do not belong to specific individuals – is invested.

There is a disjuncture between the imaginaries at work to render these projects affordable and profitable and the modalities of inhabitation in which the projects are actually used. Whereas the projects would appear to cultivate a highly individuated, tightly nucleated subject of consumption, the means through which finance is mobilized and units occupied produce different scenarios. This does not mean that single individuals or small families do not make up a significant proportion of the residents of these projects. Rather, what is striking is the extent to which units are assembled and then availed both to extended families, co-workers, members of specific associations, and networks of friends *and* more provisional, loosely configured social groupings, where individuals may or may not have prior relationships to each other, but who come to operate as collectivities in how they reside in these projects, as they conjointly administer floors, redesign the apportionment of space, or provide essential inputs.

New modalities of sociality come into being via these projects in ways that elaborate complex forms of brokerage that reapportion units and piece together various subcontracting agreements. This is particularly evident in the majority of projects where those who buy the units are not the same people as those that come to occupy them. In one of the older projects completed five years ago at Kali Bata, these subcontracting arrangements have proved so intricate that the owners have formed an association to try and get back control of their properties through the courts – a process that might take years.

In the interim, the buildings have come to house an intensely heterogeneous mix of people organized into various associations, lifestyles, national groups and crosscutting social arrangements. So, despite how the structures of these projects would appear to shape a new kind of urban resident in Jakarta, an incipient evanescent sociality ensues instead. Particularly important to consider is that developers, brokers and managers purport to know that this is indeed the actual outcome, even if all of their efforts would seem to anticipate a very different scenario.

The epistemology of the vertical towers project seems to be all about quantification – the price per square metre, the number of inhabitants

that can conceivably occupy a particular volume, the profitability derived through different streams of payment plans. Seemingly devoid of social considerations, the vertical project does allow, however, an account, a quantification of effort that gets harder to assess in the surrounding popular neighbourhoods in terms of what the efforts of residents actually achieve. While it is possible to trace intricate assemblages of effort and material and map out complex relational webs, what does all of this popular labour actually do? How can it assume a representation that enables individual and collective deliberation?

At the same time, this epistemology of quantification does not dissipate negotiations over the composition of residency. Rather, it can actually intensify them, given that the formats of space that are quantified and attributed particular financial and symbolic values are not readily viable in terms of actual life within them. To actually inhabit the units in the tower in a way that makes them financially and socially viable then requires an intensification of niche socialities and localized markets of exchange that are constantly being experimented with, provisionally adopted and discarded, rather than specific styles of living *with* and *together* being the components of an oscillating yet somehow integral fabric as they are in the surrounding popular neighbourhoods.

The move toward ordinariness in the relationships between the vertical project and the horizontal neighbourhood assumes a particular form of mutual consideration. It is as if the popular looks upon the vertical and concludes that these new projects are the embodiment of all of their own attainments. But at the same time, the popular also assumes the position of being the object of the gaze of the vertical (as if the mirror borrows my eyes in order to look at itself) and as such becomes aware of concrete instances of its own incompleteness. Thus it points to specific possible trajectories for updating its own look and ways of doing things.

For the vertical may need to copy the popular in order to sustain itself, but the actual instantiation of this process of mimesis generates unanticipated results. They are constantly reworked, constituting a different lens through which the popular can consider its own operations. At the same time, precise quantification may be displaced. But the indeterminacy of value may only be apprehended in a situation where surfaces become available precisely to be quantified. This takes place within a machine of inscription that divides the vertical project into concrete spatial, prefabricated units, which make subdivisions and agglomerations impossible as physical and fiscal entities. This is in contrast to the built environment of the popular where physical structures are constantly being changed around, with different discernible values being added on or subtracted.

Detachment and popular markets

The augmentation of urban economy increasingly centres on remapping the city and generating new value based on the proliferation of intangible infrastructures, but in the name of the exigency of transparency and legibility. From anti-corruption campaigns, to enhanced security provisioning, rationalization of urban services, and maximizing opportunities to access various resources, residents of cities, particularly the middle class, demand increased transparency and accountability (Zeiderman et al. 2015),

Metropolitan governments invest in new apparatuses of urban computation that intersect the enrollment of publics in a distributed system of data collection with the operations of control rooms that aggregate different data streams and administrative departments. As Luque-Ayala and Marvin (2016) point out,

[the] horizontal extension of network and nodal logics across urban infrastructures represents a particular form of “operational” re-bundling aimed at guaranteeing flow maintenance under many different conditions. The extension of such control room logic to the totality of the city is a first step in the un-black boxing of infrastructures. Here a (metropolitan) control room, as an ongoing practical accomplishment, reveals functions and operations in the everyday.

(203–4)

This process of extracting data through the quotidian behaviours of people and infrastructure introduces a form of time that closely couples the mundaneness of the everyday with the anticipation and experience of crisis, which I mentioned earlier.

Apparatuses of urban computation aim to intercept crises before they happen, in part through curating sanctioned corridors of legitimate circulation and exchange. In doing so, they constrain the manoeuvrability of the ‘unaccounted for’ – the unemployed, the self-employed, the impoverished and other marginalities.

But as Ravi Sundaram (2015) points out, instead of adhering to particular regimes of moral conduct and verification, many urban inhabitants are producing their own scenarios, evidence and realities. They do this through the widespread dissemination of images, texts and tweets aggregated in various forms and targeted for specific purposes and audiences. Through new geographies and velocities of circulation, shifting circuitries of cross-purposes, collision and complicity, oscillating vectors of the political are produced that are not readily subject to hegemonic regimes of visibility.

Cubitt (2014) demonstrates how discarded phones and other equipment are customized giving rise to local craft-based industries, providing affordable access to services, and increasing the lifespan of otherwise jettisoned equipment. Reference was made earlier to ways in which the circulations of e-rubbish become a locus through which assemblages of skill and entrepreneurship are constituted that combine different degrees of visibility and formalization to extract and reformulate various materials from waste in different forms and through different production methods. These networks of operations, some small firms, others floating artisanal activities, engender multiple backward and forward linkages with varying intensities of association with larger commodity chains (Lepawsky 2015). This ‘sector’ is not strictly formal or informal; it is not the purview of a particular social class or geography. It combines forms of wealth, locations, political networks and cultural capacities. In this way, it is a particular vector of the political that falls aside the dominant forms of how and what we see.

The efficacy of extensive circuits of transporting people, goods, and information under the radar across regions is made possible through the elaboration of ‘multiple sovereignties’. Formally ‘illicit’ forms of creating wealth, shaping and regulating an ‘economic body’ and establishing the parameters of truth and reality rest in continuously reworked, mobile networks that cut across cities and urban spaces (Anwar 2015). For example, as Liang (2014) points out,

just as the piracy of the past disturbed the equilibrium composed of slavery, indentured labour, the expropriation of the commons, the factory system and penal servitude, the electronic piracy of the present is destined to wreck the culture industry, either by making the economic and social costs of policing content prohibitive or by ushering in a diversity of new protocols for the use, distribution and reproduction of cultural and intellectual content that will make the whole enterprise of making vast sums of money out of the nothing of data and culture a difficult business.

(76–7)

It is important to keep in mind, however, that such ‘popular economies’ struggle with a double existence. As Gago (2015) points out, governments sometimes seek to link their benefit policies with popular economies in order to boost consumption or revitalize sagging traditional industries. Conditionalities attached to subsidies and regulations can fold popular markets into official finance-debt systems. This leads to ‘the establishment of communication pathways between global logistics – that a territory’s insertion into the global market depends on – and a plurality of ad hoc

infrastructure. This process translates and multiplies territories' dynamics of valorization, again on diverse scales' (23). And this means, in turn, that

Consumption as mediation and the financial as the figure of command put all the world to work without replacing the homogenous figure of labor. This diffusion of the imperative to self-entrepreneurship is exploited, promoting the invention of new forms of value production, beyond the confines of waged labor and the parameters of its legality. The extractive form is exterior in this schema because it prescribes the valorization but not the mode (as occurs with industrial control). From there comes its 'amplitude'.

(Gago 2015, 24)

'Irregular' vectors of the political are elaborated within the overall augmentation of urban space, but also continue, as Gago herself concedes, as something detached from it. While the extensions of these transactions under the radar reiterate the apparatus of 'economy' as a practice detached from any substantive core of power, and thus applicable in forging various relationships with the process of governing, there is another provisional detachment that can lead to multiple and parallel operations not easily annexed to corporate parasitism (Mörtenböck 2015).

We can see this interior detachment in the growth of one of Jakarta's popular markets at Kali Baru (Figures 2.1 and 2.2). For, 'popular' markets – largely constructed and managed by the participants – have long provided contexts for witnessing how economic and social realities get 'done'. In other words, markets become methods of assembling different, non-coherent practices into the 'economic' reality that markets appear to service and embody. Individuals and entities may secure a place in the market through negotiations with networks and contracts, which specify a given location and terms for operation. This means that even though sellers largely pursue their own economic interests, the very practices needed in order to make this pursuit work give rise to what Law (2011) calls 'collateral realities'. These are realities of collective entanglement created in the background, incrementally and 'silently', as the visible and 'official business' of the market is put together.

These 'collateral realities' make markets into collective forces. The market may appear to be a gathering up of individualized entities, albeit with different scalar composition. It may appear to simply be a place and occasion for buying and selling based on price advantages, sourcing of products and individualized calculations of both the pressures of supply and demand and other larger price-setting mechanisms. But behind these appearances is an intricate infrastructure of understandings and practices that enable these appearances to operate in concert.



Figure 2.1 AbdouMaliq Simone, Popular market at Kali Baru

Source: Author



Figure 2.2 Rika Febriyani, Periphery of market at Kali Baru

Source: Rika Febriyani

In Kali Baru, for example, those who unload, deliver, park, invoice, sell, clean, buy, repair, instruct, smooth over, enforce, inform, circulate, allocate, juxtapose – all essential practices in the market – may be distributed across specific roles and individuals. But these roles, for the most part, can also be assumed by anyone operating within the market. In this way, practices interpenetrate each other, as do those that perform them. This is why markets do not work well when, for example, municipalities try to administer them from above, imposing hierarchies of authority and specific rules and procedures about how those practices are going to work with each other.

This is, in turn, why the ‘real authorities’ in the popular markets of Jakarta are often weakly defined or undesignated clusters of individuals who appear to have no formal role, but whom everyone knows to be somehow ‘in charge’. The basis of their authority rests completely with the story-lines they are able to discern from and engender for the market. In other words, these are characters that pay a great deal of attention to how all of the non-coherent practices work or do not work with each other, the oscillations of transactions and performances, the affects that a wide range of actions and behaviours seem to exert on each other.

The power of the market is largely concretized in unsettling the dominance of any one story, a story that might break the ongoing line. This is why governments often perceive markets to be dangerous places, since they are never really able to impose one story about what the market is and should do. Part of the reason why markets do not demonstrate the kinds of social solidarities to which they might otherwise give rise, is that governments often have to resort to extra-parliamentary measures in order to constrain them. They do this through shakedowns, extortion and under-the-table payoffs. States also sometimes intervene by turning the market into a space of exception. In other words, they render the market exempt from the enforcement of laws around such practices as counterfeiting, smuggling, illegal labour, and even theft, in return for a portion of market proceeds.

Kali Baru is close to one of the most important historical railway stations in Jakarta, which in past decades used to be the point of arrival for the bulk of new migrants to the city, but is now ensconced in an overcrowded, volatile series of districts under intense threats of mega-redevelopment. The market has spread like wildfire along tracks, thoroughfares, lanes and creeks. It is the centre of a thriving printing business, and it is estimated that almost 50 percent of what is printed in Indonesia is produced in this area.

The whole gamut of printing is available in almost any medium and in almost any kind of production mode. Interspersed with this business is the possibility of buying almost anything in any quantity. In some ways in a city

that has some 137 shopping malls, areas like Kali Baru might seem like an anachronism. Many other 'traditional' markets and commercial zones in Jakarta are gone or are in rapid decline. They all had their own singular characteristics and lures, and these particularities enabled them to endure for years past their prime. But the onslaught of development has been too extensive, particularly as medium scale enterprises, such as banks, automobile dealerships, restaurant chains and supermarkets extend outward, escalating land prices and drawing commercial-based revenues into municipal coffers.

When we have asked different people about what enables Kali Baru to attain the edge and vitality it has, the common response has been that this is a place 'now big enough to take what we have and make something happen in ways we could never expect before' *and* 'that leaves us alone to see what we do' *and* 'that gives all kind of new people to work with'. It is a place that doesn't 'forget who we are' but still gives us the opportunity to 'forget everything we did in the past'. What is evident in these sentiments is that Kali Baru *re-describes* the singularities of other markets across the city into a new modality of operation – one that does not mirror each former or fading market in their entirety and collect them like some bricolage.

Rather, the driving features of the other markets are resituated in a distinctive structure of finance, distribution, production and exchange. These pasts become components that enable an elaboration of multi-scalar and multi-perspectival economic transactions, where big business coincides with variously scaled and managed networks that are not subsumed by the 'big bosses' in exclusive subcontracting arrangements. Instead, a plurality of ways of inputting goods, soliciting customers, filling orders and configuring services remain detached from each other, enabling the particularities of other ways of doing things in other places to retain a certain autonomy, even if they persist only through various ways being folded into something that exceeds themselves.

Detachment, ultimately, is only one in a series of moves involved in the making and regulating of urban spaces. It is not a deconstructive manoeuvre or a way in which imaginations, places or projects can cut themselves off from the prevailing conditions of a larger world or set of circumstances. I have tried to look at various moves of detachment: the logistical circulations of the young, often stuck in their being set loose, without strong orientations and anchorage in the city piecing together elastic sociality; the modes of inhabiting so-called affordable mass-produced housing in ways that exceed the mappings that such spatial products would seem to enforce; and, the detachments of markets from a definitive association with individual self-interest and rational calculation. In each of these instances, detachment also instigates forms of social relations whose

terms and operation may be not be easily specified, but which are relations nevertheless.

Might it not be possible to envision, then, forms of urban institutions that are detached from their rootedness in specific sectoral functions and bureaucratic formations and whose operations are distributed across emerging social relations occasioned by various infrastructural and economic interventions in urban life? Might suturing together different operations of regulation, from the ways in which residents repair decaying or pirated urban services, manage local markets, transport residents and goods across the city in improvised networks of vehicles, to putting together various associations of instruction, health care, and household support, perhaps bring into greater visibility such emergent social forms? Might they provide clearer and conveyable terms for them, and lend them an enhanced, concrete existence?

Given the capacities of urban governmental technologies to track, survey, aggregate and compute the various flows of the city in real time, could such technical operations facilitate the realization of *distributed* institutions, where planning, implementing and regulating is distributed across already existent activities undertaken by actors with different capacities and locations? Such formations would of course entail new ways to think about consolidations, costs and accountability. But at least in some initial experimental efforts, cities might learn to run things with a more heterogeneous cast of characters and ways of doing things involved. Providing increased employment opportunities for youth, designing prefabricated affordable housing with flexible uses and spaces and marketed to different forms of mobilizing finance and occupation, and the enhancement of 'real' provisioning markets might be a particularly strategic way to start.

In a more overarching sense, those that run cities, manage disasters and attempt to make them adaptable to climate change increasingly come to grips with the fact that cities are not just for us human residents. Cities are neither the embodiment of all that needs to be rescued or redeemed nor are they the launching pads for that very salvation. Still, this recognition is largely harnessed to the imagination of our connection to some larger constellation of ultimately virtuous forces, some semblance of an overarching ecology capable of recalibrating all the damage that human inhabitation has done if only humans recognize how interwoven they are with the city's multiple materiality (Colebrook 2012).

That we are now increasingly prepared to jettison ourselves – our modalities of subjectivity and identity – into recombinant assemblages of artificial intelligence, interoperable machines and languages, extended minds and distributed bodies, simply reiterates the long history of humans trying to exceed (and get rid of) themselves. This is history both of aspiration and extinction. The imagination of human capacity as that which reflects upon

itself and aims for continuous transformation has always depended upon the subjection of specific kinds of people (Wynter 2006). Slavery was a critical substrate of the urban, and without surplus labour, there would not have been the religious and cultural institutions that iterate the possibilities of collective striving and attainment. So, we must always be on the lookout to detach ourselves from these legacies, from the need to be something in particular, and to always have to outdo ourselves.

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