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Majority time: operations in the midst of Jakarta

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Abstract: Across many cities of the so-called Global South, the primary responsibility for constructing spaces of inhabitation has fallen largely to residents themselves. Although these cities have been largely remade through the intensive segregations precipitated by property markets, many substantial traces of the continuous incremental renovations and readjustment of everyday life remain vital. It was not just a matter of households building their own homes. Affordability meant density. Densification was not just of bodies of techniques necessary to provide an array of affordances. This meant the intermixing of measures, angles, calculations, impulses, screens, surfaces, soundscapes, exposures, folds, circuitries, and layers, as instruments for associating things, bringing things into association, where things get their 'bearings' by having a 'bearing' on each other. But these associations required their own rhythm and time. Focusing on different heterogeneous districts in inner city Jakarta, the paper explores these mixtures of temporality and how they are materialized in local built and economic environments.

Keywords: Jakarta, local economy, incremental temporality, urban development, built environment, social infrastructure

The time that works

In the fields of urban development and change many assumptions are made about the capacities of residents to bring about improvements in the conditions of their lives. This is particularly the case for residents living in rapidly expanding urban mega-regions where complex rearrangements of life outpace the ability of policy-makers and institutions to always manage these transformations. The bulk of these assumptions centres on various organizational imaginaries – that is, the capacities of residents to organize in ways that identify and secure their collective interests and rights. If only residents were better able to pool their time, efforts and assets into more proficient investments and organizational capacities, then, the assumption goes, would they be better able to make the city something that works for them (Boonyabanacha, 2009; Boudreau, 2007; Eckstein, 2000; Holston, 2008; Lindell, 2010; Walton, 1998).

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1 But what are the criteria entailed in these notions of ‘what works’ and ‘for
2 them’? Additionally, given that the city is a constantly mutating intersection of
3 materials, things, bodies and immaterialities only partially regulated or predict-
4 able, why don’t residents take advantage of the multiplicity of collectivity possi-
5 bilities embodied by urban life? Again, behind this question lurks some kind
6 of optimal spatial solution, some format or calibration capable of generating
7 synergistic effects that maximize the productivity of urban life (Elden, 2010;
8 Gandy, 2006; McFarlane, 2009; Thrift, 2005).

9 We work in a lot of different districts in Jakarta, and mostly on issues of local
10 urban economic development. People in these districts undertake a wide variety
11 of different trades and livelihoods, largely outside of formal employment. The
12 work that people do largely provides a basic income, but usually not much more.
13 As a result, there is vast scepticism about the practices of local economy, and
14 concern that people should be doing something different, more substantial and
15 at larger scales. For example, there is a tendency to create employment oppor-
16 tunities only by subcontracting out to the lowest level of production activities
17 and by creating ‘firewalls’ among activities rather than developing integrated
18 approaches. New enterprises may be created, for example, in the textile sector,
19 but usually these opportunities remain heavily dependent upon ‘big players’ who
20 continue to dominate access to capital and machinery. This dependence is often
21 reflected in very narrow market channels – in other words, the ability of new
22 enterprises to explore various market opportunities is severely restricted because
23 of these dependencies. Also, by separating out functions – such as the delivery of
24 materials, the unloading of materials, and the retailing of these materials – each
25 function develops into a specific zone of authority and pricing that often seeks
26 to protect itself before thinking about the overall market of which it is a part.

27 Additionally, people within a trade are usually unable to put together new
28 forms of economic association that cut across ethnic group or territorial affili-
29 ation. While, for example, ethnic-based developments of economic activities
30 can be useful mechanisms to ensure inclusion of a wide range of people – both
31 as workers and customers – they also reproduce the situation whereby certain
32 actors continue to dominate the high end of each sector. It also limits the
33 development of new practices and product lines, as well as the capacity of
34 neighbourhood-based sectors to produce at scale. The expansion of investment
35 savings and market share would seem to require new ways of explicitly articu-
36 lating different businesses and facets of production activity within a sector.

37 38 **A sense of timing and the becoming of an urban majority**

39
40 What is often neglected in these discussions of urban movements and collective
41 organization is a sense of timing – of what is the right time to do things, or how
42 people pace themselves over time as a way of creating evidence for what they do
43 or creating conditions that enable them to discern just how they affect the city
and how the city affects them. These considerations go beyond calculations of

1 risk – of just how much can be risked with what one has access to – or of savings,
2 of deferring certain decisions or consumption to a future time in order to
3 maximize abilities, impact or scale. Rather, they entail the very conditions of
4 living in the city themselves.

5 The majority of urban residents in many cities of the postcolony remain
6 outside of the ‘count’ – not in terms of their demography or occupations, but
7 in terms of how little their lives and how they organize them have been taken
8 into account. How much do we really know about the ways in which artisans,
9 civil servants, storekeepers, drivers, market sellers, small-scale producers,
10 teachers, service workers, repairers and police live their lives in today’s
11 megacities, and how they shape them? Yet, the capacities of such residents to
12 operate as a majority – a site through which livelihoods could be constructed
13 that simultaneously depended upon and circumvented wage labour, that con-
14 solidated particular territorial and occupational identities in a specific place but
15 yet largely used them as a platform from which to engage in highly flexible,
16 provisional and mobile relations with many different ‘walks of life’ – also
17 depended upon being kept out of the count. They depended upon circumvent-
18 ing measurement and clear ascription or sites of political objective (Chatterjee,
19 2004; Fawaz, 2008).

20 The count is avoided precisely because the majority operates at those sites of
21 urban life most maximally capable of facilitating the simultaneous negotiation
22 of such different walks of life (Bayat, 2009; Benjamin, 2008; Elyachar, 2005;
23 Goldstein, 2004; Haber, 2006; Konings *et al.*, 2006). Thus, they live in a time
24 where their own consolidation as ‘the majority’ – a self-recognized cohesion of
25 interests and practices aimed at taking power – is not the political ideal, not the
26 objective of their efforts (Badiou, 2006). At the same time, while residents may
27 seek to maximize their potentials to remake themselves in multiple ways along
28 the ever-changing trajectories of urbanized interactions, they also know that
29 eventually they must at least act accountable as ‘one thing’ – as a coherent,
30 visibly self-managed entity.

31 Using Meillassoux’s (2007) discussion of Bergson and Deleuze and the
32 countervailing trajectories of becoming, we are reminded that living is not so
33 much reflective of a process of interested choice but rather the mobilization of
34 disinterest in the real. This disinterest constitutes the basis of perception. Here,
35 only specific segments of what takes place, of what ‘matters’, constitutes the
36 entirety of what is perceived. Choices are made among various options, but only
37 following the action of the body which rules out the availability of an infinity of
38 images; which has already screened out a wide range of images at various
39 temporal and spatial scales. If reality and matter have ‘all the rhythms of
40 duration, then perception is the selection of one of the rhythms of a matter-
41 image which contains each and every material quantity’ (2007: 81). Matter is
42 intercepted in that it becomes superficial as it is enveloped in perception. Within
43 perception, matter does not cease to be itself but rather is subject to a ‘detour’,
44 a ‘break’, a means through which a non-organic past is constituted for the
procession of the living being.

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1 For the living being to mobilize itself within a given environment, for it to act
2 within it, requires what Deleuze (1986) calls a ‘disinterested interest’ – a way of
3 engaging the world that has no recourse to ‘step out’ of the flow of events, and
4 therefore must always be willing to affect and be affected by all that surrounds
5 it; yet, at the same time, not to be ‘carried away’ with the flux of that environ-
6 ment. At the same time, something is always happening in a person’s world;
7 something is always interesting, always repositions all that exists in ever-
8 changing relationships. Thus these trajectories of both active and reactive
9 becoming are the conditions of any choice or calculation – that is, where do I put
10 my body, who will I pay attention to, how will I use what resources I have? All
11 of these dimensions have to be perceived and decided upon in city life.

12 Operating in the city requires a surfeit of affect to navigate the multiplicity of
13 ways in which things, spirits, information, materials, bodies, spaces, techniques,
14 forces and differentials pass through each other – come and go, circle and
15 transverse, accumulate, dissipate and fold. To select, cut off, disconnect and
16 screen out the reality that one is fully immersed in and constituted by does not
17 in and of itself constitute spaces of refuge and withdrawal; for a person is fully
18 within this complex concave reality at ‘all times’. The question then becomes:
19 how does one ward off being dissipated in the experiencing of all things ‘at once’
20 in the uninterrupted flood of communication (Terranova, 2004)? This is then a
21 matter of timing, of time not ‘all at once’, but of breaks and detours, of
22 disattention and disinterest, of looking here and not there, of orienting a body
23 to a sense of ‘here and there’ that requires a ‘passing away’ from an incessant
24 passing through (Meillassoux, 2007).

25 This time is not one of development stages, where momentary consolidation of
26 self or collective then provides the ‘answer’ for what will come next. It is not the
27 deployment of memory that contracts space by putting together images and
28 precepts into story lines in order to constitute a present moment that can be
29 managed. It is not the engineering of some ‘critical distance’ from the flow of
30 events so that there might be time to read them as a certain progression embody-
31 ing causation and meaning. Nor is it a process of time being ‘bought’ so that
32 something more real or ideal can eventually emerge; where someone has in mind
33 just what is to come or should come. Rather, the timing talked about here refers
34 to a continuous process of becoming with and within the city, of living on the cusp
35 of that difference – that is, moving with the city in all of its shifts and also orga-
36 nizing a means of inhabitation, something recognizable as a base within all of the
37 flux (Latham and McCormack, 2004). A place, as Deleuze (1986) suggests, where
38 one can ‘set out again’ – where the ‘where’ is not prescribed or always knowable,
39 but where the uncertainty does not foreclose the capacity to act in new ways.

41 **Taking on just enough: *tempeh* producers in Kampung Rawa**

42
43 While there has much been discussion about how local economies need to ‘scale
up’, it is not clear whether the benefits are unequivocal. In the sub-district of

1 Kampung Rawa in central Jakarta, the artisanal production of bean curd *tempeh*
2 has been key local economic activity for decades. It is a business that requires
3 the continuous turnover of production given the value placed on keeping
4 preservatives out of the mix. The vast majority of local producers, with some 80
5 of the city's 700 located in a contiguous series of small lanes in Kampung
6 Rawa, come from a single city, Pekalongan. Production is usually sold in small
7 neighbourhood markets and in street stands at various strategic locations, as
8 well as in orders from caterers. A wide geographic region in the city is covered
9 through this plurality of small producers, with profits accumulated by house-
10 holds concentrated near their workshops. These households are often related
11 through kinship, at the same time that kinship in this sector is rarely a basis of
12 entrepreneurial consolidation. Related small entrepreneurs pursue their busi-
13 nesses individually with little explicit coordination regarding market location or
14 share.

15 Coverage, as a reference to both product distribution and the overall social
16 welfare of producer households, is something more implicit in the entrepre-
17 neurial practices that are deployed. While producers are organized into sub-
18 district and city wide cooperatives, the primary objective of this work is to secure
19 inputs within an affordable price range. This means putting pressure on gov-
20 ernmental bodies to curtail the power of a small number of importers who exert
21 a de facto monopoly on the import of soybeans into the country. As there exists
22 substantial price manipulation by the small number of soy wholesalers, coop-
23 eratives are engaged in the arduous process of attempting to politically curtail
24 this power. The attitude on the part of cooperative leaders is that they will
25 always have markets and the important thing is to guarantee the possibility of
26 reproducing their present capacities.

27 Continuous turnover is not only a function of the short 'shelf-life' of the
28 product but the dependence upon sales as usually the only capital available
29 to keep the operations going. No matter how long the success of an individual
30 producer, there is little investment capital available to upscale production and
31 very little social or economic incentive for producers to work out standardized
32 procedures that would be a key criterion for the agglomeration of enterprises.
33 This is reflected in past temporary attempts to supply larger supermarkets or
34 restaurant groups where supplies are paid for only thirty days after delivery and
35 where a proportion of the costs entailed in unsold items have to be absorbed by
36 the producers. Producers see the risks entailed in this jump in scale as excessive
37 and prefer to carve out their own limited market niches, which usually also
38 involve strong relationships with workers and retailers, often housed by the
39 producers themselves.

40 So instead of an explicit and organized harmonization of quality, markets,
41 production techniques, and business relations, a more implicit coordination
42 occurs through the extensive circulation of information facilitated through
43 kinship and the close proximity in which producers reside. At the same time,
44 each producer operates with his or her own autonomy and sets their price. While
many would not be adverse to securing larger market shares or expanding the

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1 scope of production, few are willing to relinquish their relative autonomy or to
2 assume the risks or indebtedness that such expansion would entail. A limited
3 sense of sufficiency thus prevails, with producers able to gradually improve their
4 living conditions over time and use their long-term endurance as a platform on
5 which to attain positions of local leadership that also are converted into various
6 economic opportunities.

7 This sense of gradualism has been widespread across the districts of central
8 Jakarta – the incremental improvement of living conditions, enterprises, indi-
9 vidual capacities and status over time. Each attainment does not usually open
10 exponentially a larger range of aspirations; residents expect to take their time
11 over a long period of time to make modest changes. In part, this practice ensues
12 from the absence of investment capital or its availability through participation
13 in patronage systems which curtail individual or neighbourhood autonomy. But
14 it also ensues from the evidence generated by others whose risks or naivety
15 wiped out years of effort and available resources. The persistence of politics as
16 essentially a game of money – a game accessible to only those with money and
17 a game dedicated primarily to the extraction rents and payoffs – is reinforced by
18 a widespread popular belief that personal efficacy has to be demonstrated
19 through concrete works and that the safest, most assured way of accomplishing
20 such works is one step at a time. While big political operators might construct
21 fancy houses and throw money around in favours and charity, there are more
22 numerous examples of those who have played the game and not accomplished
23 anything. Evidence for this popular opinion is indeed widespread, but does not
24 necessarily rule out some individual efforts to effect a more ‘productive’ engage-
25 ment with local politics.

26 27 **Knowing when to move and what to take on: the ‘conductor’ of** 28 **Pasar Nangka**

29
30 Abay is a 49-year-old father of two of the best heavy metal musicians in Indo-
31 nesia and a guy who largely grew up on the streets cajoling and hustling for every
32 little opportunity. The big payoff would come in his organizing a defence of
33 local market, Pasar Nangka, with its highly strategic location straddling five
34 different kinds of neighbourhoods. He expelled gangsters who were using the
35 market to gamble and sell drugs. While the struggle was protracted, his key
36 decision was to keep the market open around the clock, organize clear thor-
37 oughfares and generally make it a place where everyone could safely come at all
38 hours. To keep the market open around the clock, Abay trained and organized
39 a ‘night staff’ made up of some the most marginal ‘losers’ in the area, giving
40 them a chance for steady employment, even if at a cut-rate wage. Widespread
41 use of under-invoicing and direct contacts with farmers – avoiding the use of
42 middlemen – ensured that prices were lower than any other market in the region,
43 thus guaranteeing a high volume of turnover, a percentage of which he and his
‘staff’ extracted for various services, such as cleaning and security.

1 Instead of pocketing all of the proceeds he bought up property in the sur-
2 rounding area for a variety of ancillary businesses to take advantage of prox-
3 imity to the market and developed opportunities for the wholesaling of rice in a
4 partly successful effort to break the hold of long-established monopolies. Part of
5 these new expansions was used to house traders in the market, as well as his
6 staff. He also lobbied for the placement of an official police post at the entrance
7 of the market, literally subcontracting out security to those who are legally
8 culpable for enforcing it. All of these efforts cemented a great deal of loyalty,
9 and loyalty in turn generated financial rewards.

10 During the entirety of this process, Abay had no formally sanctioned role in
11 the market, which officially fell under the purview of a municipal association of
12 small enterprises and as such, was not even registered as a market. This manoeuvre
13 which kept the official market authority, Pasar Jaya, out of administrative
14 control, and thus the extraction of service fees and taxes, entailed a modicum of
15 dissimulation on the part of both Abay and the traders as certain infrastructures
16 usually associated with markets had to be kept in abeyance and the general
17 appearance one of marked informality – even as trading and transportation
18 were highly organized.

19 Such success engenders jealousy and, therefore, Abay must always be con-
20 scious of protecting his position, which accounts for his involvement in party
21 politics – that is, to keep himself visible as a force to be reckoned with. While
22 Abay has over time acquired a cleaning service business and owns several
23 properties, he has no real political ambitions himself. He has his niche and has
24 used this niche to make steady but gradual improvements in his life conditions
25 and status. Rather politics, for Abay, is performance art – always making it
26 seem as if something is taking place, whether its alliances, conflicts, coalitions or
27 campaigns, when they are not yet in operation. It always seems that Abay
28 knows something that everyone else doesn't know but feels that they should
29 know and thus can't act as if they don't know it. Concretely, this ruse translates
30 into a game where Abay receives 'consultant fees' from various ministries for
31 bringing together different actors from his district of Kemayoran for work-
32 shops, capacity building sessions, and so forth, and where each participant
33 collects an honorarium for their participation – a process that further endears
34 Abay to a wider range of people. With wider connections and acquaintances,
35 Abay can also play as an intermediary for those who need masses in the can-
36 didacy for public office.

37 It also helps that Abay plays the part of a kind of gregarious 'fool'
38 who continuously disarms people by his 'ingenuous' forthrightness. But
39 Abay is certainly no fool, and part of this is that he has always been careful
40 never to overreach, never to take on too much, and thus not to owe anyone
41 anything. He talks about how many of his close peers he grew up with have
42 gone on to important positions in ministries and enterprises, but also indi-
43 cates how obligated and thus confined they have become, always careful about
44 what they say and do, whereas he feels he is basically free to do what he
wants.

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The heterogeneity of time: managing lives as projects

1
2
3 What do urban residents experience as the heterogeneity of time? Increasingly,
4 the operations of developers, attempting to maximize ground rent through
5 the large-scale production of uniform living space, convey a message of equal
6 access for residents to a 'larger world'. As more residents situate themselves
7 in large-scale apartment blocks, serviced by shopping complexes with their
8 array of conventional retailers and a standardized menu of amenities, the
9 idea is that whatever histories residents may bring to the superblock, the scale
10 offered has the capacity to absorb these diversities. Absorption in this instance
11 becomes a modality of neutralization rather than a capacity to use these
12 histories as a resource in unfolding particular economies and residential
13 practices.

14 In cities like Jakarta, this promise of detachment can be attractive to an
15 emerging or aspirant middle class that realizes that flexibility in affiliation, taste
16 and commitment is necessary for successful careers. As the residential offerings
17 of the superblock are tailored for nucleated families, residence within them also
18 serves as a way to mitigate having to respond to kinship obligations, even if in
19 many instances improvised adjustments are made to house multiple generations.
20 The residential infrastructure, along with the emphasis on religious renewal,
21 lifestyle and regimens of constant training and re-skilling across many cities,
22 reiterates the message that for the individual to be eligible for success they must
23 attenuate parochial orientations, family obligations and preoccupation with
24 narrowly drawn social and personal identities. Superblocks thus become forms
25 of erasure; they are not so much marketed in terms of what they are in and of
26 themselves, but what they permit – that is, physical and social mobility, con-
27 venience, personal autonomy, security, managerial authority and proximity to
28 critical resources.

29 Many residents who choose superblock residence have grown up in highly
30 dense and mixed districts where former practices and institutions of social
31 solidarity are waning and where local economies are increasingly overcrowded,
32 resulting in the expansion of insecurity and illicit livelihoods. While having
33 neighbours with different backgrounds, capacities and schedules may avail
34 households to various supports and inexpensive services, the maintenance of
35 functional relations may entail more frequent and arduous negotiations.
36 Demands are increasingly viewed as excessive. Parents worry more about ensur-
37 ing a 'good' environment for raising children. As more economically successful
38 households move out of these districts, pressures are compounded by introduc-
39 ing new, more 'footloose' residents. These residents usually reside temporarily in
40 houses that have been converted into short-term rental accommodation – most
41 often by owners who have relocated elsewhere – or by wealthier residents who
42 buy up property so as to construct new homes or businesses. In each case there
43 is an infusion of residents who are usually less interested in participating in local
44 solidarity practices and are only interested in the specificities of the district as

1 being close to work, as an opportunity to construct at a scale not possible
2 elsewhere, or for speculation.

3 Nevertheless, there remain significant areas in cities like Jakarta where a
4 profusion of heterogeneity persists. The form of this persistence is probably
5 less identifiable through forms of economic cooperation or social solidarity
6 and more in the contiguities of scores of 'material projects' – from the
7 maintenance and repair of existing infrastructure to new construction that
8 proceeds at various speeds and scales. Districts may have specific genealogies.
9 For example, they may have ensued from state initiated projects to allocate
10 land to civil servants from particular ministries or have become the domain
11 of workers in a particular industry or sector. Economic or residential corri-
12 dors may have developed along specific transportation routes, public land,
13 or at the periphery of planned developments. These genealogies may
14 account for how households gained access to basic residential opportunities
15 but often do not tell us much about what households eventually did with this
16 access.

17 As such, districts which were founded with a certain commonality of popu-
18 lation base, land certification and economic development 20–40 years ago
19 usually undergo marked internal differentiation. They become replete with
20 stories of accumulation and loss, of expansion and contraction. These stories
21 are embodied in the shape of land disposition and the built environment.
22 Households beginning with similar platforms of residency have pursued dif-
23 ferent forms of calculating and concretizing opportunity. For example, invest-
24 ments may have been made in consolidating contiguous plots into facilities
25 which combine residential and economic activities. In other instances, plots
26 may have been subdivided to accommodate expanding family size or sold off
27 with residential expansion developed along a vertical trajectory. Original
28 pavilions may not have been altered since their construction, while neigh-
29 bouring plots have 'witnessed' several projects, owners and occupiers come
30 and go. Single streets are often the inventories of discordant values embedded
31 in the very selection of materials used to sustain or remake built projects.
32 The selection of roofing, tiling or frontage – such as ceramics, wood, tin,
33 steel, cinder block, aluminium – not only reflect differences in affordability
34 and assessment of environmental conditions, but also social status and
35 commitment.

36 Some residents aim for a 'summation' of their residence – that is, they wait
37 until they have the financial resources, certification and permits to realize their
38 project all at 'one go'. Others may 'take their time', construct things in stages,
39 aiming to instantiate 'facts on the ground' – that is, additions that aim to secure
40 a *fait accompli* in terms of particular claims to land use or economic activity.
41 They may not have yet secured permission to build or operate but select ways of
42 'going ahead' that convey the sense that erasing what has been done will be too
43 complicated for everyone involved. Yet if eviction does happen, the particular
44 materials used and ways of trying to 'implant' these facts will not incur a
debilitating financial loss or loss of prestige. Still others may simply build slowly

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1 over time, adding some increments to a basic frame or multiplying the use of
2 particular asset or space.

3 While Jakarta law specifies that no substantial changes can be implemented
4 to a resident's plot without the permission of neighbours living on both sides,
5 this is rarely enforceable or even taken seriously by anyone. Thus, household
6 projects are highly individuated and uncoordinated. Conflicts and negotiations
7 may come from excessive consumption of collective resources, such as water,
8 power and sanitation. But again, these projects are rarely elaborated at a scale
9 that would register substantial disjunction in the resources consumed. While
10 neighbourhoods will be full of talk about who is doing what and comparing
11 resident access to money and opportunity, the most 'accomplished' of projects –
12 in terms of the size or money spent – will not necessarily stand out, either as the
13 concretization of what is to be aspired to or as the exemplar of efficacy. What is
14 important is the sheer diversity of time-lines, that it is possible for so many
15 different kinds of projects of the built environment to exist in close proximity to
16 each other and that this diversity has been generated by people who still manage
17 to know each other, and provide each other the basic elements of space and
18 solidarity.

19 Whereas participation in specific sectors of the local economy, such as print-
20 ing, textiles, furniture, automobile parts and repair may be largely a matter of
21 ethnic affiliation, and whereas each household network, neighbourhood or
22 ethnic group may aim to make sure that they are involved in each facet making
23 up a sector, the shape of individual built environment projects seems to break
24 with such patterns. A given ethnic group may prefer a certain style or organi-
25 zation of space, but there are no lesser or greater diversities in these projects
26 when ethnic affiliation is factored into consideration.

27 This is heterogeneity that goes beyond negotiation and planning. As it reflects
28 the diversity of individual narratives – of work, networks, personal decisions,
29 institutional belongings – it shows just how the city opens up a plurality of life
30 trajectories and that this plurality need not be an impediment to co-inhabitation
31 in densely populated spaces. This is not to say that in such districts there are no
32 conflicts or structural dynamics that disentangle long-term relationships of col-
33 laboration and solidarity. It is clear across cities everywhere that the forms
34 through which we have relied upon in the past to think about collaboration are
35 probably no longer salient or available. Instead of viewing the plurality of
36 projects – often seemingly hodge-podge, without adequate planning or regula-
37 tion – as a deficiency in need of better coordination, it may be the very evidence
38 of a deepening of possibilities for livelihood within given spatial parameters, as
39 well as a basis to think through new forms of economic cooperation and scale.
40 Efficiencies in service provisioning systems do require forms of harmonization,
41 but too often the language or coding systems through which harmonization is
42 recognized as operative require excessive homogenization of the visual land-
43 scape. There is often limited appreciation as well for the ways in which very
44 different looking built projects manage to adjust themselves to the lines of basic
standards.

1 **Weighing confidence and caution: or how to operate under the radar**

2
3 If stories are a particular spatialization of ways in which people connect to each
4 other, then what kind of stories buy people time to attain some level of confi-
5 dence in what they are doing? When do particular stories come to dominate
6 collective imaginations in ways that seem to foreclose the possibilities of people
7 doing different things with each other, of 'taking charge' of their lives in new
8 ways? Do certain stories come to the fore that attribute histories and capacities
9 to particular actors which may be a functional abbreviation of complex events
10 but also leave many things out? Are the capacities and events left out – seemingly
11 marginalized by these stories – at a disadvantage in terms of what they are able
12 to actually do by virtue of being left out? Or, for the 'time being', is such
13 occlusion a beneficial tactical manoeuvre? In other words, does everything that
14 happens in a locality – whether it is a neighbourhood, economic sector or
15 network of institutions – attain a wider range of possibilities by being included
16 in the stories that come to represent it?

17 In the locality of Bungur in the Senen district of central Jakarta, just down the
18 road from Kampung Rawa, the accelerated growth of the printing industry
19 during the last ten years has substantially changed the character of the area. It
20 has enfolded former residential areas as extensions of commerce and drawn in
21 local households to the lowest level of subcontracting. While artisanal printing
22 has existed in this area for a long time, in part due to its proximity to one of the
23 city's major transportation hubs, the extensive agglomeration of designers,
24 lithographers, cutters, finishers, maquette producers, plate makers and digital
25 operators is a more recent phenomenon. The consolidation of a district that
26 encompasses all facets of the printing industry, as well as its ability to service
27 almost any customized order in a short period of time – given the wide range of
28 artisanal production centres that co-exist with larger scale, but more standard-
29 ized operations – enables it to dominate the printing market across the country.
30 This is also made possible by its ability to peg pricing to its management of a
31 broad range of trans-shipment opportunities, so that quick turnarounds can be
32 actualized through linkage of the district to various air freight services. Eco-
33 nomic efficiency is evidenced in the fact that yearly growth of the sector in the
34 district has tripled the previous year's expansion in each of the past five years.

35 Still, local officials and residents widely bemoan the loss of their district.
36 Perhaps more importantly, they feel that there is little they can do to either
37 secure some benefit from the industry or to engage it as a mechanism to pursue
38 their own particular development agendas in Bungur. To a large extent these
39 concerns are completely legitimate. There are few environmental controls to
40 deal with increased volumes of toxic waste and local authorities have few juris-
41 dictional powers to enforce specific regulations dealing with commercial and
42 employment practices. Local opportunities are largely defined in terms of hiring
43 residents to manage parking or to perform low end tasks such as page compi-
44 lation or binding. Most of those who populate the sector are designated as

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1 having come from the outside; many artisans indeed apprenticed with firms that
2 were once located elsewhere and the printing business has integrated those
3 having relevant skills, which in most cases have not included local residents
4 whose primary economic activities were in other sectors.

5 But the key story told over and over again about changes in the district
6 centres on almost absolute dominance of the printing industry by Indonesians of
7 Chinese descent. Ten Indo-Chinese firms are seen as controlling almost every
8 aspect of the industry, to the extent that their supposed control of market access,
9 information, and orders gives them the capability to define how the hundreds of
10 differentially scaled workshops and factories in the district are articulated. So
11 even though the vast majority of actual producers may come from a broad range
12 of Indonesian ethnic backgrounds, the ways in which they are connected along
13 a series of forward and backward linkages – in terms of who gets orders in terms
14 of volume, specialization and frequency – is represented as the purview of these
15 ten firms.

16 It is true that the capital investments entailed in the technology of preparing
17 photographic plates are usually only available to Chinese entrepreneurs, and
18 thus their concomitant ability to control this essential aspect of the industry
19 automatically propels them into a commanding position. This is often translated
20 into an ability to function as the key intermediaries steering the sequence of the
21 production process through artisans specializing in one or more aspects of it.

22 Still, anyone, no matter how big or small along the chain of the production
23 process can serve as an intermediary. You can take a job to the smallest of
24 artisans with the guarantee that he or she will steer the job through the system.
25 Though it may be infrequent, each artisan maintains his or her own relation-
26 ships across a wide network of others; they know what each is capable of doing;
27 they know that they have considerable latitude in negotiating a final price or in
28 delivering reciprocal favours so as to broaden their access to a potential market.
29 While they may largely depend upon the capabilities of the Chinese firms to
30 secure a steady market share for themselves, this does not foreclose their own
31 abilities to map out and negotiate their own ‘pathways’ through the production
32 process. Unlike the Chinese firms with their large sunk costs and their tendencies
33 to transfer significant profit shares to larger ethnic-based entrepreneurial group-
34 ings, these artisans are not obligated to act as intermediaries and rather some-
35 times use the position as a means of ‘experimenting’ with different ways of
36 articulating themselves to other actors in the printing sector.

37 While local residents rather than artisans are usually the ones responsible for
38 the attributions of Chinese dominance, small artisans have little interest in
39 making visible any countervailing evidence. While they may not doubt their
40 potential ability to pool resources and organize to circumvent the power of the
41 Chinese – as reflected in their control of essential yet expensive machinery – they
42 also know that the risks incumbent in such a move are too great. The willingness
43 to accede to these popular stories about the Chinese can thus act as a screen, not
44 only to project the concerns and worries of a community in transition, but also
as a means to be off the radar screen. In other words, they have the space to

1 experiment as intermediaries in a highly competitive business where success at
2 the top requires the ability to include a broad range of small artisan producers
3 within a company's orbit and to find ways of setting them against each other so
4 as to keep costs as low as possible.

5 When small artisans offer to play as intermediaries they usually have a
6 different motivation in mind: to explore relationships that can find their own
7 pace, that need not be reproduced time and time again as a means of protecting
8 a high risk investment, and that potentially can lead to other things having
9 little to do with the printing business per se and its schedules and exigencies.
10 These efforts are not to be construed as a business challenge or a means of
11 consolidating greater sectoral control. This is why the majority of such artisans
12 tend to leave the Chinese alone and let them play the part of some essential
13 overseer.

14 What is troubling in the use of this story line, however, is the apparent
15 inability of the local residential community to 'see through it'; to see a way of
16 getting through this story in order to take some greater advantage of the pres-
17 ence of this growing economic sector. Too often they seem to absolve their
18 responsibility by turning themselves into victims. But given the dissatisfaction
19 that many residents had in the character of their conditions separate from the
20 growth of the printing business, even this performance of being victim may, as
21 one *imam* at a local mosque told me, function as a kind of a ruse. According to
22 him, community residents have been looking for ways out of the community for
23 some time but were reluctant to make final decisions given the way in which land
24 values were rising and felt that they should hold on a little longer. But with this
25 story line of Chinese dominance and their own inability to do anything about it,
26 residents can disentangle themselves from this dilemma, feel free to finally decide
27 to leave, and with the increasing demands for commercial space, can sell and
28 move on.

29 30 **Conclusion: anticipating the common**

31
32 Given the uncertainties and frequent hardships of city life, residents can be risk
33 adverse and sometimes lack confidence in their abilities to create new opportu-
34 nities. Sometimes it can seem as if entire districts are basically pursuing the same
35 limited strategies of accumulation. Still, livelihood remains largely contingent
36 upon a politics of anticipation – of not only canvassing the actual initiatives of
37 others, but sensing what could have been done, what could have taken place. It
38 isn't that what doesn't occur is necessarily ruled out, blocked or neglected, but
39 is rather suggested, made possible by virtue of not having been decided, of being
40 almost left to others. Anticipation may then 'traffic' in ways of doing things that
41 may go unnoticed, provide cover for others, or provoke a wide range of varied
42 responses. All of this buys time for residents trying on different initiatives for
43 'size', without having to make definitive commitments or to find ways to fit them
into whatever is established.

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1 Anticipation is not directed to a final known outcome or a specific objective,
2 but rather a way of applying whatever is attained at a given moment to a set of
3 different possibilities. Rather than working to coordinate a series of clear objec-
4 tives and capacities, the practices of inhabitation in central Jakarta continue to
5 emphasize the cultivation of ways of building, living, making money, calculating
6 and deciding that do not necessarily fit well together or make explicit reference
7 to each other. Nevertheless, they provide evidence of a certain efficacy for highly
8 individuated practices of urban living. Thus the commonality of residents is not
9 so much located in negotiated mutual understandings but in the stretching of the
10 parameters of what can count as viable without having to assign any particular
11 course of action with a counted value. New residents, money and ideas are
12 pouring into these districts, just as long-term residents adamantly find ways to
13 reiterate a sense of continuity. Time is then something that happens in between
14 registration, between the count – that is, in between different trajectories of
15 change and continuity, different experimentations and cautions, and where each
16 singular path expands that which can be taken as common.

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