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Urban Life at the Extensions

How to straddle the deployment of crisis as a ruse, inciting the masses to new levels of anxiety and amenability, and as the immanence of a break—in the sense of both rupture and opportunity? How are the untenable conditions of a present extended beyond their shelf life, and how are the rambunctious, irreverent invocations of crisis extended into productive instigations? These are questions seemingly on the minds of urban majorities (the working poor and lower middle classes) increasingly unsettled into having to extend their bodies, capacities, and belongings into increasingly dispersed and provisional formats. This is an unsettling where dispossessions simultaneously extend practices of inhabitation across different landscapes and modes of social cooperation and compress the horizons and thickness of collective solidarities. Here, the capacity to narrate a progression, some discernible trajectory, splinters into a plurality of contradictory stories. For the substrate of everyday social collaborations and reciprocities are twisted and turned beyond recognition, yet still must be relied upon in order sustain all of those services (provisions of care, maintenance, delivery, and fabrication) that constitute what Tadiar (2022) calls a vital infrastructure for what capital values as lives worth living.

Intersecting elements of Black and urban studies, this essay explores the multifaceted dimensions of *extensions*. Extensions not only as descriptive of the ways in which urban populations and practices are being unsettled and forms of anchorage and belonging suspended, but as a way of living itself. It acknowledges the ways urban majorities “draw” themselves into whatever games come their way. This sense of drawing as an extending of disparate places, histories, and sensibilities to each other, as well as the lengths to which residents must go to try to draw a picture of plausible futures, is as much an act of extension as the more overt processes of how urbanization expands across different kinds of terrain in processes that invite continuous efforts to come up with workable and imaginative orientations, which often means unsettling those of familiarity and comfort, as well as sometimes literally unsettling the body and critical relations, in order to reach for those positions from which a new orientation, new capacities are seen as possible.

Casting Extensions

In what is widely seen as one of the most indelible performances of recent years, Alice Smith, dressed as she might have been to run an errand at a local bodega, emerges in the sweltering summer heat in New York’s Damrosch Park on July 27, 2016, to deliver Screaming Jay Hawkins’s classic “I Put a Spell on You.” Delivered not so much as sermon, scream, or sorcery, but as proton accelerator, scattering the accumulated, disconnected, and discordant strands of Black life in all directions. Stalwart, plaintive, lurid, fiery, mocking, adamant, intransigent—all not conceding one inch to any other affective tone—Smith seemingly mobilizes the entire archive of Black women’s gestures, tics, gazes, and haptics to extend across a universe of suffering, longing, and determination. It is not her that is being extended, but rather that very archive etched from the experiences of centuries living in America.

As is evident in the entirety of the “song” as presented above, the minimal lyrics don’t say all that much about anything. At most they embody the recourse to bewitching as both the insufficiencies and plenitude of Black everyday agency and the destabilizing of the amorous bond by the other’s “running around.” And given the enforced dispossession of the self at the heart of slavery and the subsequent difficulties faced by Black people to possess property as the mechanism through which they might come to possess themselves, the altering references to “you’re mine” and “I’m yours, right now, right now” might seem to reaffirm all of the turbulence attributed to the Black amorous couple. But in Smith’s hands, hair tied back, whatever

traces of makeup applied now smeared, and seemingly channeling every Black woman scorned, these spare lyrics and the piercing voice engender a space beyond coupling, conveying the simultaneous empathy and brutality of a Black self that extends itself into and across the earth in arrangements that may lack any discernible institutional, molecular, or even virtual form but which constitute a gathering up of concerted action whose dispositions may never be known.

What does this particular performance have to do with theory in crisis, let alone a particular set of trajectories of urbanization in South and Southeast Asia, which is the thematic focus of this essay? As the presupposition of this special issue is that the most dynamic work of contemporary critique is concerned with crisis, it might be easy to simply say that Smith's performance points to the possibilities of grace immanent in a particular stance toward crisis. That despite the empirical evidence available, and the apparent impossibility of discursively working one's way through crisis, there are other deep-seated "technologies" available, such as sorcery, to believe that it can be tamed, reined in. And that such "technologies" are less a set of external tools than the instrumentalizing of the self as the embodiment and conveyance of memory, resistance, and invention. Rather than prioritizing a self that comes through the crisis intact, the self "gives in" (to) life's priorities, in the double sense of submission and gifting—priorities that emphasize an enunciation of living beyond reason so that spaciousness might be created.

For the attempt to secure spaciousness for the prolongation of life, and thus the identification of all of those who perpetually experience "slow death" (Nixon 2011), who do not participate in such possibilities of prolongation or are relegated to being the byproducts of all of the dirty labor entailed in concretizing such prolongation, potentially entails a profound contraction of life's possibilities. The capacity to live, with its manifold expressions, impulses, and risks, cannot be structured by a measured proportionality; that is, if only people were to adhere to specific mindsets, diets, behavioral regimens, and investments their prospects for longevity would be enhanced. Similarly, then, according to this approach, the terrain on which justice is to be done would entail removing the impediments that foreclose longevity to the oppressed and condemn them to slow death.

The question Fred Moten (2017) raises is not so much whether that justice is indeed done through such an orientation but rather that justice itself might be inapplicable to apprehending the ways in which the irruption of such normative trajectories, the tumultuous spilling out of life in wayward, inexplicable ways, is the product both of subjugation and of life's

“priority,” and that it is sometimes impossible to navigate this distinction. Moten asks, what does life have to give up in order to escape loss/seizure? What Smith does in Damrosch Park is to profess that she will give up nothing, for there is nothing strictly of hers to give up; that whatever she is can be found only in what might have been given up already; and that she gives herself up entirely, but will remain entirely what she is.

This intricate weave of seeming contractions and affective intensities is posited, then, as the underlining impetus of what I call “the urban extensions.” These extensions at the most basic level concern the making of spaciousness, of room to move. They emanate from and in the face of an urban crisis and, simultaneously, are a response to it. Important to this essay as well is the extension of Black thought and experience to understandings and geographies of urbanization processes that on the surface would seem distant from them, only weakly applicable. But there are two dimensions here where such a connection seems important, neither entailing the conventional tropes of blackness *per se* as are commonly used.

On the one hand, if the manifestation of urban extensions in its most familiar, obvious connotation is the extension of urbanization into regions surrounding cities, across hinterlands and peripheries, an important driver of such extensions is the contraction and sometimes complete dissipation of the “Black town.” The Black town is a colonial artifact, representing the spatial segregation imposed by colonial rule that relegated the indigenous as a reserve of cheap labor and racialized the status of their residency and their concomitant rights and responsibilities (Fanon 2008; Prakash 2010).

On the other hand, the Black town also points to an “urban majority.” Not a statistical aggregate, but rather embodying the ways in which different economic practices, demeanors, behavioral tactics, forms of social organization, territory, and mobility intersect and detach, coalesce into enduring cultures of inhabitation, or proliferate as momentary occupancies of short-lived situations. How they make up a kind of algorithmic process that continuously produces new functions and new values for individual and collective capacities, backgrounds, and ways of doing things. Here, the majority was never a static entity, never a class-in-the-making, never so much a sociological or political entity as it was a manifestation of the possibilities and affordances that urbanization “lends” to inhabitants bearing the structural onus of having to largely make “their own way” in urban life (Simone and Rao 2021).

The systematic eviction of this urban majority across much of the Global South fuels the growth of the extensions. It is not the only factor, of

course, coupled as it is with the expansion of capital accumulation, the maximizing of land value, the exigencies to realize “correctives” to the problems of the urban core, and the need to accommodate a growing urban population (de la Luz Hernández-Flores et al. 2017; Dick and Rimmer 2018; McGee 2018; Ranganathan 2018). But the seeming wholesale displacement of that majority, and the assault upon the very social infrastructures and practices that characterized that majority, constitute the predominant character of contemporary urban rearrangements (Garmany and Richmond 2020; Janoschka and Sequera 2016; Yiftachel 2020; Weinstein 2021). The extensions become the materialization of the dispossession of a capacity long viewed as undermining capitalist urban hegemony, operationalized as the medium for consolidating a form of rule impervious to the specificities of local inhabitation (Doshi and Ranganathan 2017; Roy 2017).

Such processes of course occur throughout the world (Maharawal 2017; Watt 2018), but the complexion of these changes as and in extensions assumes a particular character and fungibility. While extending and extensions can take place anywhere, their particular importance in South and Southeast Asia rests in the ways in which urbanization processes far exceed the form of the city, as settlements of various kinds spread out across a vast landscape of “strange contiguities.” Here diverse logics and scales of development collide or run parallel to each other in a temporal unruliness where clear development trajectories are often difficult to put one’s finger on—where is this headed, what is likely to be the success or failure of a particular project? These are questions increasingly difficult to answer. Far from extending a determinate logic of urbanization, the extensions seem more “all over the place.” It is possible in many cases to confidently chart out the progressive expansions of accumulation, creative destruction, real estate speculation, greenfield developments of affordable housing, and so forth. But these are either instantiated in neighborhoods of shifting spatial and demographic compositions or themselves are readily repurposed according to discordant logics.

Rooting my reflections in Alice Smith’s performance, I intend to explore the multiple dimensions of extensions as a way of introducing new improbabilities (Hui 2019), new spaciousness into the world in response to diminution of the coherence of the city and the dispersion of urban life across multiple disconnected forms and temporalities. It is an attempt to extend the Black capacity for extensivity beyond the sociological particulars of normatively Black people to engage blackness as a critical dimension of urbanization processes everywhere.

Working with Extensions

The specific genealogies, contestations, and transmutations of a range of metropolitan regions across South and Southeast Asia have historically made visible a sense of *multiplicity* in the logics, arrangements, and constellations of power that did and *could* in/form processes of urbanization. Here, the designation *cities of the south* is not a brand or category but signifies heterogeneous sites of conceptual inversions/reversals and empirical diffractions that flesh out a more pluriversal composition of urban life (Escobar 2019; Lawhon and Truelove 2020; Maringanti 2020). Not unlike Alice Smith's "proton accelerator," things are coming at you, and making you, from above, below, sideways, and all around.

Current trajectories of urban change emphasize security of tenure, propriety through property, inclusiveness through debt, the equation of affordances with affordability, and the enforced promotion of resilience through the attenuation of social contracts. All have a debilitating impact on the sociability of city life (Amin and Thrift 2017; Nielson and Rossiter 2008; Tilley, Elias, and Rethel 2019). The political technologies of apparent "stability" disentangle various solidarities, collaboration, and economies built on the continuous recalibration and plying of relations among different kinds of actors and activities. The "majority" of the inhabitants of cities such as Delhi, Karachi, and Jakarta are increasingly living and operating in spaces beyond the traditional settlements of what conventionally is understood as the urban core. These *extensions* are saying something different, uncertain not only about urbanization but *inhabitation* itself, and its sensibilities and politics. Extensions thus pose critical questions about relations, scale, temporality, and the incipience of differences without separability.

My concern here is not so much to delve into the never-ending controversies about the constitutive processes of the urban, but to use these processes, or the consideration of a particular facet of them, to think about how existent and emergent practices and spaces, which will always determinately be subsumed in one way or another to capture, enclosure, interdiction, and hierarchy, also continuously prefigure forms of valuation and emancipation that fall outside of the dominant modes of calculation. While extensions are theoretically limitless, all-encompassing, this essay does have in mind, as an empirical platform for analysis and speculation, what are commonly called the "extended urban regions" of the metropolises of South and Southeast Asia. At the same time, there are no exemplary, predominant extensions—particularly as they imply a continuous unsettlement, both debilitating and generative dispossession (Kaviraj 2016).

Within these Asian contexts, colonies were often considered as extensions of particular territories, regimes, and missions. As extensions, though, they were both within and outside the normative laws of the colonizing state; they were to be domesticated under the prevailing rubrics of administration practice and moral sensibility incumbent to that state, but also were treated as domains where their purported radical difference would warrant various exceptions. Whatever existed in the extensions could become objects of theft, either because the inhabitants were not capable of recognizing the real value of what was stolen or because they were incapable of exercising the kind of mastery necessary to convert these objects into property (Mbembe 2019).

For the realization of property requires such objects to be enrolled into a specific agenda imposed upon them that is distinguished and maintained by force, as irrevocably *separate* from others, and whose relations are primarily characterized by the logics of exchange and price.

As objects were often held in common, or engaged as interlocutors, where human inhabitants needed to be sensitive to the “wants and needs” of such objects, property was a conceptualization often far removed from local use (Goswami 2004; Roberts and Worger 1997). As such, in the eyes of the colonizer, things could be taken, even if those things might be critical to the material and cultural functioning of the inhabitants, because they were not anyone’s property, and thus theft was not an issue. This was to have even more drastic connotations in the ways in which life itself was taken.

The extensions, far from embodying the connotation of stability and moral coherence that colonizers presumed to impose, were spaces of intensive volatility, saturated with brutality and an entanglement of terror and pleasure—the terror of the extent to which brutality could engender pleasure, and the pleasure accrued through the terror entailed in the suspension of principles and order (Fabian 2000; Stoler 2010). In many instances it is difficult to discern the difference between them, as any sense of unity among self and subject is torn apart (Scott 1999). Such disjunction is the result of constant intrusion, intercession, interdiction.

Working from this history, the extensions upend settled ontological dispositions of the city—its presumptions to crystalize human potency to arrange natures; its claim to embody the will of free individuals (Castriota and Tonucci 2018; McFarlane 2018; Angelo and Goh 2021). The extensions are speculative futurisms in that they constitute alternative readings of what might take place within a specific order of things. Additionally, the city, or the predominant readings of it, have been excessively preoccupied with settlement. Even while mobility studies have emerged over the past three decades

to counter the hegemony of this preoccupation, there remains an underappreciation of the dominance of movement. People have always moved, and instead of viewing movement simply as a descriptor of transport and conveyance, the activity entailed in shifting bodies from one location to another, human movement is consonant with the fact that all matter constantly moves. Whatever stabilization indeed emerges is not the cessation of movement but the capacity of different things to move with each other in a consistent fashion (Gamble, Hanan, and Nail 2019).

Extensions as a Materialization of Inconsistency

The oscillations of such movement generate multiple inconsistencies at the surface of urban appearances, and this is evident even across different instantiations of urban coloniality (Cooper 2005). The city as the consolidation of the propertied land, of populations with individuated properties demonstrated through citizenship, of densified spatial functionalities, economic aggrandizement, and the maximization of value-added activity, is extended through the continuous quotidian abruptions and upheavals of this very consolidation. While it may be increasingly unclear in the proposition that coloniality persists across many urban regions just who is colonizing whom or what forms of power are occupying and steering the processes of ongoing urbanization, practices of theft remain unabated, as do instances of incomputable sharing (Stoler 2016).

Nevertheless, extensions can still be caught up/in colonial imaginaries of spatial production. This is reflected in the violence entailed in the assumption that nothing is there, or what is there is an anachronism, something whose time has come or gone, and is in need of being rectified, or is no longer useful. It is manifested in the imagination and construction of space where accumulation is uninterrupted, unimpeded—not to be contaminated, belabored with the intrusions or proximities of other ways of living. Similarly, such spaces seek to configure a sense of belonging to the “world”—removed from messy entanglements in local situations. Yet the very process of putting together and settling extensions opens up liminal spaces in the absence of clearly consensual plans of development. These are spaces between all the starts and stops, the incompletions, which allow for various “projects” to emerge from the “background” (Gururani and Kennedy 2021). This is a background that includes sediments of past uses and histories, including intensive contestations of land—often waged through complex brokerage of social and racial identities and countervailing claims (Das 2020; Mitra 2018; Kundu 2016; Sharma 2021).

The extensions are at the fulcrum of an intensive and oscillating process of unsettling and resettling anchored in a systemic process of depletion and devaluation. This is a process that consigns increased numbers of urban dwellers as encroachers through a purposeful foreclosure of technologies of counting and documentation that would enable them to count, to narrate a history capable of exerting legitimate claims. Here, the dependence on improvised arrangements of valuation, use, and regulation—as tools for “possessing” territory—is defined as not having the right to be in possession of certain documents, or that the documents that residents may be in possession of were issued by authorities that now are deemed not to have had authorization to issue them at that time. This process is reinforced through the expansive role of judiciaries, not so much as arbiters of claims, but to instantiate the priority of *order* above and beyond the rights to land, livelihood, and shelter that the law might provide. The judiciary frequently supersedes existing planning processes and reifies planning tools—otherwise functioning as heuristic instruments—as *blueprints* to be legally inscribed (Karachi Urban Lab 2021). Without comprehensive resettlement schemes, or schemes that act more as warehousing far removed from the transportation and jobs needed to sustain livelihood, the displaced scatter across varied landscapes, instantiating themselves into discrepant places provisionally tied together through the extensions of family, neighborhood, and clan relations. Here both time and space are stretched to maximize the coverage of small opportunities that have to be consolidated, tied together across increased distances and multiple barriers.

This stretching not only applies to the most vulnerable and precarious, but to those of urban majorities that might be construed as a working or lower middle class and operationalized through increased indebtedness (Bear 2015; Breman 2004; To Nguyen et al. 2019). To receive an extension on a debt actualizes the promises of finitude, that something can come to an end, that debt can be paid off, that solvency remains intact. There is a deferral of reckoning but also the postponement of a sense of conclusion, which itself is repeatedly extended, for the obligations and debts remain unsettled. Borrowing from the future, with or without penalty, a deduction, tariff; the household and, by implication, the city goes on to live another day.

Yet, everything must be speeded up in an interval that straddles *two due dates*, something past due, both reaffirmed and diluted, where the past must be addressed in a new way, one that won't let go but that requires a new orientation, a new pace and rhythm, within what is both a contracted space—for the extension is not limitless—and an experimental space, for something new must be tried in order to meet the deadline. Still, there is the possibility

of owing never brought to an end. For what is the basis to ask for an extension? The possibility for an extension necessitates evidence of both capacity and incapacity, a redoubling of owing—as one now owes gratitude to the person granting the extension. Such is the game with the loan shark who issues continuous loans to finance the paying back of prior loans at increased interest on a principle that can never be paid. This often entails a spreading culpability—endless reminders, involving sisters, cousins who might have had nothing to do with the debt. An enlarged audience becomes involved in a single situation of indebtedness, as well as attempts to seek protection from those who would purportedly extend their protection.

The vast expansion of debt-fueled consumption across South and Southeast Asia installs a process of generalized plunder, to take what one can from any other, to extend the terrain of theft (Cavallero and Gago 2020). This is not only a theft of material resources but of orientation as well. Debt fuels a rush to build, to acquire, resulting in a profusion of tipping points through which projects fail, come, and go. The rapidity of land conversions coupled with the obdurate resistances performed through varying logics of claim (spiritual, ancestral, dissimulative), the dissipation of interest in particular sites or projects, the resurgent feedback of materiality (climate, floods, infrastructural collapse), the enfolding of contradictory modalities of livelihood within single regulatory frameworks, and the silent complicities between different categories of residents—all intersect to produce the extensions as oscillating *differentials of speeds* where it is difficult for anything take hold, *to become a hold*. The extensions become a landscape of unruly details, where it is not clear how different spatial products, spatial uses, and populations fit together. The intended functions of built environments frequently are upended in favor of more temporary, uncertain dispositions.

As such, we are reminded of Glissant's (2010) notion of *incommensurable simultaneity*, relations that are disruptive of perspectives rather than confirming. Residents are increasingly exposed to the nontransitive details of this world, to landscapes, built environments, and events that are incommensurable details open to *gatherings* not subsumable to existent categories. The deferral of definitive framing. The leveraging of emergent effects. The valuation of intensities not subjected to preexistent entities (Simondon 2009; Malafouris 2015).

Blackness and the Extensions

Blackness points to particular ways of living through the incommensurable. At a global level, blackness continues to operate as a mode of managing the

intensified urbanization of populations increasingly circulating across territories and provisionally anchoring that circulation in various-length residencies in towns and cities. From Eastern Indonesia to Northeast India, to the Mediterranean, to Brazil and Peru, blackness is mobilized to filter, interdict, read, and channel *circulation*, as well as to prefigure more experimental *solidarities*.

These experiences reiterate the conceptual conundrums that have long inscribed Black populations in what could be considered a logistical exigency of both affirming and effacing the coherences engineered through blackness. It desubstantializes the normative implications while also generating a positivity through extensions that take shape beyond the recognized integrity of subjects—moving across, within the earth as a movement of deterritorialization. If the advent of blackness is the state of capture rendered an unrelenting ontological condition, where the state of being Black is to have been constitutionality made available and worthy of capture, and where subsequent generations of being Black, even if not subjected to enslavement or incarceration, are still rendered fundamentally available to premature death engineered explicitly or implicitly on the basis of their being Black, beyond capture cannot register a positivity within its own terms. Rather, it always has to play off the presiding architectures of captivity. This did not mean that Black people lacked the capacity to materialize memory into new versions or failed to offer collective visions about lives worth living or economic practices capable of underpinning specific imaginations.

But there was always a diligent awareness of shared vulnerability, that all Black inventions could not institutionalize themselves according to the normative procedures of transparency and dissemination without inviting assault and denigration (McKittrick 2013; King 2019). It is a matter of logistical dexterity. For in logistics, the process of disembedding particular nodes, transit, and processing sites from the specificities of their relationships with particular locales, demographic compositions, social and economic histories, and cultural practices requires an open-ended sense of how these sites, now acting as nodes, could be articulated in new and various ways. It entails how they are multiply situated in a plurality of different circulations. This is a process that reiterates the fundamental *instability of interconnectivity*—as well as a potential space through which resistance and illicit uses might emerge and thus require capacities to anticipate instability and preempt interruptions (Martin 2012).

As Franco Berardi (2021) emphasizes, the rescaling of salient force to the level of planetary climate conditions and to the micro-registers of biomes, toxins, and viruses—registers which are increasingly articulated through techno-semiotic calculation—constricts the operations of politics as a means

of constituting “free citizens” long affiliated with the city. As such, new interplays within and among registers are needed as a means of multiplying entanglements among things, the relations of mutual implication, and the directionalities of collisions beyond the specifications of algorithmic determinism. The extensions become these entanglements.

Across many urban regions of South and Southeast Asia, this is reflected in a growing and practical dissipation of the desire for property and the accumulation of assets as consumption reaches a glass ceiling. Attainment is still on the cards, but for operational maneuverability—as selves, households, affiliations *spread out* and consolidations *scatter*. For there is the conviction that new sites of affordable residence are unlikely to ever consolidate themselves into viable economic-social territories. Houses often fall apart in less than ten years after they are built. At the same time, the neighborhoods where people are coming from are also “broken”—leaving simply remnants.

As a result, everyday life is being made through mediating something that will never be “enough” and something that is no longer “enough.” These entanglements as extensions take place also at the level of the body in circulation. Bodies that find the effort to stabilize—through consolidating place, acquiring assets, maximizing consumption—offer an increasingly limited horizon, as it involves too much labor, indebtedness, compliance. Instead, they distribute social life, livelihood across multiple locations and opportunities.

Let me tell a story about a long-term interlocutor, Buna, that I have known for many years during my time living and doing urban activist work in Jakarta. A dowry for a rapidly failed marriage is deployed by a young woman to purchase a tiny house at a far periphery. It is too far from work for residing there all of the time and, as such, is leveraged for the storage of illicit pharmaceuticals, while she resides part-time with her young child at the house of her father’s estranged second wife. She also rents a boardinghouse room down the road from the large retail center where she runs a small stall selling cheap accessories; ventures each night after work with a boyfriend across a landscape of cheap cafés where she occasionally sings for tips; and attends college classes for broadcasting on the weekend, where she also sells small packs of MDMA, which she uses to fund a small fashion line distributed under the table to several of the stalls in the retail center where she collects a “formal” wage. The range of partial, overdetermined settings and infrastructures through which she operationalizes her life and livelihood posit multiple vulnerabilities, exposures, as well as apertures that enable lines of both flight and articulation to be provisionally enacted.

Exhausted by seemingly never-ending family dramas, she is relieved to have extricated herself from cycles of abuse and obligation, while remaining on the periphery of these family relations just to the extent to have her kid nominally taken care of and to maintain her registration with a local authority that provides some subsidies to her. She is as actively bisexual as can be viable in the Jakarta context, and her longest-term lover is ensconced in a central city apartment block replete with women living on their own as extramarital partners to men with money and connections, and it was through these connections that she tangentially maintains a relationship with the drug trade and margins of the music business. The apartment block itself is a nerve center of information garnered from close-knit relations among women involved in sex work, cheap entertainment, and hosting of various kinds.

It is a very different story, if one returns to the history of the modern city: subject to the logic of *perspectivism*—both in the making of a “subject” and the object of power—the separating out of the individual body from the social body is the premise of the “vanishing point,” from which perspectivism is imposed and the “city” congeals (Farinelli 2015). The uniformity or identity of constituent elements—orthogonal, equidistant units of analysis, and the interiority of rationalization (individuals maximize their self-interest—all composed a geometry of power expressed in the very material form of the urban, predicated on the separating out of difference.

In contrast, Denise Ferreira da Silva (2016) offers a more incisive reading for Buna’s inhabitation practices. She poses Black spaciousness as difference *without separability*. Coercion of this separating out of urban modernity was the necessity upholding liberty. For separation is always threatened by the instabilities in maintaining bodies and terrain as something detached, individualized. Property is thus a constriction of spaciousness, a reification of freedom in the terms of self-possession—something always wary of the possibilities of being “possessed” by other forces. The very state that made Black bodies available to brutal coercion—the deferral of congealment and definitive individuation—is the potentiality of difference without separation, in an availing of possibility with indeterminate outcome, what Hortense Spillers (1987) has called “empathy.” Just as Ferreira da Silva (2018) appropriates a mathematics of sets to posit the possibilities of incalculable economies and feminist poesis, while undoing mathematics at the same time, the economy of differences without separability maintains the possibilities of computation to introduce new improbabilities into the world.

This doesn’t mean that things are not different, not detached. But they are detached in the sense that it is not possible to conceive of a form of

attachment that would subsume differences within some overarching formulation that coheres and coordinates whatever those differences are capable of doing. Differences are not inseparable because they are unable to live without each other, but rather because they avail to each other the very material and conceptual resourcefulness that enables their difference, their very capacity to operate as a difference to the stabilization of any specific proposition or state of existence. Thus the extensions embody the very extendedness of difference to each other, as a surfeit of unanticipated possibility not captured in calculations of proportionality or the prevailing semiotics of meaning's apportionment.

The gift of the difference of blackness is not what it makes probable, but again, how it introduces new improbabilities into the world, not amenable to contract, to democratic accountability, but available to both utterly fungible extractions *and* incalculable territorializations of liveliness and collective gathering. This inseparable difference is particularly important in considering the complex entanglements emerging across the urban extensions. The entanglements among household composition, entrepreneurial networks, financial reciprocities and dependencies; the profusion of tipping points; the multiplicity of risks and impulsive maneuvers; the intensive scrutiny of individual behavior coupled with the indifference largely shown to individualized needs—that constitutes a thick fabric, even flesh, difficult to alter and reweave. Here, residents are constantly doing something but are increasingly unsure about what that something is, what it means, and what value it has. Yet, the repetition of entanglement provides the semblance of stability. It is not necessarily a precarious life. Even as residents want something different, they express confidence in what they have now, their situation is largely felt as being all right. But it also constantly points to the limit of what it can be and turn into. The attainment of stability, just this side of precarity, then becomes both security and trap. But this both-end relation of difference is precisely the locus of its spaciousness, of its collective possibilities.

What kind of relationality holds this all together, while at the same time holding apart any constitutive elements from all collapsing into each other? Fred Moten's (2017) references to Butch Morris's practice of *conduction* are useful, as a process of both choreography and energetic transmission, where relations operate as a device of the conduction of force. Within conduction as a particular device of musical performance, it is not so much that the individual musicians perform their respective parts in a coherent composition or matrix of improvisation. Rather, they enact a multiplicity of different intonations and phrasings simultaneously. These remain detached

and autonomous from each other, not contributing to a coherent orchestration but the transmission of wave forms where the possibility of articulation is incipient within any of the players, who are in turn recipients of a gathering of sounds. The conductor's task is to follow the trajectories of flows of these forces, then direct particular ensembles of performers to steer these forces in a particular direction. There are always multiple lines of connections, most of which never develop beyond their incipience, but others emerge as traceable lines of connection.

Conclusion: Improper Relations

In the last section of this essay, I concentrate on a particular exemplar of extensions in the Eastern hinterlands of Greater Jakarta. The intricate logistical hub that has become Cikarang—replete with Asia's largest sub-city, Meikarta, its largest internal port and industrial zones, reflecting the massive growth of the city but also responding to the crises of flooding, subsidence, and inflationary prices of the urban core—is also a landscape of ambiguity and tremulous opportunity for spatial dispositions whose complexion remains simultaneously captive but also free of the massive motor of speculative capitalism. Improper relations become an embodied vehicle of theory-making for those attempting to situate themselves among disorienting trajectories of urban making.

On the one hand, enormous sunk costs in infrastructure would seem to promote a seamless interoperability of residence, employment, asset creation, transportation, marketing, commodity circuits, cultural valorization, and social reproduction. The intended inclusion in Meikarta, for example, of four universities, six hospitals, and forty primary and secondary schools not only indicates the wholesale privatization of urban existence but more importantly signals the ways in which the process of urbanization itself is “packaged” as an economic object, requiring new practices of governmentality, planning, and financialization (Schindler and Kanai 2021; Shatkin 2019).

At the same time, discrete components of these environments “circulate” through each other across various databases, spreadsheets, future-scenario plans, and securitization tiers, and in ways where it is difficult to tell sometimes the extent to which efficacy is a sleight of hand attained through the abstracted accountings of interoperability rather than more substantive synergies and mutually beneficial and reinforcing relations (Goldman and Narayan 2021; Rizzo and Mandal 2021). This is because even a cursory, superficial analysis of these “extensions” points to large swathes of vacancies

and undercapacity, of continuously reworked financial infusions and structural repurposing of built environments. Functioning across markedly differentiated temporal horizons, everything to be assessed falls under the belief that, inevitably and eventually, things will work according to the plan, because the “plan” itself, even though specifying the precise ways in which different spatial products are to be interrelated, in practice, builds on the obsolescence of those very specifications.

In the absence of any overarching regional planning, development, and governance framework, as is the case in Greater Jakarta, benefits and losses are distributed unequally and with little attention to the potential complementarities and duplications of built environments and infrastructure inputs (Hudalah 2017; Hudalah, Tessa, and Lestari 2021). Many so-called affordable housing complexes—primarily consisting of small semidetached pavilion units—built by developers who quickly vacated management responsibilities to municipal authorities largely unwilling to take on the responsibility—have quickly become desolate, even as households continue to pay off their debts. As such, many housing rentals and purchases in these extensions constitute short-term, speculative investments subleased out for various purposes and lengths of stay.

Cikarang is inhabited by a growing “unsettled” population, whose composition includes both migrants less able to identify viable footholds in the region and “refugees” from the urban core. The latter, faced with increased property taxation, immanent eviction, forced buyouts, or depreciating housing assets, often impulsively mobilize funds to acquire flats, hostel residencies, or cheap house rentals or even purchases as temporary destinations or potentially fungible assets. These assets are viewed as capable of underwriting the buying of time, or the acquisition becomes one node or component of itineraries of accumulation that are distributed across a wider territory of operations.

On other hand, the megadevelopments continue to be imbued with confidence, caution, and uncertainty, and where uncertainty is repurposed to be as lucrative as possible, confidence is a testament to caution, and vice versa. That a wide range of varied actors don’t know very much about where things are headed on the basis of ground-level realities, but yet retain a sense of inevitability about the long-range prospects of what is being put together, engenders an overarching ambiguity about what works and what does not.

My friend Miya Irawati, a seasoned researcher of this area, tells a different kind of story about Cikarang. In the middle of Cikarang, along the raised embankment of an irrigation canal that now separates corporately

held agricultural land from the almost magical appearance of Meikarta, residents originally from the island of Madura have long operated from hundreds of makeshift compounds, with their various assortments of junk and found and stolen items, including steel beams, bags of concrete, broken doorframes, thousands of bolts and screws dismantled from who knows how many infrastructure projects. Renowned as artisans of the “useless” and providers of what anyone needs for almost any kind of project, the Madurese are the consummate archivists, rarely discarding anything. They talk about and arrange their “wares” in such a way as to propose interconnections among things that might often seem outlandish and impossible but nevertheless seem to be taken seriously enough by a sufficient number of customers to maintain these archivists in business. A row of cheap migrant hostels, for example, abandoned because of internecine conflict or simply bad positioning in the face of flood drainage, can be completely dismantled in a matter of hours and the components reinserted into a wide range of repairs, house extensions, junk markets, and small factories before the day is over.

The Madurese are not only collectors of materiality but they “collect” cheap jobs as well. They won’t usually do the jobs themselves because it impinges upon their sense of freedom but distribute them to others who work, for example, as porters, janitors, cleaners, and security guards. The objective is not so much job *placement* per se but brokering connections among different jobs as part of an expansive information network, which circulates updates about what is taking place across different factories, construction jobs, internal customs ports, and service centers. Such a network not only facilitates the “just off the truck” acquisitions of materials or the ability to offer “quick solutions”—material inputs—to projects or operations facing unanticipated problems but concretizes “off-grid” relations among places and functions, that is, among those that do not fit into any of the prevailing conceptions about how things and places are to be connected to each other.

This positing and materializing of off-grid relations is not conducted within the register of realizing unexpected potentialities. It doesn’t concern itself with developing alternative worlds or inventive usages. Rather, it functions as intensive artificiality, even noise; a means of interrelating things not informed by a specific vision or even objective. It concerns an infusion of incomputable instrumentality in the intersection of the quotidian experiences of hundreds of “service” workers and laborers across a landscape characterized by moving things around, constantly improvising where they might fit, disrupt, and supplement operations of almost any kind.

The Madurese are constantly on the run. Even within their internal dealings along this irrigation canal, it is unclear what relationships one makeshift compound has with any other, or whether any “project” is simply the result of individual brokerage or some kind of intricate collective choreography among them. It is not clear whether or not a tacit moral economy of sharing markets, a complementing of distinct networks, or a fortuitous interweaving of competition is at work. What is evident is a very loose sense of any affiliation with *property*. Madurese are stereotypically known as thieves with almost extraordinary powers and agility, as well as being indiscriminate in terms of weighing the relative value of whatever they can get their hands on. Nothing is deemed either waste or luxury, even as they are known for driving a hard bargain around anything they attempt to get rid of. They certainly know the market price and how to set it. But any sense of *propriety with property* is far removed from daily operations that attempt to draw lines across the “back doors” of nearly everything that exists in this area.

We might construe these improper relations as complicit in the maintenance of the macrostructures of urban capital accumulation relations, since all they seem to do is to momentarily compensate for a proliferation of small dysfunctionalities. They might be construed as a kind of cheap *just in time* provisioning of small affordances, fueling an already hypertensive neoliberal emphasis on everyone having a project. But in amplifying the essential brokenness of the world, of things out of their *proper* place, no matter where they end up or how they are used, this economy goes beyond repair to highlight how that brokenness suggests its own propositions devoid of the will to restore functionality.

The Madurese, known for breaking the integrity of projects, repurpose elements from that brokenness to dispositions that they have little interest in defining, but rather seek to perpetuate a state of brokenness as generative of a continuous circulation of materials across different hands, different sites, and different uses.

Here, relations are proposed that are detached from obvious genealogy, that compress things conventionally viewed as impossible to be together, and that have no way of knowing whether they will endure or not. Like the proton-accelerated enactment of Alice Smith, this techno-poetics of relationality implicitly addresses the fundamentals of urbanization itself, that is, as a process simultaneously human and inhuman that does not proceed simply as an artifice of human will but as a *techne* both with and *without* its own registers and affects.

In other words, the *technical* dimensions of the relationalities of urbanization come from all over the place, and work in different degrees, proportions, and manifestations that come to be associated with it but also do not intrinsically belong to it. In the clamor of countervailing projects and logics at work in generating contemporary urban inhabitation and operation, what constitutes viable modes of political practice able to navigate the intricate physical and social landscapes of discrepant times and strange spatial juxtapositions? Instead of envisioning processes of urbanization as the unfolding of definitive forces of value capture, asset creation, and resource extraction, the question is how these albeit salient categorizations of spatial production are accompanied by a growing multiplicity of entities and their exertions. How they extend themselves to each other in an atmosphere of global blackness that has not consented to being a single being in a growing landscape of intricate landscapes of provisional sutures, half-lives, diffractions, disjuncture, compensation, and transience.

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