# Chapter 15

# Sociability and Endurance in Jakarta

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Instead of devolving into chaos or becoming more proficient copycat imitations of their northern counterparts, could it be that the big metropolitan areas of the so-called Global South are concretising new ways of 'becoming' cities – ones which make broader and more judicious use of the varied actors who inhabit them? Is it possible that even as the familiar tropes of collaboration, autoconstruction and informality are fading, new formations of collective life, less readily discernible, are coming to the fore, and in ways that alter the social arrangements and subjective experiences of being in the city? These questions inform an exploration that will focus largely on Jakarta but also touches implicitly on other metropolitan areas across the 'majority world'.

Cities of this 'majority world' share an important sense of the 'afterwards' – after apartheid, colonialism, authoritarian rule or partition – but this common disjuncture, while important in accounting for particular trajectories of spatial and economic organisation, does not in itself point to shared horizons. Most cities of Africa, Asia and Latin America have been subjected by and articulate subjectivity through the simultaneous application of highly contradictory, contentious, experimental and formularised modalities of city making. This means that social and material formations are always being undone as they are being remade and then undone again.

These oscillations give rise to different forms of collective life, sometimes operative through discernible associations and social movements, at other times through more implicit, provisional modalities of collaboration. Here, households ensure that they are surrounded by and embedded in heterogeneous relational fields which compel them to negotiate the practicalities of everyday life with different walks of life, affiliations and networks. Local economies were built from small initiatives undertaken by households to incite collaboration from others. A continuous

process of adjustments ensued as residents tried to make their own initiatives fit together or sidestep each other in order to attain larger scales or decentralise larger operations into more specialised production or service. But often these efforts did not aim for specific objectives charted in advance.

As in Deleuze's (1989) notion of the missing people, sociality is always yet to be completed, always inclusive of conjunctions of all kinds. Related directly to the very structuration of language with its plurality of references and specificity, that which is yet to be built is reliant upon the impersonal that need not identify a specific subject. Thus an assemblage of residents, for example, do not conjoin activities or their proximity to each other in order to attain the status or experience of a 'community', some coherent whole that explains and accounts for their coming together. Rather, the conjunction becomes the possibility of 'saying something' that need not be summed up, saying something that need not have specific parameters of efficacy or objectivity, something that 'keeps people going' in and through transformations that are without precedent in the sense that they need not represent the culmination of a goal or necessity.

Given these insights of Deleuze, what are the practices that keep the people of Jakarta 'going'? What are the terms of endurance, the mixtures of games, moves and orientations that produce sociability? Much of the interaction among the residents of Jakarta never went anywhere, often never accomplished anything. But instead of this apparent failure acting as a deterrent, it tended to keep the game going.

The difficulties of everyday life in places like São Paulo, Lagos, Jakarta or Karachi feed an intense hunger for justice and equity. But there is also a general wariness of pinning things down too much, of instituting policies where capacities and conditions are calculated and compared. There is often a preference for keeping things incomplete. Everyday life may be full of antagonisms, misconstrued behaviours, evasions, tricks and manipulations, but they are also the conditions that give inhabitants something to work with, something to try and put right, something that brings people together who otherwise would keep their distance, and thus a platform for the incessant rehearsal of different ways to 'work things out'. Now, of course, this can be labour-intensive and a strain for residents already overwhelmed with trying to make ends meet. But it is in these rehearsals that residents often feel that new vistas are opened up, where at least they are exposed to worlds otherwise inaccessible, even though there are no guarantees that they can take advantage of them.

## Experimental Enactments of Everyday Life

Cities are arenas where the proximity of differences is often stark. Take, for example, the relatively new Kalibata City complex in central Jakarta. Part replication of the now standardised middle- to upper-middle-class all-in-one apartment blocks combining residences, shopping mall, leisure zones, schools and social services and part low-cost, densely packed towers of small flats, social class divisions are built into the very spacing and composition of dwelling. Class divisions are also reinforced by the availability of parking spaces and other amenities. Roughly 30,000 people live in the complex and, unlike many other similar developments, there has been some effort made to landscape ground levels with scores of small shops, restaurants, coffee houses and public spaces. As residents are thrown together in an environment with limited history and situated in a context where relations of authority and civility can no longer rely upon the mores and practices of long-honed, thickly enmeshed residential/commercial districts, those who live in Kalibata are still trying to figure ways of working with and around each other. Lower-income residents (in the 'lower' zone) find ways to take advantage of their proximity to those middle-class residents (in the 'upper' zone).

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

The small shops and cafes attract and curate niche groups and audi-

ences at different times of the day, e.g. older men who live with younger women, older women who live with younger men, women in polygamous marriages who want to have 'legitimate' sex and children but don't particularly want the burden of living with a full time husband, and other couplings of various genders and sexual preferences. The commercial and public spaces are aligned in such a way as to separate out lifestyles and sexual performances that might clash, but to keep them in a mutual view sufficient to satisfy curiosities, permit tentative forays across thresholds or at least temper the inclination of any one constellation of actors to impose their codes of propriety upon the others.

These are filiations that seek no definitive reproductions; they are not intended to stabilise a genealogy, but rather to keep unravelling and refiguring strata of activity, continuously repositioning individuals in terms of each other so as to broaden horizons of opportunity and vantage point. They bring into play different actors, scales, niches and situations, but in ways that are not organised hierarchically, that do not accrete experience into an accumulative narrative of attainments. As Deleuze and Guattari point out in their discussion of the concept of involution as an intensification of growing difference:

> Becoming is a rhizome, not a classificatory or genealogical tree. Becoming is certainly not imitating, or identifying with something; neither is it regressing-progressing; neither is it corresponding, establishing corresponding relations; neither is it producing, producing a filiation or through filiation. Becoming is a verb with consistency on its own. (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 239)

In many respects, Jakarta has opted for grandiosity, square footage, door-to-door automobility and the banal spectacles of mass consumption. But the bulk of its residents still try to eke new, virtuous basins and pathways from the intensely punctured material environment that they have repeatedly distorted, generating new inclines and surfaces. The resultant curvatures roll things, people and opportunities their way, as they are rolled toward others in some tentative formulations of a project. This is what Levi Bryant (2014) calls a 'terraformation', a material and semiotic framework that enables disparate people and things to intersect and generate new trajectories of movement and becoming.

Despite the grandiosity and mass consumption, experimentation continues to thrive, perhaps just barely, and in a way that may exemplify Deleuze and Guattari's (1987: 238–9) notion of involution as a kind of striving that has no particular end in sight. Residential space in my Jakarta district, Tebet, can be described as a collection of projects. Even

if the term 'project' has been overly tainted with neoliberal connota-
tions, a popular sensibility remains that everybody has got to have a
project. When people say they live in the 'projects', they are not talking
about social housing; they are not talking about being warehoused in
run-down areas. In some respects, a lot of Jakarta is run-down, but not
because stuff is no longer happening. Too much might be going on, too
many projects. Residents have their domiciles, their households and
their stuff. But they mostly live elsewhere; they live large, in the sense
that a person tries to turn whatever they have access to into something
other than what it is at the moment. A house becomes part of something
else, like part of a chain of making or distributing things, information
or influence. A street is divided up, not into turf (although turf exists),
but more often into particular concentrations or specialisations which
then have the street as a conduit to each other, a physical medium of
relationship.

Some projects rework long-term kinship, commercial and political
'lineages', extruding wide effects, problems and potentials. There are
people who have known and worked with each other for a long time
and have played off their different capacities in ways that are able to
absorb new blood, which brings fresh ideas and momentum. Sometimes
it is hard for people to remain 'solid' and avoid clashing with others,
but competing projects are usually able to step 'sideways', again trying
to do something different with what they have. Importantly, projects
fold in the remains of depleted, overworked, under-utilised, practically
disposed institutions, buildings and other facilities as points of reference,
launching pads and frames of legitimacy.

Projects depend on investigation: you look to where people gather,
wait, enter or exit, where there is a moment of hesitation, and you
think about what you can put in front of them, what they could see
and experience, and then buy or talk about to someone else. You step
outside of your front door and you look at the different angles, lines of
sight; you see how one thing leads to another, and how the different
ways where you are standing are connected to a larger surrounding.
You try and figure out ways to work the distance between you and all
that could be gathered up by something you could do with others that
you already know, some kind of coordinated operation. Because if you
look inside people's houses, you realise just how much stuff has been
'locally sourced' by such operations, how many things have been fixed
or invented. Some projects are about operating across various gaps and
enclosures. Canals, intersections, administrative boundaries have to
be crossed. Empty lots and vacant spaces can be filled in for the time

being. While collaborative effort among residents may seem like putting together individuals in some mathematical set, it is usually more an intermeshing of projects. While norms, policy and law may guide the melding and coordinating of individuals and corporate entities, they may have little traction with projects that are imagined and enacted with shifting casts of characters, terrain, objectives and results.

Of course there are institutions whose functions are widely understood and which have clearly delineated rights and responsibilities. But how do you regulate a project that entails stringing together a bunch of cheap eating places on the slim verge between property fronts and the street for taxi drivers who take breaks along a small public park, places that operate as expansion businesses for those who are losing customers from their cafes in a nearby social housing project to a rash of fast-food chains around the corner? How do you link these projects to a thrice-weekly night market that a local Islamic school rents out to a group of itinerant preachers to sell cheap goods to young kids not old enough to take their motorcycles to the nearest shopping malls?

What holds a project together? Part of the 'holding' entails spatial impressions, as if particular 'pressings' of space create inclines which move people and projects toward or away from each other. In quite literal ways, any two steps you take in Jakarta will seldom be the same. Strides are interrupted by a ground that is dented and twisted from the propulsions of use and the turbulence of the surface. Space is twisted, folded, forced open and shut with structures both makeshift and permanent. There is stuff everywhere – carts, wheels, tyres, wood, metal planks, tiles, tools, shards, dirt that is pieced together as containers, stages, exhibitions, hiding places.

Another facet of holding involves propagating lures, eliciting or inciting attention and proximity, by which projects are lured toward meetings, toward a situation of unanticipated discovery and negotiation. Projects are also lured away from each other, into thinking that the 'real deal' is located somewhere else than it actually is, or lured into a position where a project may have only limited access and influence over another. Lures are often matters of gesture rather than discourse, a matter of performances that exude a kind of magic or mystery to be uncovered. Lures are conveyors of the elusive – what you see is not what you get – and thus the impetus for a mimesis where projects attempt to cloak themselves in the guise of another as a way of penetrating to the heart of things.

In this way, projects are always 'on the run'. Even if the same people, materials and objectives remain inextricably affiliated to them, projects

move through each other, and sometimes duck and dive, avoiding undertows and onslaughts or riding the crests of waves. These are the interplays of those who aim to map themselves on the radar and those who wish to remain off it, those who attempt to spread out, expand, take over and those who enfold and insulate themselves. Expanding households and kin relationships, the consolidation of external resources inward, insertions into the slivers among contested or dominated areas, the keeping of everything in view and the selective veiling of events and bodies, the parcelling out of functions and places and the erasures of divisions – all are manoeuvres in the polyrhythmic composition of projects.

What is also important in all of these performances and manoeuvrings are the things that do not get done, do not take place. For the intermeshing and circumventions of projects do not take care of everything. They do not pick up all of the trash; they do not rescue or remove all of that which decays; there are not continuous updates and renovations. Traumas fester, some people and areas appear immobilised as if caught in some time warp; contiguous persons and structures may march completely out of step.

Yet sociability can exist among project situations where no one is pushed aside, where capacities unfold in tandem even where exchanges are marked by inequity. For example, subcontracting work involving manual labour to small, unregulated units is a common project for the medium-size commercial enterprises focused on printing, textiles, electronics and household goods. Sometimes exclusive relationships are forged, but more often these small units take piecework from wherever they can get it. Hours are long, wages are low and working conditions can be hazardous. While formally being exploited by and dependent upon big players, most of the 'small-time' workers know that the 'real' money, as well as innovation, comes from those instances when the small units gather themselves together to develop their own 'lines', and then feed them into parallel wholesale and retail circuits. Such projects have to take place under the radar, since the bigger enterprises are well connected to dominate the official circuits of marketing and exchange. Yet, these projects, which ebb and flow through shifting assemblages of the small, can turn out goods and services at cheaper prices and equivalent quality. Everyone seems to know this game of projects is taking place, and it continues as long as it doesn't draw too much attention to itself.

## Intersecting the City

In my Jakarta neighbourhood, called Tebet, I live near a 'problematic' intersection. It is problematic in that it requires continuous assessment of how much time is needed to get out of the immediate surroundings into the larger city. The surroundings are replete with meandering roadways that empty out onto this intersection. It is a place of convergence for crowds of pedestrians and hawkers and for the loading and unloading of goods. It brings together the two main flow-through traffic pathways. Because of these features, the intersection is subject to oscillating gaps and closures, unpredictable rhythms of congestion and circulation.

Now think of all of the occurrences, activities, events and gestures that take place at any given time in a neighbourhood like Tebet. Think how we commonly explain the causes and effects of all of these occurrences. Think about how we assess the impact we have on other people's lives and the impact these lives have on our own. Much of what we think is possible in this regard has much to do with the infrastructure of how bodies, things and words are connected, what can be seen or heard, what kinds of arrangements of bodies and materials allow for things to circulate. But also think of the possibility that any of the things that take place at a given time in Tebet might have an effect on each other outside of any seemingly plausible or visible form of mediation. That somehow things intersect across distance and difference, coming together in all kinds of 'strange' constellations and circuits of causation.

So this intersection in Tebet is not just a physical feature of the neighbourhood. It also marks the frontiers of shifting basins of consolidation that fold in events and materials whose interactions would tend to ramify outwards, away from each other, or bring together occurrences and actors that would seem to have no basis to connect or connect only in arbitrary, chance encounters. Different kinds of residents and economic activities that might otherwise not pay attention to each other end up dealing with each other in unanticipated durations of time. This is not only because the transportation grid lends implicit structural definition to chunks of space, but also because the intensity and range of the activities and actors and their reverberations at the intersection are selectively incorporated as the impetus and content of more or less stabilised basins of residence and commercial and social activity within given chunks of local space. Local solidities take place not only because particular kinds of people and activities are next to each other or because they have histories and concepts that enable them to discern commonalities, but also because they rely upon alternating currents and patterns

in the intersection of different streams and networks that provide food, services, materials repair, leisure time and information that are gathered up in changing bundles in a particular space. No small sub-neighbourhood can simply depend upon one particular way of doing things and getting things done, of accessing supports and services. There have to be many possible alternatives for enacting the solidity of a place if it is not to simply atrophy and fall apart.

The entirety of the city is in some sense enacted at the intersection in various durations and manifestations, and congestion is not just a matter of too much traffic. Congestion is also an indication of the plurality of linkages at work, which residents selectively pay attention to or withdraw from. It is evidence of all of the places people are going, as the area around the destination is both a point of arrival and a point of departure. These arrivals and departures are coated with intensities of aspiration, fatigue and the weight of influences of all kinds. The surroundings of this intersection in Tebet are particularly heterogeneous because they contain facilities for servicing the needs and aspirations of the very different kinds of residents who live in the area. These needs and aspirations are in turn inscribed in space, through the forms of property, design, consumption and exposure.

The availability of these surroundings to particular people and uses ensue from diverse histories of land consolidation and tenure, zoning, resettlement and legal frameworks which are tied to various documents, policies, political mechanisms, institutions, calculations of pricing and compositions of capital. The plurality of objects that have to be affiliated in 'working relationships' which follow from these histories, produce seemingly untenable densities when coupled with the sheer number of cars, trucks and motorbikes on road layouts not easily rearranged without substantially disrupting hard-won, yet constantly renegotiated, balances among intensely discrepant uses and users of the area. The pathways have to follow the documents and sentiments as the pathways also structure these documents and sentiments at the same time.

It is also conceivable that the congestion at the intersection could be replaced with a different kind of congestion. Lateral interchanges that could enable those who reside in this area to work and live with each other in radically different formats could be actionable through comprehensive detachments of a greater number of residents from their involvement in other parts of the city. This would require a realignment of resource allocation and a self-constituted web of affordances that maximise mutual care and synergies of skill and income. In other words, there exists the virtual potential for an intensification of residents

working, socialising, administering, producing and distributing within the immediate surroundings themselves. If it is possible that anything that takes place in Tebet could register, and perhaps already is registering, an important impact on everything else outside of the visible infrastructures of cause and effect, why not actively use this as a way of making a different kind of everyday life for those who at least reside in Tebet?

Of course this is unlikely to happen, given the exteriorising deformations of intensive differentiation and the inclinations of people to put distance between themselves and others and as part of the entropic trajectories entailed in the amassing of effort and activity. But this plane of 'virtual consolidation' never ceases to exist as the substrate along which enacted linkages – explicit and implicit – take place to various degrees and in various forms within the different 'neighbourhoods' that mark and are marked by the intersection. What gets connected or remains apart, then, is a matter of ethical decisions, of the dynamics entailed in making the choice to actualise something that exists all along, even though that which has existed all along may not be available to human cognition or to extant forms of calculation and verification. The ethical decision is not based on the evidence, but rather on a conviction that the evidence of the viability of the choice, of the commitment to venture into new arrangements of living, will ensue from the decision itself, but not necessarily inform the capacity of the decision in the first place.

## Sex of the City

In addition to many dilemmas of ethical decision, some processes of interconnection are also about sex. In Tanah Sereal, a particularly rambunctious district of Northern Jakarta, there seems to be a continuously intentional sense of sexual provocation. The district borders on being many things at the same time – slum, up-and-coming middle-class area, repository of sinister characters and a bastion of new found righteousness. It also borders on one of the city's largest small- and medium-scale textile production districts. While there have been significant spillovers in recent years, Tanah Sereal defies being 'turned over' to any dominant economic activity. A small river separates it from the hustle and bustle of Glodok, the historic centre of Chinese commerce. Despite the economic spillovers from other parts of the city, Tanah Sereal tends to accumulate the more 'dirty' and marginal jobs, as well as being known as the place where it is possible to buy all kinds of 'junk'. Painting buildings with an array of wild colours, bright pinks, greens and oranges is rampant; this

tends to divert attention from the dilapidation on all sides, but it can also engender nausea in the casual observer. There are long thorough-fares that seem to go on forever without interruption, but behind these are emplaced tightly packed three- to six-storey buildings separated by narrow lanes that wind their way eventually to an opening where vehicles are able to pass.

Tanah Sereal is a district replete with signs – signs that advertise for non-existent job openings and signs that invite participation in activities that are clearly illegal but which are elaborated with such detail and bear what look to be the authentic signatures of the appropriate authorities so as to constitute some kind of official collective joke. Other signs are offered as warnings that some could even construe as invitations to indulge in the activities prohibited. For example, in the extremely slim frontage of a house painted with an image of red bricks – while a pile of real bricks stand neatly stacked by the front entrance – the owner had planted an orange tree some years back. On an adjoining wall an image of the same tree is painted with a sign that warns that anyone taking an orange will suffer from excruciating bouts of diarrhoea that have a 65 per cent chance of leading to the person's death, and advises that a relevant life insurance policy could be taken out at an address which is provided. On another wall a few minutes' walk away, there is another large sign in which residents are invited to register a mark whenever they have had a particularly 'good time' in bed, an invitation which seems to both be taken seriously and to elicit all kind of salacious comments; these sit alongside pasted announcements of lectures at the local mosque on the importance of morality.

Most districts similar in look and composition to Tanah Sereal in Jakarta are usually eager to participate in the frequent contests held by municipal authorities to beautify and green their areas. But some residents in Tanah Sereal respond to these invitations with graffiti that disparagingly point to the secret wish of power brokers to 'send the inhabitants back to the jungle'. Other signs conversely point to the fact that the district is 'already so far from civilisation that there is no turning back now'. Yet others observe that 'beauty is skin deep and it is only what is inside that counts', written in a slang that clearly points to the statement's sexual overtones. Most of the district leaders – the local headmen – are reluctant to talk to outsiders, but one headman, Hari, describes the area over which he presides as an 'Olympic competition for sexual gymnastics'. Hari is a former gangster who won a lot of money gambling, then built a well-equipped Islamic day school, went to make pilgrimage in Mecca and reports spending most of his day in the

mosque because the local women otherwise just 'can't keep their hands off of me'.

Hari's district is a hodge-podge of mostly one- and two-storey small bungalows appearing to heave with the weight of too many people crammed into them. *You see how the buildings seem to sniff each other out; how they try to touch each other in every way possible; I mean we are mostly Muslims here, but looking around, you wouldn't know it.* Pointing to a house across the street from where we are talking, where a public phone booth is set right in the middle of the family's spot for washing clothes, Hari says, *I have no idea how that thing got there, but if someone wants to make a call, it looks like they have to inspect the family's underwear at the same time.* This is a prospect that gets even more daunting as a passing three-wheeled motorcycle cart carrying bottles of water is emblazoned with the sign, 'Daddy just got home and mama is wet'.

Setting aside the erotic dimensions of its construction, Tanah Sereal does participate in different 'collective projects'. Residents along two parallel roads, and the winding pathways that crisscross in the spaces behind them, have been putting up a building for the past several years. Almost the length of a football field and now five stories high, it is a rudimentary construction, slowly being assembled by mostly voluntary labour as the contributions come in. Some of those are financial, but most are in-kind, i.e. materials, labour and political connections to keep the project going. It is a project that would inescapably violate some codes, although residents are serious about it being viably occupied. The building has walls and interior floors, and the surface cladding is almost finished. But it remains to be seen what it will be used for. Individual residents have no shortage of ideas for possible uses, though everyone agrees that it should not be a rooming house to accommodate workers, as residents have already turned over part of their homes to this function. Everyone also agrees that the building should not be divided into individual apartments assigned to each of the residents that have participated in the project.

The headaches entailed in assessing the relative monetary value of different kinds of contributions, assigning volumes of space according to the quantity of assistance contributed or simply dividing up the space equally for all contributing residents are viewed as enormous. In addition, there are no clear ideas about what would constitute the end of the project, at what point the construction will be over. There have been discussions about different scales and temporalities of completion, about assigning specific uses now and getting them ready to be actualised and

leaving more open-ended other parts of the building whose use would be worked out later. There is also recognition that, at some point soon, construction will have to come to an end given the likely onset of structural vulnerabilities that ensue when structures are not used. The conundrum brings out various displays from local power figures, who all want to declare the 'defining moment', but each instance tends to reveal an impoverishment of imagination which seems to act as an incentive for residents to keep on building.

As construction usually proceeds at a snail's pace anyway, the act of continuance does not hurry any irreversible horizon. Discussions remain open, as the building operates more as an occasion for an insistent exploration of options and next moves, most of which never materialise. In this way the building is a technical operation that connects residents to a series of ongoing potentialities. Its actualisation may mean that residents have to narrow their range of options, but since actualisation does appear imminent, another set of conundrums and possibilities is looming.

Amid the jumble of interstices, enclosures and openings that ensue from the interaction of materials and metabolisms, power is mobilised through efforts to posit architectures of possibility. These possibilities entail specific lines of association and distancing, gathering up things as mutually implicated and affected while separating off other possibilities and matters viewed as disallowed and irrelevant. The density of the city is not just that of human bodies but of the multiplicity of possible associations among bodies and various materials. While these associations have been subject to various political technologies of governance and control, there has always been something that slips through, leaks out, overflows or generates long shadows.

The possibilities of life, then, in cities such as Jakarta have depended upon a range of forces, neither virtuous nor demonic, productive nor anarchic, but which do entail 'dangerous' circulations of bodies through materials, atmospheres and transactions whose dispositions are not clear one way or the other. As such, experimentation is never easy, as it is an encounter with an anomalous form of life (Delpech-Ramey 2010).

## To Do Justice

Density is not only about the proximity of bodies. It is also the intermixing of devices – measures, angles, calculations, impulses, hinges, screens, surfaces, soundscapes, exposures, folds, circuitries, layers, tears and inversions. All are instruments for bringing things into association,

where things get their 'bearings' by having a 'bearing' on each other. City life is propelled by this possibility of creating sets of 'bearings', by things having a bearing on each other.

So in some ways all configurations of life and matter in the city are speculative. You can start with components as they 'move' toward something else – place-to-place, body-to-body, body-to-place and so forth. But there is nothing in their trajectories, characters or 'aspirations' that necessarily 'takes' them to each other. Or if there is some overarching 'need', it can only be accounted for from the multiple starting points of the elements themselves. But there is no overarching map which determines how these elements work together. If there is a core essence to the city it is a sense of its *plasticity*, to borrow the term from Catherine Malabou (2008, 2012). It is the incessant exchangeability of substances, where the entanglements of effort, body and stuff constantly reduplicate themselves in ways that do not have to be the same or different, but constantly move on, into and through strange syntheses. Constellations are torn apart and recomposed without relying upon any clear sense of what should have taken place or what must take place. Malabou's notion is important here because it circumvents a preoccupation with flexibility – the assumption that people's urban livelihoods and capacities to adapt exhibit an intensive flexibility, a capability to roll with the punches. This capacity may indicate reservoirs of strength, but also turns particular urban populations into objects of easy imposition. As Malabou indicates:

> To be flexible is to receive a form or impression, to be able to fold oneself, to take the fold, not to give it. To be docile, to not explode. Indeed, what flexibility lacks is the resource of giving form, the power to create, to invent or even to erase an impression. Flexibility is plasticity minus its genius. (2008: 12–13)

There is no ultimate substrate on which everything rests, on which clear trajectories of rightness or efficacy could be grounded. The city is replete with layer upon layer of how antecedent actions produced particular consequences. Cities cannot cover over the fact that they are repositories of decay, of rot and decomposition. For the ability to make things, to harness and consolidate the energies of dense interactions is, at the same time, always taking things apart, detaching them from their 'life support systems', digging and filling in land with enormous volumes of waste, as well as extracting from waste something that might live on.

If what the city 'just is' is something constantly mutable, it, nevertheless, has to show some kind of 'face', act as if it is a definitive culmination

of specific histories and decisions. The form of that showing, borrowing once again from Malabou (2011) is fantastic, a phantasm. What presents itself as stable and unequivocal is always already moving on, in the process of exchanging the apparently critical elements of its coherence with a surround that is also 'shedding its skin'. Whereas urban modernity acted as if the intense deformations and recompositions – the plasticity – of urban life could be summed up once and for all with all the componential elements gathered up in clear calculations of mutual implication, a neoliberal urbanisation gives up on such conceit and simply turns the fantastic into the predominant marker (and market) of urban life.

As landscapes in cities like Jakarta become crowded with one showcase project after another, making the city a spectacular show becomes a critical organising principle of resources, attention and affective affiliation. Instead of a modernity of institutions, design and comportment acting to gather together the disparate facets of urban life, 'all-in-one' enclaves provide a fantastic proximity of residence, leisure, work, shopping, schooling, worship and socialising in highly circumscribed spaces that render larger swathes of the city irrelevant. Here both the solidly and the aspirant middle classes can feel assured that they need not waste their time with messy negotiations and collaborations. They can spend their time in incessant self-improvement, a process of continuous updated statuses and digital evidence of recognition – the thumbs-up status of being 'liked'. The phantom of self-sufficiency, the closing off the rest of the world in order that one might be part of a larger, abstract global space enjoins residents to a position where they occupy a world of homogeneous environments strewn across city and national borders. They don't know each other directly, but they don't need to, for what is important is an implicit collective affirmation of a kind of super-belonging, of not being left out or left behind.

This kind of phantom then turns the rest of the city, now viewed as increasingly dangerous, anachronistic or simply insignificant, into another phantom. For the all-in-one attempts to secure a seamlessness in the transitions between contexts – from home to work to school to clinic and so forth – that risks no interruption or interference. Without being subjected to the exposures of other atmospheres and navigational circuits, the residents, too, verge on being phantoms. They become ciphers and avatars in an intensive sedentariness meant to facilitate expansive mobility across social media, tourist destinations, and various convocations across the world.

But what of the ground underneath, what of the movement of physi-

cal, biochemical, infrastructural and animal processes? In exchange for the enclave-portal, the all-in-one, a wide range of facilities of engaging with different dynamics seems to go by the wayside. This is the long-term problem of multiplicities: the fact that the city highlights the existence of dangerous circulations, of arbitrary irruptions in the fabric of conjunctions that emanate from the sheer density of processes brought in close proximity. These are dispositions whose trajectories can be charted and anticipated but not always fully controlled. Even in contexts of continuous and successful adjustments and repairs, not only are tears, irruptions and malfunctioning compensated for but the very act of repair often has to delink and dismantle the familiar and relied-on, a process that generates untoward implications not always discernible in the present. Cities are the results of specific intentions and objectives, as well as the culmination of plans, management protocols, power struggles and both systematic and random selections of what to pay attention to, what to use and value. But the 'results' of the city are not most effectively composed simply from the viewpoint and instrumentality of human inhabitants, no matter how diverse their perspectives and capacities might be.

Since residents do not share their neighbourhoods only with each other but with a much broader range of entities, what kind of moral procedures are applicable to these extensions of hospitality? The exigencies of hosting, of improving livelihoods, of being able to discover new potentialities within what a person is as well as to become something completely different means that people largely 'circle' each other, come at each other from different angles, even when subject to all of the devices of calculation and location which orient them. This circling is a willingness to engage the people or events at hand knowing they can never be grasped or known definitively. It is also a means of prolongation. One does not have to know who one is dealing with for sure in order to keep the game of collaboration going; it is always possible to look at things from new angles, to recalibrate relationships. At the same time, collaborations need not always be prolonged; they can be momentarily occupied and then let go of without the fear of experiencing debilitating loss. This circling means that many things are going to intersect accidentally and precipitate their own energetic transformations that will register some kind of impact, even as the circling continues. This circling is the necessary ingredient for just and information-rich environments, if not necessarily the guarantee of political mobilisation that can defend such environments from those forces which refuse or see no need to be hosted, let alone deflected or reshaped.

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