Part I
Precarity

1

Precarious detachment

Youth and modes of operating in Hyderabad and Jakarta

AbdouMaliq Simone

Instability has become a critical modality through which the power of capital accumulation is recomposed and reiterated. In key ways, the long-term instabilities of urban life strategically maintained by many urban inhabitants, engendering the continuous updating and remaking of various forms of life, have now been "stolen" by more powerful economic actors. As a result, current trajectories of urban change emphasizing security of tenure, propriety through property, inclusiveness through debt, and on the equation of affordances with affordability, and the enforced promotion of resilience through the attenuation of social contracts have a debilitating impact on the sociability of city life. These 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.

This essay reflects on a study of youth in six cities and demonstrates an unintentional or calculated indifference to this "theft" on the part of these youth. It attempts to show the ways they navigate urban space – ways that are not easily included within the constantly shifting frontiers of accumulation and political normalcy, and as such reorder the conventional terms through which life in the city is spoken about and experienced. Many of the youth who were interviewed about how they make sense of urban life and what is required in order to attain a viable position within it emphasized the importance of simultaneity – of being in the midst of different places and networks of care all at the same time. They decouple themselves from a fixed set of aspirations and development trajectories and instead use the infrastructures of the city as a means not so much to "settle" within as to "traverse" territorial and institutional boundaries. Their practice is not about finding ways to include what is rendered irrelevant or marginal within the existent modalities of everyday life, but rather to logistically elaborate new modalities capable of making judicious use of them.

In many respects cities now embody the exhaustion of labor's creativity and the prospect of uncertain and substantial rearrangements of human existence itself. Urban lives and materials are increasingly hedged in convoluted financial infrastructures, purportedly in order to generate the money needed simply to keep cities afloat in their present state, let alone introduce the massive interventions necessary to provide sufficient work, services and built environments for the future (Kirpatrick and Smith 2011). It is often unclear who or what actually runs things, as complicities of all kinds between supposed antagonists are often necessary in order to maintain

any semblance of order (Willis 2015). The particular ways bodies, things, spaces, and the relations among them mutually compose themselves engender both dynamic, uneven, inventive, and intensely problematic experiences and expressions for those who inhabit them.

These problematics of inhabitation then constitute the primary focus of this study. The study tried to elicit what youth deem to be the outlooks and practices needed in order to make any kind of future life. What do they pay attention to when so many parameters and variables are potentially relevant, when the efficacy of normative protocols for pursuing livelihood diminishes in the face of intensified arbitrariness, and when the technologies for evaluation seem so totalizing at the same time as any kind of stability appears more elusive? In cities where precarity refers to conditions of intensified uncertainty, the inability of any specific reading of conditions to take hold, and to *fleetingness* as the modality of instrumental action, what affective, conceptual, and practical sensibilities do youth mobilize to operate within precarious conditions? Without minimalizing the extensive desperation, violence, or dogged persistence of holding on to anything, what other atmospheres of urban living are perhaps constituted?

In listening to the voices and observing the practices of youth in Abidjan, Hyderabad, Jakarta, Berlin, Athens, and Karachi, a group of researchers, assembled under the auspices of the *Urbanizing Faith Program* of Humboldt University, the University of South Australia, and the Max Planck institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity, explores the prospects of new modes of urban living through the ways in which youth are taking on their futures. In abstracting from these engagements it is possible to discern various modalities of practice at work. These practices are not so much distinct entities as the outlines or shadows of provisional coalescence. All have highly permeable boundaries, relying upon shifting interfacial relations of figure and ground, where the surface of what appears to be one particular practice provides a "screen" or layer of opacity for others to work, or fail, without being detected.

In this presentation at hand, I will work with materials from two of the research cities, Hyderabad and Jakarta. Here the research was anchored by two "urban laboratories" – NGOs with long-term engagements in local urban social movements, which also had conducted a wide range of research studies on local economies and markets, urban revitalization projects, and employment. Using these past studies and the institutional and community networks consolidated from them, fifty youth from various class backgrounds, residential locations, and education levels were identified and then interviewed on several occasions during a six-month period. The protocols asked youth to show interviewers the key spaces in which they conducted their lives, as well as show them places in the city to which they aspired more intensive affiliations, as well as places with which they were familiar but no longer wanted to have anything to do with. When possible, interviewers were also introduced to people whom youth considered to be of particular significance to their particular practices of livelihood and aspiration. Interviews thus took place across a wide range of settings and backgrounds.

From these interview materials, local researchers collaboratively attempted to conceptualize a series of practices through which youth oriented themselves towards and acted on the city. The practices I take up here include *crafting*, as an aesthetics of continuous reappearance that addresses an oscillating field of opportunities, as the person stylizes a specific performance aimed at luring or captivating the attention of some and the dis-attention of others.

Waiting and *accelerating* deal with the temporal dimensions of what is considered possible, of how quickly a person attempts to intervene into a situation or allows things to unfold. Everyday life is wrapped up in the compulsion to act quickly and the diffusion of incessant opportunities that need to be seized. But there is also evidence of failure all around, of risks that compound debt, so that the capacity to wait, even with all its disciplinary and submissive connotations, is a critical tool in terms of cultivating an ability to read and play "the field". Yet at the same time,

many youth also actively attenuate fears of failure by adamantly "making their moves" and then "moving on", taking what they can from any situation without investments over the long term. Other youth surmise particular trajectories of change, and willingly position themselves in situations where nothing seems to be happening at the moment, but where they anticipate being the recipients of particular amalgamations of forces and opportunities that are "headed their way" and which have the capacity to fruitfully alter their lives if they are willing to wait.

As cities are domains of waste – of wasted lives and ways of doing things – as well as sites of wasting as a mechanism of biopolitical control, *harvesting* is a means of recuperating such waste, of putting it to work. Here, bits and pieces of solidarities, cultural memories, discarded materials, and the fuzzy interstices that are created through uneasy juxtapositions in rapidly restructured urban environments become resources for livelihoods.

Practices are deployed within and across specific places, and the cities this project engaged are replete with heterogeneous sites and configurations of action. In addition to the readily discernible machines and aggregates – such as households, factories, markets, malls, institutions, stations – are both obdurate and ephemeral formations, such as packs, *warungs* (multifunctional small shops), short-term rooming houses, over- and underpasses, backrooms, plazas, stairwells, vacant lots, game rooms, lobbies, interchanges, corners, enclaves, swarms, chat rooms, and hashtags.

Particularly important to this discussion are practices of *detachment*. Youth, increasingly aware of their own expendability and the seeming arbitrariness entailed in who gets ahead or not, actively pursue ways of subtracting themselves from what is expected of them. Additionally, the incorporation of cognition into increasingly automated protocols of behavioral enactment and algorithmically determined self-consideration prompts refusals to commit to particular modes of operating in the city. Concrete courses of action taken or imagined often involve individuals spreading themselves across disparate "projects" or engagements, hedging their bets, pluralizing possible destinations and sources of income. In one sense this is the very dissipation of an integrative subjectivity cultivated by neoliberal logics of flexible labor, where value is placed on resilience and a willingness to persist through contradictions. On the other hand, such individual tactical maneuvers opt for the construction of a self-visibility more effectively insulated from scrutiny. In some instances, detachment from steady contractual labor is a means of forging a relational autonomy, where mobility is linked to sustaining particular experiences of sociality or relations of care (Millar 2014).

Here, there may be much that can be garnered from the ascendancy of *logistics* as a mode of circulation and articulation. While we think of logistics as a matter of constructing the seamless transmission of commodities across discrete territories, youth are also faced with the exigencies of "transporting" themselves across intensely differentiated environments and protocols, which require a continuous detachment of their understandings and performances from the contexts in which they may be most familiar and comfortable.

In cities that seemingly demand youth to put themselves on the map, to incessantly communicate their ideas and feelings, or to enhance their visibility everywhere, many of the youth we talked with seemed to want not to disappear but to be enjoined in collective endeavors where "nothing seemed to be going on" and thus did not demand the intensities of labor, obligation, and reciprocity, nor the anxieties about failure and expendability that otherwise informed their sense of what was needed for them to survive. They may, on the one hand, make highly visible efforts to succeed and stylize themselves in particular ways. But even then, these efforts seem to be deployed as a way to recede into something more virtual, into a condition where anything might take place, where instability is embraced as a critical strategic maneuver.

As Guy Standing (2014) indicates, the varying instantiations of globalized neoliberal operations cultivate the norm of *instability*, both in work and in life in general. These are the conditions

that generate a *precariat* as a class in the making. Not only do such individuals have limited access to steady jobs and professions, but also they have limited access to any condition associated with stability – in terms of either employment, residence, or citizenship. Precarity is the active transformation of people and practices into a state of *nonexistence* – rendering people and their lives invisible and irrelevant even if the fact of their presence endures (Santos 2001). While there are many arguments that dispute the distinctiveness of the precariat from long-term conditions of labor exploitation (Munck 2013; Shukaitis 2013; Bhattacharya 2014), the systematic erosion of the capacities of place-based networks to create value, solidarity, and relational economies clearly introduces a significant form of deprivation for which no form of labor organization can compensate.

In situations where work increasingly has to be pieced together in the interstices of once highly differentiated production logics, now bleeding into each other as a plurality of mutant hybrids providing various forms of compensation and enforcing compliance through generalized insecurity, how do youth maintain their convictions in a viable urban future? What can they imagine and do to understand what they are up against and what it is possible to do given the situations they face? The remainder of this discussion will focus on some of the practices deployed by some youth in Jakarta and Hyderabad to navigate an urban milieu that seems to be simultaneously replete with precariousness and possibility. I need to emphasize that this is a preliminary discussion in that it has yet to engage a substantial literature on urban youth in Asia.

Crafting

The capacity of individuals to resiliently become many different things has become standard operating procedure and, as such, individuals repeatedly experience the very conditions that constitute the presuppositions for human experience in general (Virno 2009). Of course, the relative absence of anchoring cultures, discourses, and norms does not open up complete freedom, and instead ushers in a flood of guidelines, instructions, pointers, expectations, and indicators whose applicability is for the moment, and then altered quickly.

But this is why the *crafting* of performance is now so crucial – for it concedes the perceived inefficacy of planning and preparation but also wards off the temptation to pursue wholesale conversions of the self, and its preoccupations with millennial movements, trickery, or redemption. In crafting there is the recognition of a sought-for instrumentality, of the ability to accomplish something through composition, through piecing together different styles, influences, and skills to gain access to specific opportunities.

Dimas, age 25, has had six jobs in the past three years after completing a technical high school diploma in automotive engineering in Jakarta. He has worked as office boy, ATM repairperson, telephonic credit card validator, restaurant waiter, motorbike taxi driver, and administrative assistant for a newspaper.

> I started getting work when I was in Bojong station (a peri-urban area of Jakarta), after I was graduated from secondary school. I was hanging out in the station everyday with the same clothes, walking up and down trying to figure out what I was going to do. Someone approached and offered me a job: "Do you want to work?" I asked, "What kind of work?". He replied, "Do you want to work or not, let's apply as office boy. You can join me, I take care for it today". And I explained to him, "But I don't have any diploma", and he said, "You don't need a diploma". When I arrived, the house manager and her sister were calling me. I did not know that I would work for ibu Shinta (the wife of Abdul Wahid, a former president of Indonesia). I got into the house manager's room; she was called Bunda. I was

asked if I really want to work. I convinced her that I really want to work. If I don't want it, I would not be there. She explained that the salary was not that much. And I said that's okay. I said that I never worked before. Not so long after, in the next day, they checked on me. When they come, they will do this to the table [he wipes the table with his finger].

They were pretending to walk around and put their hand on the table, to check if it's clean or not. So they were convinced it was clean, and I was clean. Then the job was to sometimes get money for them from ATMs. Since there is a limit on how much can come out, I had several cards to use. I am told to go to Ciganjur (outside of central Jakarta), but don't know why. I am very nervous to always pretend to act crazy. The parking attendant in the area knew what I did. So, I gave him 5,000 rupiah, so if I went there again, I could be recognized by him. So if I need assistance, he will be ready, that's the way it was.

At that time he was saying, "Brother, so much money you took".

ME: Yes, I got order from my boss.
PARKING GUY: Who is it?
ME: You know, Ciganjur.
PARKING GUY: Oh, I see, be careful, brother. If you have success, I may know someone else who needs money to be carried.

Meanwhile, this guy knew how to break into ATM, so I thought, oh, maybe I use his knowledge to learn how to fix them.

Dimas also goes on to talk about his role as chairperson of a cellphone provider–initiated "community" of youth that takes shape simply by the provider offering free conference phone calls for a subscriber to call ten other persons, most of whom are unknown to any one user at any given time. These become the initial "seeds" of strangers actually meeting physically in order to make connections across a wide expanse of the urban region without obligation or history. As Dimas said, "We have no project in particular".

Yuni, a 25-year-old public relations and journalism student from a poor family outside of Jogjakarta, is finishing university on a full scholarship. For her, going to university is not primarily about taking classes, but using the affiliation as a platform on which to branch out across the city without facing the exigency of finding employment. She has started several "learning houses" for children in poor communities and helped organize groups to learn screenwriting, English, and filmmaking, and attempts to intersect her social activism with internships in journalism and in film production. As a result she has produced several short films documenting everyday life in various districts of Jakarta, and now is considering how to intersect the possibilities of further education with employment offers in several distinct sectors, which she has prepared herself to move across. Although she knows she has to make a decision soon, she worries that any decision will "bring all this moving around to a stop", and she likes the ways all of her different involvements don't always go together, how they "always seem to interrupt each other".

Abdul Azis, 22, grew up in a poor family in Sukabumi, some 300 kilometers from Jakarta. After finishing one year of junior high school, he commenced five years of work in various factories at the periphery of Jakarta, working eighteen-hour shifts and becoming addicted to dextroamphetamines, which employers would disburse in large quantities. Two years ago a childhood friend, working at a Padang restaurant in central Jakarta, telephoned and informed Abdul Azis of a dishwasher vacancy in the kitchen. At nights after the restaurant closed, Abdul Azis would experiment with the kitchen, coming up with unique drinks that the owner was willing to try out with some of the customers. After a year he was moved from the kitchen to the

front to handle the drinks, at which point he noticed that the restaurant's customers would bring coffee purchased from the outside. He convinced the boss to try out some inexpensive coffee equipment and then, with the help of YouTube, and an informal group of barristers whom he located through Twitter, set out to learn the coffee trade and enter some local barrister competitions. After placing well in these, the boss decided to allocate part of the restaurant space as a coffee shop, which now Abdul Azis runs. Many workers have passed through the restaurant in the time that Abdul Aziz has been there, including his childhood friend. But they continue to maintain their relationships with each other, borrowing and lending, helping to support each other's small moneymaking schemes. Abdul Azis has been offered more lucrative positions at more upscale coffee places, but he professes a desire to remain where he is for now because he views his job as the critical node that keeps these relationships among ex-workers going, which in turn enables him to "stay *with* the city" and to make it "knowable without having to always get stuck in traffic".

Idzni is a 25-year-old freelance graphic designer and photographer. She is the daughter of upper-middle-class parents living at the far periphery of Jakarta and is well traveled across Indonesia and Asia. She lives simply on her own in a central popular neighborhood with little money as she attempts to shape a career. She manages to scrape by with enough work to meet expenses and, at the same time, volunteers at many different organizations to expand her network of contacts and to open up different avenues for her photographic work. In many respects her trajectory aligns with young creative urban professionals across the world. But she also envisions herself as engaged in an ongoing "negotiation with the city", with its disparate settings and ways of doing things that she anticipates will alter how she works in ways that she is not able to anticipate at the moment. For her, it is a matter of how a person shapes him- or herself in relation to ways of urban living that both persist and disappear, where openings are always available, but which require "new ways of seeing".

These youth of different social class backgrounds all attempt to compose themselves as highly individuated entities. While they embody many facets of the "neoliberal subject", they also accede to the impossibility of "going it alone", to resiliently roll with the punches in trajectories of continuous self-improvement. Rather they attempt to craft particular insertions into a shifting urban fabric, on the one hand availing themselves of various opportunities that come their way, but also acting as instruments of conjunction, as hinges that vary the angles through which particular places, events, and opportunities in the city come together and also disappear from view.

Waiting and accelerating

Across many of the interviews in Jakarta and Hyderabad, youth expressed impatience in sticking too long with work and activities that did not quickly generate pay raises or open onto a more expansive set of opportunities. Sometimes this impatience is based on the recognition that employers can draw upon a large pool of potential labor and thus keep wages low for long periods of time, and so for many youth, they need to assess the concrete possibilities of advancement early on and then move on if they feel they are going to have to wait long periods of time for even the most minimal increments of salary increases.

Rarely did we encounter youth who felt that they desperately needed to hang on to whatever they had. More often we heard comments like Rifki's, a 23-year-old air conditioning repair person, who said, "If you are going to make your move, you have to make it look like a move, like you mean business, instead of spending years playing nice". This process of acceleration is sometimes expressed through more extensive circulations across the city, engaging larger expanses of the urban territory and its variegated domains, as a means of expanding an individual's confidence

in his or her potential choices. This circulation is, in turn, buttressed by the expanding provision of cheap temporary accommodation. In Jakarta's urban core, many households rent rooms, and the conversion of many residential and commercial structures into short-term boarding houses is widespread. In this way, youth can easily find accommodation, and, if they share a room with several others, manage to keep their costs to a minimum. Here, they are not tied down with any contractual or familial obligations, and thus can easily move on to try something else.

Waiting becomes a near-constant dimension in some people's lives, as well as a mode of captivation produced through specific aspirations and calculations. Roro, 18, wants to be a pastry chef, studies to be a pastry chef, gets support and capital from her mother to do and attempt to market her own baking, and has had a variety of internships and part-time jobs in catering and kitchens. She is attempting to apply to get further university training in special needs education because her mother made this suggestion. She wants to pursue this career and open up a pastry shop. While she waits for acceptance to university, her real passion, being a pastry chef, hangs in suspended animation. She clearly knows what it will take to move towards her career goal, and she "falls into" the requisite steps needed to realize this, largely with indifference. The passion consumes her as she has given up hanging out, having boyfriends, and other leisure pursuits in order to pursue this goal. But nothing is happening except waiting – even though things are concretely falling into place, Roro doesn't feel she is moving closer or further away from this goal.

Other individuals not so much wait as simply do the minimum of what it takes to stay in place. Sanusi is 29 years old and lives in a boarding house in Padamangan, not far from where he grew up. He has been selling things for almost two decades, starting with newspapers and now mostly battery packs at Ancol, a recreation and leisure park on Jakarta's north coast and a frequent stop for visitors to the city from other parts of the country. His father was a taxi driver and his mother a rice cake seller, who recently opened up a small eating shop (warung) not far from where they live. His world largely revolves around a group of friends who also sell various things at Ancol.

Compared to earlier in his youth, his world seems to shrink. During his early teens he would sell glow sticks until late at night in more middle-class neighborhoods in southern Jakarta or at the national monument, earning around $7 a day, which for someone age 13 was a substantial amount. He never finished high school after several attempts, saying he was "tired of being taught by people who probably could never do anything practical; I like to be free, I want to study when there is no one to rule me, and we can learn about real things". He has had several regular jobs in different stores but never stayed for more than a couple of months because "basically work is oppressive, bosses mock the weaknesses of those who work for them and so the best way is to run when people mock you, because otherwise you just blow up". Now the aim is to make enough each day to put $5 away in savings so that he can buy his own things to sell; otherwise he has to go to the "bosses", who provide a supply of goods for him to sell, and in this situation he gets only a small percentage of any profit. Although he has been working in the Ancol area for many years and pays the $60 for the annual entrance pass, he remains an "illegal" seller among formally licensed stalls. A "boss" is anyone who has goods to sell and is willing to distribute some to other sellers for commission on a particular day. But Sanusi never functions as boss, and has no desire to do so.

He is well known to everyone but has to tolerate periodic raids on his goods. The authorities largely tolerate the presence of these sellers as an unofficial hedge against roaming bands of pickpockets and thieves, even if sometimes it sounds as if there are collusions among all of them – official security, police, thieves, and legal and illegal sellers. It isn't that he doesn't know how to set up a more established operation, but simply prefers not to. Now, he says, his approach to selling

is mostly based on "my feeling about whether or not I will be able to sell my stuff . . . it is just a feeling, a feeling about where the people on the bus come from, the ones who come from out of Java will like to buy my stuff, for example, people from Kalimantan and Jambi, where the electronic stuff is really more expensive". Although it is possible to access information about tour schedules and expected group arrivals in advance, he makes no effort to find out when his target customer base is likely to arrive – he just "goes every day and if something happens, well, then something happens".

He wants to get married, have a family, and be more successful. He has formed several bands, but loses members when they move on to a "family type of life". He has detailed knowledge of the ins and outs of the district in which he lives and operates, who the players are, and what it takes to make much more money than he does, but for him "the drive to get ahead doesn't make you free, and so I will just wait to see what happens".

Harvesting

What remains then, often in a state of apparent waste, can also be *harvested*. Familiar tropes of "gathering of the sheaves" can also apply to urban practices where the bits and pieces of solidarities, cultural memories, discarded materials, and the fuzzy interstices that are created through uneasy juxtapositions in rapidly restructured urban environments become resources for livelihoods. These livelihoods may never exceed the appearance of constant scavenging and may be dependent upon aggressively enforced hierarchies. They may depend upon keeping any democratic forms of institutionalization in abeyance since much of harvesting would seem to work by keeping the ways in which specific kinds of people, materials, and places are conjoined under the radar.

Harvesting differs from scavenging in that it is not so much the remainders themselves that are put to immediate and clear-cut uses, but rather the way in which they are bundled in ways that circumvent the usual expectations about exchange and collaboration. Collections of materials, the logistical operations of interventions or scams, contacts with police, and arrangement of places of convocation all require different actors, chains of command, and forms of communication and cooperation. Oftentimes nothing is written down or secured, and as such, betrayals and manipulations are rife. Some harvesting merely gathers up what is available on a short-term, perhaps once-only basis. At other times the practice attempts to implant seeds for other opportunities, but without guarantees of any clear results.

Nangshi, a 24-year-old law student, comes from a working-class family and has lived in Hyderabad all of his life. He indicates that he barely got into university and seldom takes it seriously, although he is smart enough to get by. He was late coming to education, and got through a fairly decent secondary school by ingratiating himself to the boss of his uncle. But the important social reference in his life during the past five years has been a group of seven young men who came together initially through their interest in *nawabi*, pigeon-breeding. But as this is an increasingly competitive business in the city, they moved on to roaming across the city.

This was a practice partially enabled by the fact that all seven are fairly singular composites of the basic social ingredients – some have a common religious identification but are from different class backgrounds, and those of similar class backgrounds also vary in their religious identification; they also come from different parts of the city. While the exchanges among them originated in a common hobby, they all were sufficiently curious about each other's varied positions within Hyderabad to "check each out", and then later move collectively, looking for places to hang out and socialize as a group that was always somewhat different from the others in any location they found themselves in.

Sometimes sounding overconfident in his knowledge about Hyderabad, Nangshi provides a wealth of details about the city that few other interviewees possessed. He indicates that the group was always looking for opportunities to put things together. At one time, one member of the group had a tip-off for a place selling stolen high-end tires that another member of the group knew how to off-load in another more upscale part of the city. Where the religious, territorial, and class divides of the city are often prohibitive of particular kinds of circuits and exchanges, the coming together of these seven differently composed individuals seemed to allow small articulations across the divides. Although Nangshi didn't use the word explicitly – preferring to describe their activities as simply "putting stuff together" – what he seems to point to is a practice of *harvesting*, of canvassing the city for things that are not so much lying fallow but available to being folded into circuits of exchange.

Ayeesha is a 16-year-old girl seemingly neither inside nor outside home and school, where she spends almost all of her time. She describes the Hyderabad *bustee* (housing tenement) in which she lives as a "body somewhere between the living and the dead", as a "relic" in the city to which everyone desperately tries to hold on. In a world where "everyone watches" but "no one pays attention", she views her everyday life as taking small advantage of all the things that "don't really fit in".

In the increasingly desperate attempts of the nearly impoverished to maintain the integrity of their households in close proximity with others, there are varying mixtures of enforced conformity and letting things slide. Wayward children or spouses may be temporarily locked out of their quarters; hurried exchanges and random affections are left to settle in the cracks, becoming information that can be hoarded and perhaps later used. Things are always spilling over, and instead of ignoring all of it, Ayeesha prefers to find a way "to take it all in", even if it has nowhere specific to go. She doesn't expect much of her life. She tries to avoid contact with relatives so as to avoid pressure to get married. She has to invent reasons – part of the surplus of paying attention to the information economy of the *bustee* – in order to circumvent her mother's rage when she attempts to attend the social functions of friends. She imagines ways of being independent without "being made independent" as a result of extended family disapproval of any autonomous action. She relishes the unexpected opportunity she has to attend college and diligently does everything she is expected to do at home, such as fetching water in the middle of the night, even if it potentially drains her of time and energy for her studies. But it is the mostly routinized navigation of the spaces between school and home that she particularly values, that she "saves up for a later occasion".

Hendi, 18, finished junior high but did not go to secondary school. He came to Jakarta at age 15 and found work in a restaurant, which was comfortable and paid well, but served pork, the idea and the smell of which made him, as a devout Muslim, sick, so he quit. Through an older brother he found work in one of Southeast Asia's textile and clothing markets, Tanah Abang, where he has worked for the past two years. Although he expresses a desire to save enough money to open up a shop in his hometown, he largely concedes that for the conceivable future Tanah Abang is the only place where a young man without a diploma would be able to find work. He circulates through the market, never content with one specific location for very long, always looking for better deals. Many young men are in his situation; they have fairly stable work as sellers in stalls owned by others, but a large number never stay for very long. But they also never leave Tanah Abang. It is as if their decisions to quit produce a kind of void, a refuse that gets harvested.

In order for the bosses to retain labor, deal making becomes more intricate. Different formulas of compensation are negotiated – daily, weekly, monthly, and varying combinations of these – accorded on the basis of flexibility of hours and tasks. This deal making is not the product of

any self-conscious mobilization on the part of the bottom tier of the market's workforce. Still, young laborers talk to each other, and through these interchanges get a sense of the market's atmosphere – the fluctuations of prices, the capacity of owners to respond to new trends and volume, the capacity of owners to bundle their goods with others to offer wholesale prices to buyers coming from all over Indonesia, who often pool together their money.

The young sellers get a reading of who is in debt or making a lot of money, and then try to find ways to get closer to the real action. Of course, there are a lot of failures in what the owners do, either collectively or individually, and there is always a sense of urgency to recover from these failures. This happens by not only reducing costs but also taking on energetic labor equipped with new ideas and solid experience. These are situations to be "harvested", as some young laborers put it. Most young labor will never make enough to become owners or ever increase their eventual earnings substantially, but this circulation through the market at least creates the semblance of trajectories, of going somewhere, even if it is not necessarily going forward.

Detachment

Precarity also signals various efforts individuals make to detach themselves from work or the prospects of work careers, where every detail of their performance will be scrutinized and assessed. Such efforts are infused with ambivalence as the absence of connectivity is reinforced, in so many ways, as the cessation of existence. Connectivity seems especially valued as, at least, the ability to share the burdens of multiple insecurities and estrangement. Concrete courses of action taken or imagined often involve individuals spreading themselves across disparate "projects" or engagements, hedging their bets, pluralizing possible destinations and sources of income.

In one sense this is the very dissipation of an integrative subjectivity cultivated by neoliberal logics of flexible labor, where value is placed on resilience and a willingness to persist through contradictions. On the other hand, such individual tactical maneuvers opt for the construction of a self-visibility more effectively insulated from scrutiny. There are of course vast differences in the motivations and conditions of such maneuvers, and the degree to which they represent volition or desperation. For many of the poor there is nothing available to commit to, let alone detach themselves from, and so the circulation through different games, locales, and affiliations, instead of resilience, represents the intense provisionality of everyday life.

Detachment may represent the limits of collective life, the inability of particular districts or residential networks to tolerate different ways of doing things, and so households or individuals are to detach themselves from paying too much attention to what co-residents or kin might think. Sonu, a 16-year-old college student, comes from a lower-working-class district in Hyderabad.

> People talk a lot. They ask things like why do you send your daughters to school? If we stand outside the house for even a minute, they say, look, your daughter is standing around. Why do you send your daughter to the shop? Why does she come home so late? What is she doing? They tell my mother all this and try to poison her mind. Luckily my parents trust us, even if they have to listen to all this. But they still tell us that people are talking. What can we do – people will talk. Nobody can stop them – that is their job.
>
> In the beginning my parents didn't allow me to study because in my mother's family, people are very conservative. Girls are married off very early and they are not allowed to study too much. But my parents said no, we want our children to study, and supported us in that way. Otherwise today I wouldn't be going to college. My younger sister is also very interested in studying. My parents have told us that we can study how much ever we want.

> The problem of religion has really affected me since I was a child. My mother is a Muslim and my father is a Christian. My eldest brother, once he came of age, converted into Islam and the same with my other brother. My sister married a Christian so she has stuck with it. Because of all this, people talk again. We are always scared about this being the reason for getting thrown out of our house because we live in a predominantly Muslim area. Each community wants us to convert into their practice and because of this, sometimes I really don't understand what is right and wrong. I don't share anything with anyone. I tell my sisters sometimes but they don't really understand. They will say, we have to listen to our parents; we are here because of them so we must do as they say. I am not very close to my mother but I am very fond of my father. But I don't share anything, even with him, because I don't want anyone to be burdened by my thoughts and feelings. I don't want them to think that I am not okay. I wish I had someone to share my thoughts with, but nobody really understands or sympathizes. Nobody tells me what is right or wrong. Everybody just says "no", no matter what it is.

Regardless of crucial class, regional, and gender differences, there is a sense of commonality among many youth not wanting to or affording to be caught in readily discernible practices of accumulation and self-enactment. The cruel irony is that the mushrooming of identity politics, where youth hang on to narrowly circumscribed, caricature-like depictions of religious faith, national belonging, or ethnic identity, may be largely motivated by the desire not to be "pinned down" by destinies which seem increasingly predetermined, with little recourse to negotiation or change or which entail "cancellation of what in the human psyche is incompatible with abstract domination" (Berardi 2014).

A sense of detachment may also be found in the city's "floating populations", where floating describes the way youth, in particular, circulate through scores of jobs, cheap room rentals, neighborhoods, and styles of engagement. There are high school graduates and dropouts, tertiary students, members of fan clubs, gangs, organizations, self-organized interest groups, and roving packs. The large retail markets of Jakarta, such as Cempaka Putih, Cililitan, and Pasar Pagi, selling cheap, mostly locally produced or finished clothing lines, employ thousands of young men and women. Watch them pour out of these places at the 22:00 closing time and climb into buses and onto motorcycles to go home. But home for these youth is enacted in varied scenarios and compositions with the aim to keep rent under $25 a month – essential given that most of them make perhaps no more than $100 per month. They canvass the city, often looking for nothing in particular, often frequenting the 24/7 convenience stores, where they can sit for hours with a Coke and noodle soup and watch what other youth are up to. It is not that these youth are without aspirations, plans, or methods for pursuing specific trajectories. For example, YouTube is used constantly as a medium with which to learn new skills, such as those of the coffee barista, web designer, chef, sound mixer, hacker, or electrician. Rather, they do not conceive of any occupation as a destination, but simply something to pass through, as if the city were a proliferation of doors – devices that hinge rather than hedge futures, marking trajectories simultaneously connected and detached.

While youth have long carved out their separate worlds and supposed subcultures, perhaps what is new to Jakarta is the intensity of collective indifference proffered by some youth, particularly of lower-middle-class and working-class backgrounds in the central city. With somewhat marginal relationships to schooling but whose families have sufficient income so that they do not yet have to look for work or participate in household income generation, there is an elaboration of leisure time that pursues little but the circulation through back alleys, backdoor relations, a constant turnover of professed friendships and amorous relationships. Some of this is

represented in the figure of the *cabe-cabean* – girls who circulate on motorbikes, who sometimes offer themselves as prizes to male racers, who post salacious group videos, but who more suggest such "transgressions" as a cover for their preference that nothing really happens – just circulation, going around, not getting held up or stopping too long to negotiate much of anything; where there is no need to forge opportunistic friendships and connections. As Dina, age 15, puts it, "Complications only happen when you try and do something; you should just let things go". To "go" often literally means that – a process of continuous exit. When you go around on your motorbike "you look for the alleys behind the main traffic cause that's where the real people go".

At the same time, there are practices in Jakarta where long-term relationships are forged and reaffirmed through frequent get-togethers. The basis of these relationships is usually a particular point of commonality – school friends from sixth grade or senior high school or college. While individuals may participate in multiple memberships, there is usually one prioritized point of coalescence. But what makes one group coalesce around sixth grade or another around the last year of high school, or even, as is sometimes the case, the common experience of a primary school grade? While participants many have their consensual story honed through years of protracted contact, these decisions seem arbitrary – they could have easily been focused on a different common experience at a different point in time. The specific etiology of the collective seems less important than its factuality in the lives of young adults, where the seeming arbitrariness of the decision and the repetition of contact enable individuals to do something with each other that is not predicated necessarily on how their lives specifically take shape, where the present specificities do not matter, even though the repeated contact avails participants opportunities and support.

Conclusion: logistics, detachment, and the possibilities of urban life

Logistics configures new forms of territoriality that both facilitate and curtail particular kinds of circulation. This is done through ports, inter-modal transport hubs, warehouses, container parks, and information-technology infrastructure, as well as labor that is continuously monitored and assessed in terms of optimal efficiencies. The actions of employees are tracked in real time through performance quotas, GIS, radio-frequency identification tags, mechanisms which deliver voice instructions for a continuous sequence of tasks, and the use of what are known as KPIs – software programs that measure worker and organizational efficiencies. Through the use of such tracking technologies, the temporal delay between execution of tasks and their statistical measure is erased (Rossiter 2014).

For global production networks that require the seamless movement of primary materials and finished commodities, the configuration of such new territory also entails a process of detachment of materials, social relations, and bodies from their anchorage in specific locales. Instead, they are rearranged as elements in an intensely standardized series of maneuvers and movements (Martin 2012). Logistical knowledge is the means to stabilize interconnections across multiple sites and practices. Interchanges, ports, and trade zones promise the organization of stocks and flows in ways seemingly drained of political interest.

Here the ostensible consideration is the seamless circulation of effort and goods accomplished by technical efficacies in spaces completely turned over and neutralized for such observations (Toscano 2014). In the meantime, the complex negotiations of accords, monitoring procedures, fragmented and multiple sovereignties, security apparatuses, and labor regimes, which go into creating this promise, become impenetrable to ~~negotiation~~. Standardization is a critical element of logistical functioning in terms of attaining the interoperability of different infrastructures and materials, the exchange of data across multiple platforms, and attempts to overcome AuQ5

protocological asymmetries – all of which enable goods to pass through increasingly elongated and textured commodity chains (Rossiter 2014).

Knowledge about the heterogeneous circulations, destinations, diversions, costs, and assemblages is distributed across various organizations and scales (Cowen 2014). Resultant asymmetries in the access to interconnection potentially destabilize logistics. Martin (2012) provides the example of the illicit appropriation of existent commodity circulation networks and the appropriation of particular circuits of transit by migrants. Logistics attempts to compose a friction-free circulation of inputs and outputs across various spaces often marked by national boundaries and discrepant regulatory frameworks of all kinds, while relying upon a specific set of standardized equivalences, containers, and calculations.

All of this requires a *diffracted* knowledge. Here the process of dis-embedding 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 disruptions and illicit uses might emerge – and thus iterates the role of governance as an instrument to anticipate instability and preempt interruptions (Martin 2012).

But perhaps the practices of youth in Jakarta and Hyderabad potentiate some long-term interruption. The logic of governance concedes the inability to "keep people in place". The viability of urban economies seems to require incessant circulation – the circulation of actual selves through various locations, consumption opportunities, skill sets, and sites where their labor and creativity are to be expropriated *and* individuals as components in the circulation of shifting fields of probable actions, data sets, risk calculations, credit ratings, genetic profiles, and shifting lifestyles.

Control then is not exerted so much by keeping people in place as it is by preempting "dangerous" circulations, anticipating in advance what kinds of movements and constellations of bodies and experience pose particular kinds of threats. But the youth in this study exemplify a "difficult reading" and the possibilities of recomposing both mundane and shadowy worlds where the nature of commitments and loyalties, combined with the willingness and preparedness to be many different things, points to a force of sociability not easily coded or controlled. Perhaps this is a feral city (Valayden 2016) or a city always immune to any overarching fantasies of control.

References

Berardi, Franco (Bifo) 2014 The Neuroplastic Dilemma: Consciousness and Evolution. *Efflux* 60. www.e-flux.com/issues/60-december-2014

Bhattacharya, Saumyajit 2014 Is Labour Still a Relevant Category for Praxis? Critical Reflections on Some Contemporary Discourses on Work and Labour in Capitalism. *Development and Change* 45: 941–962.

Cowen, Deborah 2014 *The Deadly Life of Logistics: Mapping Violence in the Global Trade.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Kirpatrick, Owen L. and Michael Peter Smith 2011 The Infrastructural Limits to Growth: Rethinking the Urban Growth Machine in Times of Fiscal Crisis. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 35: 477–503.

Martin, Craig 2012 Desperate Mobilities: Logistics, Security and the Extra-Logistical Knowledge of "Appropriation". *Geopolitics* 17: 355–376.

Millar, Kathleen 2014 The Precarious Present: Wageless Labor and Disrupted Life in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. *Cultural Anthropology* 29: 32–53.

Munck, Ronaldo 2013 The Precariat: A View from the Global South. *Third World Quarterly* 34: 747–762.

Rossiter, Ned 2014 Logistical Worlds. *Cultural Studies Review* 20: 53–76.
Santos, Boaventura de Sousa 2001 Nuestra America: Reinventing a subaltern paradigm of recognition and redistribution. *Theory, Culture and Society* 18: 185–218.
Shukaitis, Stevphen 2013 Recomposing Precarity: Notes on the Laboured Politics of Class Composition. *Ephemera 13*: 641–658.
Standing, Guy 2014 Understanding the Precariat Through Labor and Work. *Development and Change* 45: 963–980.
Toscano, Alberto 2014 Lineaments of the Logistical State. *Viewpoint*. https://www.viewpointmag.com/2014/09/28/lineaments-of-the-logistical-state
Valayden, Diren 2016 Racial Feralization: Racism and Ferality in the City. *Theory, Culture and Society*.
Virno, Paolo 2009 Natural-Historical Diagrams: The "New Global" Movement and the Biological Invariant. *Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy* 5: 92–104.
Willis, Graham Denyer 2015 *The Killing Consensus: Police, Organized Crime, and the Regulation of Life and Death in Urban Brazil*. Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press.