

**WATER,
POLITICS
AND DESIGN
IN JAKARTA:**

**A
CONVERSATION
WITH
ABDOUMALIQ
SIMONE**

AbdouMaliq Simone is Professor of Urban Studies at Goldsmiths College in London. His work has been a provocative influence on urban research and a key for thinkers engaging the contemporary assemblage of the megacity. He has written *City Life from Jakarta to Dakar: Movements at the Crossroads* (New York: Routledge, 2010), *For the City Yet to Come: Changing African Life in Four Cities* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), and edited, with Abouhani Abdelghani, the collection *Urban Africa: Changing Contours of Survival in the City* (London: ZED Books, 2005). During our work in Jakarta, Research Coordinator Farid Rakun organized a meeting with Professor Simone, who joined Profs. Adam Bobbette and Meredith Miller, researcher Etienne Turpin, and the students of the *Designing for Hypercomplexity: Jakarta* workshop for a conversation about urban research in the city; an edited transcript of the conversation appears below. A special thanks to Professor Simone for his generosity and provocation during the workshop, and to Farid Rakun for his help in preparing this text.

ABDOUMALIQ SIMONE What do you hope to do here?

GEOFF SALVATORE Our time on the ground in Jakarta is short and I don't think our goal here is to pretend we can understand everything. As we have learned from your work, it is a very complex situation. Our charge from the three faculty members is to look at hypercomplexity and architecture's agency in Jakarta, specifically concerning the issue of flooding and what we might be able to do as architects to change the situation. It is an activist project, but the intention is not that our work is going to "solve" all the problems of Jakarta.

ADAM BOBBETTE The theme driving all the research here is water. When we were composing the studio, we began with the shoreline as a site in itself. It is highly mobile and highly flexible, subject to climatological, geological, and human forces. We looked at the changing morphology of the shoreline and discovered that it goes deep into the city, through canals and channelized rivers. It is also corrugated in the north by industrialization; conditions along the shoreline differ greatly—from industrial areas, to gated communities, to amusement parks, to slums—and each of these different conditions relates to the shoreline in its own way. So, as the research unfolds, we are using water as a way to unfold the hypercomplexity of the city; this necessarily includes the unequal distribution of environmental risks and benefits, the unequal distribution of access to water, risk of inundation, and the multiple meanings and uses of water in everyday life in different conditions.



Looking south from Kota down a Dutch colonial era canal

ETIENNE TURPIN In *City Life from Jakarta to Dakar*, you discuss the significance of anticipatory urban politics, especially in relation to your reading of Jakarta.¹ How long have you been studying Jakarta, and how have you seen the city change in relation to a "politics of anticipation?" How long have you been tracking this research, and how has the city changed in relation to neoliberal investment more recently?

AS I started working here completely by accident about six years ago. It was at the tail end of a period where the comportment of the urban poor was still something that had a political valence within the city. I think that time has passed. No one cares what happens to the urban poor today. But, when I began

working in Jakarta there was a kind of schism in the politics around representing the interests of the urban poor in Jakarta. I was mostly aligned with an organization that still believed in a kind of self-valorization of poor communities, with a sense that essentially being poor in this city represented a kind of ongoing warfare, and that the poorer communities could take matters into their own hands and discover their own resourcefulness, using it as a platform to persistently become a pain in the ass to official institutions. But this movement, the Urban Poor Consortium (UPC), didn't really know what it was. They didn't want to call themselves a social movement, but they weren't an NGO.

The UPC stood in contrast to a more traditional approach where local organizations were partnering with national or international NGOs as a way to make service delivery more efficient and judicious. But, there was a kind of schism in approach, and organizations on either side of the divide had a very hard time working with each other.

The idea was to work in North Jakarta for about two years, with eight different areas basically along the coast, and instead of having poor communities simply become preoccupied with their own conditions, complaints, and hardships, we would get them involved in trying to understand the larger political dynamics of the *kampung*s and larger districts of which they were a part.² After all, these districts are very heterogeneous in their composition. If you look at Jakarta, areas that are classically and clearly "slums" are few and far between. There are large areas dominated by the urban poor, but they are always in some sense in intense proximity to areas of other kinds of economic capacity.

It was an interesting experiment having residents become researchers. I was working with about 100 residents who were being paid to conduct research on the districts in which they lived. This was not to have them look so much at themselves, but rather to have them examine larger-scale dynamics and use that work as a kind of ticket to come to the table—at the time there was an opening at the table of Jakarta politics (at the district level) for a kind of deliberation on and rethinking of what a democratic local governance system might become. The problem was that this opening closed for a lot of different reasons. In terms of trying to develop a process where residents themselves are the repository of real knowledge about what's going on and then use that process as an interlocutor among different kinds of institutions and organizations working with the urban poor—well, in some ways it worked, and in others it didn't. In a way, it set up a competition among different organizations about who was going to get these residents,

and about who would be able to appropriate their capacity to, in a sense, front the interest of different urban logics and approaches that remain fundamentally different.



Warakas

ET There is the side of the organizational disjunctions and approaches, which is one thing. But, regarding the closure of this opening for the urban poor at the table of Jakarta politics, what characterized that? Why don't you see this as a possibility anymore?

AS Because, in Jakarta, the urban governance system is pretty fucked up. There has only been one elected governor. There is an election for governor coming up in July 2012, and this is only the second time that the governor has been chosen through an electoral process.³ And, in fact, there is a strong move even to get rid of this; there are many in the national government who see this kind of process as a waste of time and money that the city cannot afford.

There has been a constant effort because everyone recognizes that the way the city is run fundamentally doesn't work. So, trial balloons have been sent out to see if it is possible to institute reforms or new forms of local government that in some way are democratically elected. But the city always has to confront its own peculiar history in this regard because for a long time the way in which Jakarta has been run is that those with ultimate authority—specifically in terms of a hierarchy of power—subcontract out the running of things to a wide range of both official and unofficial actors. There is a kind of subsidiarity at work through an incessant subcontracting of the real management of things.

Even with the *Orde Baru*,⁴ where one had the impression that the city was very tightly run from the top, the administration of the population was in reality conducted through a plurality of highly localized surveillance and organizations that were in competition with each other. So the control of the population functioned through the competition between a lot of different local organizations that each had the responsibility for a certain kind of surveillance, a certain kind of cataloguing and classification, and a certain kind of intimidation. But based on the history of subcontracting, decisions at the top are very weak because they can never anticipate the implications of the decisions being made, they don't know exactly what's going to happen by virtue of what it is that they decide. It is a problem around a lot of different issues—transportation, housing, fuel subsidies—and there is an inherent avoidance of confrontation. The society generally doesn't like confrontation, and the authorities at the top don't like it in part because they don't know exactly what will happen as a result. They have always run the city through a kind of subcontracting to a lot of different kinds of players who, in the end, they really can't control. So, the government basically said that they are going to control this city by giving out a certain amount of authority to extra-parliamentary players for them to make their own deals, essentially allowing them to be both political bosses and gangsters—not that the difference is at all clear. However, when you attempt to rationalize the system of governance, everyone gets very afraid of what will happen because they don't know how to anticipate the results. It ends up like traffic: you have a gridlock situation where no one wants to take the risk of making any kind of definitive decisions about the problem.

ET What about the question of master planning and the role of informal components? Many people have spoken about the inability to respond to problems because of a lack of “political will,” but others, such as our research coordinator Farid Rakun, suggest that we might need another approach to politics, or that it is precisely not a problem of political will at all.

FARID RAKUN I have been hearing this song for years, and the government always says they have a grand plan that is going to work, but that someone in particular in the government is the problem. So, it always depends on who is president, who is mayor, and so on—this is just a list of excuses. For me, since I was a student here, before 2005, I have been hearing about this problem of “political will.” I have come to the conclusion that it is the time in Jakarta for anarchy. For residents to take matters into their own hands, especially since this is what the resi-

dents of Jakarta have been doing for a long time anyway. But is it good to “officialize” these things? Would a formal hierarchy of power do the agents at the bottom any good, or would it just allow someone to attack them more easily? Take street vendors, for example. Architects are fascinated with informal street vendors and they want to map their locations, but they really end up making these maps for the government because they will ultimately be used against the vendors. This kind of research is only ever used against them. It would be good for any school here to teach Bakunin because of this!⁵



Proposal for the new industrial port

ET We have seen projects about mapping the street vendors, and more broadly, questions of how to “formalize” the informal through representation. So, we really have two questions: the question of “political will” as an excuse, and the question of the “formalization” of informal struggles.

AS The reality is, in terms of cities like Jakarta and others of a similar size, that no one particular sector has any comprehensive idea of what is going on. They all, of course, have to act as if they do, which can be very effective, whether it be in the elaboration of good policy, good spatial planning, good urban development policy, or policy in terms of planning for service provision. There are a lot of examples of interesting projects that are up-scaled at the level of metropolitan policy. But, when all of these cities are very complex assemblages of particular histories, materialities, political situations, and infrastructure—as well as different kinds of sectors with various economic practices, social compositions, etc.—if formalization means some way in which the interrelationships of

these different facets of the urban assemblage are either predictable or consistent, then this is simply never going to be the case. Formalization doesn't entail stability. It may be one element within the assemblage that in some ways is necessary for people to recognize, one way or another, that they are in the same boat.

I have a very ambivalent relationship to the Right to the City movement. Where I am most sympathetic is in terms of a kind of formalization of rights: it is a kind of instrument through which people from different ways of life and in different kinds of positions might be able to recognize how they are in the same boat. But, the kind of economic practices in which people have to engage in so they can put food on the table are not easily subsumable under a kind of codified system of rights. These kinds of practices are labeled "informal" simply because they do not easily correspond to the devices used for the formal specification of things. Still, to group them all under the rubric of informality doesn't really make sense.

CATHY PYENSON When you started your work using researchers from the neighbourhoods in North Jakarta, how did you even connect with the people? How did you go about bringing them all together?

AS They were all members of the UPC. Officially, the consortium brought together 78 local bodies that were supposedly self-organized, mostly across North Jakarta, but also throughout the city. But in reality, it was the UPC itself that provided the incentive and the means for residents from these different areas to organize in this particular way. So, it was a kind of complex congealment: in some ways the different organizations were the product of the larger group, but the consortium always viewed itself as simply bringing together the smaller groups.

JOSHUA KEHL With respect to self-organizing in the city, I'm wondering how the mosques come to fit into the urban assemblage. They are being built even if there is not a lot of money for them, and they can become like an exchange program—as you have written about with respect to Warakas—key sites of information exchange. How would you characterize the role of religion, and the mosques in particular, as an attractor for these other actors within the city?

AS To a large extent, this ongoing tendency to construct small mosques is in some way, for the majority of districts in Jakarta, connected to the premise that most of these districts are



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fairly intense places of opportunistic angling among residents, which produces a kind of exigency, of needing to do something more than they are doing at the moment. Within Jakarta, there is a very strong sense that whatever works now, whatever you are doing now, isn't going to work for very long, that you can never really trust the particular way that you have found stability at any given moment.

This goes back to a sense that, historically, even when people had civil service or factory jobs, their income was never going to be enough to really do anything more than try to stay in place. Also, there are uncertainties around labour markets and trying to organize labour, as well as whole histories of organizing in traditional ways were often heavily repressed by the Dutch and in the early postcolonial period, particularly in Jakarta. So you are dealing with areas where people always have the sense of having to do something more; even if they have a job, or a kind of livelihood, they all are trying to think of something else to do.

But if I want to act, I can never go from point A to point B to point C directly, because I operate in a crowded field of actors who all have their own ideas about what to do. So all of these initiatives that are being undertaken will conflict, and there is no straight line that allows anyone to follow an agenda. So I always have to work around whatever you are doing, and that means I either try to fit it into what you are doing and we make things complimentary, or we try to operate under the radar so the potential competitive dimensions don't stand out too much. You are dealing with districts where there is an intense pursuit of opportunism. Likewise with people looking out for other people's vulnerabilities, as well as their strengths,

because I know that in some sense, I can't go it alone. So, who do I go with? Who do I work with? I want to work with people who aren't necessarily like me. As you know, a lot of the city was settled according to ethnic ties, and especially under the colonial period ethnicity was linked to the kind of job that you would do. So, if you are a Batak, you are a teacher, a lawyer, or a bus driver, or if you are from Madura you hustle hardware, if you are from Padang, you do textiles. These are the confluences of regional sensitivities and colonial privilege that get reproduced continuously. But if I want to be opportunistic, if I stay with people like me, then I owe them something, I'm obligated, and this is the price I pay for a sense of belonging and a sense of security. But I don't want that all the time. I don't want to be indebted, and I don't want to be obligated, I already have enough obligations. So I am always looking for more provisional short-term opportunistic relationships with people who are not like me. You have this configuration always going on. People project a very clear identity of who they are. When you work in the neighbourhood, there are no secrets. I know where you come from, I know whom you are married to, I know what your kids are doing, I know what you're doing at three in the morning, we can always place each other, so you are always trying to get around that, to find more provisional ways of dealing with each other. This makes districts very complicated, and often very treacherous, manipulative, and generous beyond anything you can explain.

In this kind of field of agency, developing a sense of common space, public space, shared space, or even neutral space—these spaces are very difficult for these areas to generate on their own. And certainly the government has never been very interested in providing them. So, religion, or a kind of common religious affiliation, becomes a conduit through which these types of spaces can be built, such as a mosque. It is much more than a place for people to say their prayers or for people to give money to construct it so they will go to heaven. Beyond that, mosques have become a way of configuring a common space for districts, a kind of neutral space, an outlet, even when they are tied to specific or larger organizations that may be competing with each other. It is not that they are politically neutral, because to be a mosque, you have to exist within the whole network of mosques, you get your money from some place, you get your imam from some place, and if the mosque is going to function, it is also a kind of machine that enables its members to have a connection with the larger city. It usually aligns itself with some other kind of larger network. To me, it seems that one of the predominant reasons that mosques continue to be built is that they allow for common spaces within



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districts which are very dynamic, but often problematically so.

Now, religion has other space-shaping forces as well. For instance, in Jakarta, a lot of what people did was keep a sense of eligibility at bay, which I've written about elsewhere.⁶ What this means is that it didn't matter who you were, everyone had an identity and a status and relationship to each other, and, as you know, the Javanese have an authoritarian culture and there is the right way of saying things and the right way of being deferential to people who are above you. At the level of the street, there is a whole other way of speaking that is full of the anarchy that Farid is talking about, where all of those hierarchies are upended. There is a whole language that tears all of those conventions apart, and people learn how to speak both of these languages.

In some way, part of the relative success of many of the auto-constructed districts in Jakarta is based on keeping this notion of traditional eligibility at bay. People can get in each other's faces and say things to each other without necessarily worrying about who they are and who you are. They can contribute, put things out there, and not be afraid of other people saying they are stupid, crazy, disrespectful, or transgressive. There is a sense that things get put on the table in this context that otherwise wouldn't be there at all. If I went to an astrophysics convention, I am not going to start running my mouth off because I don't feel eligible to do so. I don't have the training, I don't have the background, and I would look stupid, so the question of eligibility is operating there in a large way. But there is a significant amount of anti-eligibility sentiment in Jakarta. I work in a place called Kampung Rawa, which is one of the densest districts in Jakarta. You've got kids there, a

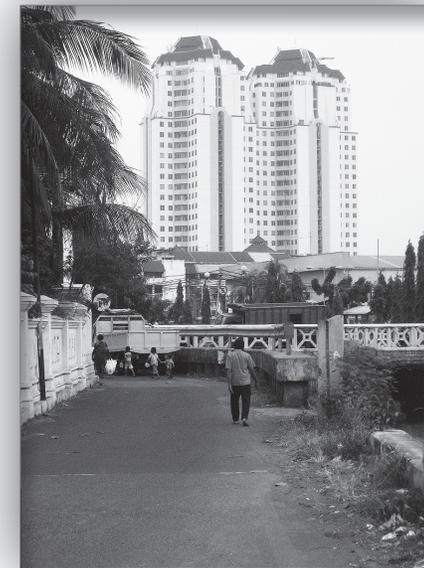
network of youth, and they use social media to find out what is happening in the city. They go by motorcycle convoy and they show up at these places and meetings, they have no idea what is going on, they have no idea what the agenda is, and they try to see what's going on. But, they are committed to saying something, they are always committed to saying something. And what they may say could be completely out of context and have nothing to do with the situation, but they will speak. They are present, and they speak and make their presence felt—and they don't care. This is a commitment that they have.

So, you see, in Jakarta, like many other Muslim cities of the world, there is the emergence of a new middle class whose ascendancy is very much tied to Islamic devotion and an ethos of doing the right thing. In a way, the aspirations of this class have been expressed through reformist Islam; basically, Suharto paid them off and gave them a lot of opportunities for accumulation. Still, there is a sensibility that is not unlike what goes on, for example, in Istanbul, where people who are not historically middle-class and who have come up through very difficult circumstances to gain professional livelihoods now have to try to configure a form of household that matches their new occupational status. One sees a very strong notion of eligibility here. I know young couples who live in these very heterogeneous working-class and lower-middle-class neighbourhoods, and they have the sense that they are going to leave for East Jakarta, to the newer Islamic areas of the city. What makes them the “new” Islamic areas? The money involved, the hegemony of certain religious institutions, etc., but what counts is the fabric of the particular neighbourhood. Even though they live in an area where they are really embedded—if they need childcare, if someone is sick, if they need help, if they need extra income, they all have access to these things—but they are going to leave. Why? They are very clear: if they go to a more “moral” area, a more righteous area of the city, they will be eligible for success. They are going to go into a lot of debt in order to move to the “new” area, they may be in debt for most of their lives, and they also won't have the services and social support they had because they will be very much on their own; whether or not they will be able to cope with that situation remains to be seen, but they are adamant about leaving.

So there is a religious sentiment at work, the individuating power of reformist Islam, even among working-class and lower-middle-class residents, which says: you have to shape the morality of your own individual existence, and that is the priority. Don't be so concerned with how you manage the social life you are embedded in, all the different networks and obligations you have; instead you have to think about stylizing

yourself as a moral individual, and if you do that, you will be successful. When this imperative is combined with the rapid profusion of mega-complexes throughout the city, many people end up thinking to themselves that their current way of life in the city is over or coming to an end, and that they should act now and leave for new areas.⁷

In a way, this is the same kind of urgency that property developers feel. They have this sense in Jakarta that the profitability of a given project doesn't matter, but if they don't act now—because most of the big developments you see are first and foremost a claim on space, whether or not it is profitable at the moment—you won't get there before others have claimed it. The mentality is that you have to decide now because if you don't it's going to be too late. It is that same psychological sense of urgency that pervades much of the rest of Jakarta, a kind of speculative behavior that requires urgent decisions. There has always been this type of urgency, but historically it has been more related to small projects; this is shifting towards “big decisions” of all or nothing.



Luar Batang

JOHN EWANOWSKI

In one of your texts, you say that the residents have an ambivalence to the *preman*, because unlike most residents they don't have to play the game in the same way. This was reiterated at the university yesterday when we were told that *preman* are generally bad for the city. In a city where the government can't do very much, for the reasons we've dis-

cussed, among others, how is the *preman*, as an extra-governmental official, a benefit? Do we have to see them as negative agents because they signal a kind of corruption in the city?

AS It is a kind of confusing term, *preman*. Part of the confusion, historically, in Jakarta, is because the *preman* would always assume a kind of powerful and ambivalent position in the sense that *preman* means “free man;” and in this sense it means they are not necessarily connected anywhere, or embedded in a particular kind of community, occupation, or political perspective. But, then, who are they? How can they be located? If they cannot be located anywhere, they are capable of doing things that can’t be predicted. This generates anxiety, but it also generates potential. Because the *preman*’s power historically came from the ability to negotiate through very different kinds of stories, very different kinds of events—and the willingness to use violence in order to do it—this meant a kind of determination, it meant you could count on the *preman* because they weren’t reluctant to fight their way through. But, if this is possible because the *preman* don’t have any particular loyalties, they also don’t necessarily have any particular loyalties to those whom they are supposed to be fighting for. I think that this ambivalent position tends to cause characterizations of the *preman* as necessarily bad.

In some ways, a more traditional form of the *preman*—that is, someone willing to attempt to translate between different ways of seeing things in a neighbourhood, different ways of doing things, and actively mediating relationships among people—is a role that is being abdicated to a large extent with the rise of organizations like FBR and Forkabi.⁸ These organizations take the approach of saying: we will fight for you and we are networked as an organization across the city. So, with the rise of new forms of protection, defense, and advocacy, the role that the *preman* played is shifting hands, and that contributes to the problem of what they can do. The *preman* then begin to impose themselves, say, at any 7-11, and begin to “manage the parking” by directing traffic. You either collaborate with them or you pay some kind of price. There has been a transition underway over the last ten years that is changing the complex character of the *preman* and shifting this role into more conventional forms of gangsterism rather than operating as a kind of “hinge” within the neighbourhoods themselves.

JK How identifiable are they within the social network? Are they just known through word of mouth?

AS Identification occurs in terms of a complicity where neigh-

bourhoods were made to recognize that they needed security and so these guys appeared to provide it. So, in some ways, they are associated with the kind of job that they do, the way they occupy the day and the night, the way they are strategically located at the places where you transition—transportation depots, markets, public spaces, commercial spaces—and they are the ones who make things happen.

The classic case is at Tanah Abang, Southeast Asia’s largest traditional textile market. The city of Jakarta subcontracts the management of the market out to the city’s influential property developers, and the market is their single largest earner. These include the Podomoro group, the largest developer in the city, who owns Jakarta’s biggest mega-complexes. They subcontract the work out to 16 different holding companies, one for the carters, one for the cleaning, one for the maintenance, one for the rents, etc. And who does it? There is a chain of famous *preman* who are the coordinators, and the power of the market is theirs. For example, there was a very famous *preman*, Hercules, who ran Tanah Abang for many years. So, in some ways, if anything needs to be done, you go to these people. They are the figures in neighbourhoods, in the markets, and other areas who manage the interstices. They are accountable to everyone, and accountable to no one at the same time. In some ways they defer any kind of conflict, for example, among the 16 different holding companies within the market; they obscure the power relationship, but at the same time their power rests on how good of a job they can do in terms of being able to appease the different interests that are involved. This was also their power at the neighbourhood level as well: to listen, to hear, to take it into all into consideration regardless of who was speaking. However, as I said, this kind of role is increasingly being replaced by a kind of game that says, alright, the city is becoming more insecure and we are helping it become more insecure so we can guarantee that it becomes more secure. This is a kind of conventional game that extra-parliamentary groups have played in cities for a long, long time.

LUCAS BARTOSIEWICZ You call the *preman* the “hinge,” and you call these people players; it seems like the livelihood of the city, the “cityness” of the city, happens in the interaction among more formal and more informal sectors of the city, and the government seems more of a referee.⁹ Now, we have heard about the city being separated between formal and informal sectors, and the city government appears to support this division. What do you think the result of this rigid division will be?



Ancol, Northern Coast of Jakarta

AS The most powerful actors in this city are the property developers. They by far have the greatest scope of autonomy, which is not dissimilar to a lot of other cities because part of the motivation of being in politics, of being in government, is being able to steal. Once you have stolen the money, what do you do with it? You have to put it somewhere, and the property developers offer a kind of venue where you can invest stolen money. This is the best way to clean dirty money. There is a complicity there.

But in some ways the state allows this and there is a kind of greater separation. If you look at the way that mega-complexes are marketed, developers are largely saying that if you move here you'll be a part of the world. This is the essence of it. We offer you a platform through which you can be in conversation with the world. How is this possible? If you look at these complexes you'll notice that they try to be as self-contained as possible. Each one has a shopping mall that offers the same thing as all the others, so there is nothing really to differentiate them from each other—they have the same restaurants, coffee shops, etc., but there is still a notion of being self-contained. You only have to leave if you go to work, otherwise it is a self-contained universe withdrawn from the rest of the city, so you don't have to pay attention to the messiness of Jakarta. If you look at the central urban corridor, it is one big complex after another, and a fly-over is being built to take traffic above the complexes, which will cost the city an enormous amount of money. This is being done at the urging of the developers who want to lessen traffic congestion for residents within the complex strip. The property developers contribute, of course, but only to the governor's reelection campaign, not the infrastructure itself. In many ways, the city can sit back because property developers

are creating a kind of constituency to be addressed politically, while the separation between the rest of the city and the complexes only grows. A colleague of mine has done a thorough study of the new developments and has shown the devastating effects, in terms of how many people are actually housed in relation to hidden costs, environmental costs, etc., that these complexes exert on the city. They impose a greater bifurcation of the urban space, and for the rest of the city: they will find a way to deal with life on their own.



Muara Angke

Meanwhile, one of the major considerations is the provision of rental accommodations. So, if you have a property, even if you are very poor, you try to rent some of what you have. I would estimate that 70-80% of the residential units within the city have some rental space, at least one room. There is a great demand for accommodation, and even if statistics say the central part of the city is losing population, which might be true officially, you have all kinds of temporary residents moving around, who are not counted in surveys. So, I think in many areas there is an intense densification taking place, partly in response to the way the mega-complexes are taking up more and more space. What the result will be, I don't know. One thing to remember is that the older complexes were designed as two-bedroom units for young professional families—husband, wife, two kids—but once you sell them off, you can't control who lives there. So, if you look at some of these new residential complexes, they can be shared by up to ten people who go in on them together because it is a good location and they like the idea of living above a shopping mall, but who actually lives there is often not who the developers imagine.



Glodok

AB We'd like to ask about corruption as an aspect of Jakarta. Your reading of the role of the *preman*, whom we heard was very problematic figure in some of our previous meetings, is somewhat more sympathetic. How do you define corruption in your work? Is it different from the normative assumptions of other urban theorists? Do you see a clear distinction between corruption and non-corruption? Does corruption register in the built form of the city—not in transactions, but in the physicality of the built environment?

AS The first question is deliberated and fought over in all kinds of post-colonial discussions. What often gets called corruption are rather hybrid and long-term, institutionalized practices of accumulation with their own moral sensibility and efficacy and which guarantee and certain kind of distribution. They are one way to speed up the circulation of money in light of bureaucratic structures of governance which are no longer effective but still can't be eliminated because the process of inventing new ones is too time-consuming, complicated, or actively militated against by stronger multilateral powers. What changes is the display, one after another, of various instances of corruption. It is also a way for people to account for their relative powerlessness in face of urban reality—you can't do anything, you can't count on anything, because people are corrupt, so why bother? It's a way of trying to read the political field and excuse one's own fear, one's own lethargy, one's own reluctance to get involved. People often complain that there is so much complicated creativity in inventing schemes of corruption, but, when it comes to the inept deployment of governance people wonder why they can't transfer some of the

that inventiveness and skill to simply governing people. It is a complicated question. Every time you leave a parking lot, and someone directs you out even if you could do it on your own, you pay the *preman* without thinking. There is a sense "why do it?", but you still feel obligated. It is a kind of constant extra-legal obligation.

AB What is the difference between paying the *preman* to turn left and paying a parking meter? Couldn't you also just leave?

AS If you do *anything* in Jakarta, you are probably violating a law. Most of the time it doesn't matter, but there is always someone around to make it visible that you are violating something, and that violation will cost you something. In some sense, you live in a permanently illegal situation and if you do anything, you have to pay for it not to be prosecuted. In some sense, then, what that means is that the litigation system would be tied up for centuries to come if it were to actually prosecute all the illegal activities, which is nearly everything. So the question of what is corrupt and not corrupt is all about visibility, scale, and collusion.

How it is registered in the built environment is sometimes very clear. There are 104 shopping malls in Jakarta, and at least 40 of them were built and paid for with cash. Tarumanagara University had a research program on shopping malls and the research methods included participating in the construction of several of the new malls. So, we know that cash was used and they took it. Another way to tell are the things that get built and are sold eight months later at 60% of the construction cost—these buildings were not built as sound investments but rather as a way to "clean" money. For this, the guy to know is someone named Tommy Winata. He is about to build the fifth largest tower in Jakarta. You know the Freemasons? There is an Indo-Chinese equivalent here in Jakarta, a developer clique that is fairly well-known for collusion with the military and the government. One thing to remember about Jakarta and Indonesian history is that Suharto maintained himself in power by making sure his military had many opportunities for the massive accumulation of property and state assets.

NATE OPPENHEIM I have another question about the urban environment. Today we went on a walking tour of Warakas. There you have a close proximity of industrial spaces, mansions, small shacks, etc. Is this indicative of a neighbourhood in transition? What is the role of development within the *kampung*? Is this the opposite of people leaving the neighbourhood? Do neighbourhoods make the transition from informal to formal districts?



Warakas

AS There are a lot of neighbourhoods with long trajectories of transition within them—oscillating stories of accumulation and loss—and the heterogeneity of the built environment is clear in many of them. In Jakarta, in any given neighbourhood, there are so many different materials used, so many types of living spaces, so many proximities among different kinds of residences and residents. In part, these are products of the economies of local districts, and this is why you can't talk about these areas as communities of cooperation and equivalent reciprocities or judiciousness; they are highly competitive districts where some people make it and other people don't.

Indeed, the wealthy are often able to provide work for others living in the neighbourhood, but quite often these are not areas of great equality. Income distribution can be highly skewed. Often times you will find that some of the larger housing construction in a neighbourhood comes from people who have lived in very modest circumstances for five, six or seven years, who were once newcomers and took their time to see what was going on before eventually making their move—perhaps to buy contiguous plots and consolidate them to allow for a larger residence.

These reflect various kinds of calculations and choices. For example, some households will decide to build big because they want to avoid inheritance problems. An issue in Jakarta is related to the ambiguities around property law and inheritance law. Often you see property standing vacant because the offspring of the owners can't agree what to do with it. So some parents will say: let's avoid this, we'll build a big house and all the children will have a place to live with their family here. Other families will decide that they should use disposable in-

come to develop businesses. What I'm saying is that just because contiguous residence spaces may look very different, and they may indeed indicate a difference in income and economic capacity, they just as well could indicate a difference in calculations as to what you do with disposable income.



Kota

There are very diverse narratives at work. The thing is that all of these initiatives, in terms of the built environment, also determine what other people can do as well. So, you've made your move, you've consolidated or divided plots, but you can also lose some control over the property. For example, a common occurrence 40 years ago was that the State, with the aid of the developers, would lay out a kind of neighbourhood in a grid, and people would acquire plots one by one on the street. But, behind them, there would be backyards that residents would sell on an unofficial land market for someone else to develop and live there. But once that gets started, you begin to see the whole area filling in, and it becomes completely densified: in a sense the owners of the original plots completely lost control over what the area was meant to be.

Jakarta's heterogeneity is the outcome of very particular kinds of household stories, but also because the built environment exerts its own particular effect, it has its own agency that limits what others can or cannot do in any particular instance. What you have produced, then, is a very complicated built environment that doesn't necessarily hang together all that well. There are always problems, there are always things that are breaking down, there are always conflicts, but in a way that is the very occasion which allows for different kinds of actors to deal with each other in ways they otherwise wouldn't.

The fact that things don't fit together all that well, is the very game which allows people who wouldn't normally deal with each other to do so, and, out of that, comes a history which gets really nuts! This begins to produce even more kinds of things, more projects which don't work. But, one thing that is historically interesting about these neighbourhoods is that failure has been all right; failure is not something that has deterred residents from trying other things. At the same time, as neighbourhoods pile up evidence of failures, who's going to take responsibility for cleaning them up? That's the other thing.



Farming adjacent to an expressway in the North of Jakarta

ET What is the role of water, and access to water, in this region, and, more specifically, since we are here looking at water and inundation in Jakarta, does a politics of anticipation come back here in relation to water? Can water characterize some of these disjunctive encounters of people interacting with people they normally would not? That is, does the improbable mixing of different types of people relate to water as a daily experience?

AS I'm not so sure. I mean, the impact of flooding, of water, has created a kind of corridor of dead neighbourhoods, neighbourhoods that are basically...over. And if you look at where there have been attempts to invest, to renovate, to try new things, to develop new uses for existing facets of the built environment and infrastructure, they tend to take place in areas that are relatively removed from flooding. But if you look at areas in which flooding does occur, and you walk block by block, you can see that there has been almost nothing done for many years, which is very unusual when you look at the overall picture in Jakarta. So these have become almost like dead spaces, and their future disposition is unclear.



Potable water distribution, Glodok

AB Dead spaces in what sense?

AS In the sense of the trajectory of a general decline. When you go through much of Jakarta, there is always something going on, some kind of modest construction taking place. There is always someone trying out a new business, or there are always ways in which people are trying to reconcile commercial and residential usage within the same space, providing residents with a kind of dynamism, and also using it as a way to develop new commerce. And this is how you get this sense of rebuilding, remaking, a kind of sustainability. In these areas, these dead spaces, you don't find any of that—no initiatives, no attempt to remake or improve upon. You just hold on to what you have for as long as you can, and you cope with the flooding that occurs, which is terrible to deal with, but you can't sell your property for very much because no one wants to buy or relocate there.

But, that said, water politics are going to be an increasingly important issue because even though most new developments build their own water infrastructure—they are not on the urban grid, so they dig their own wells—they contribute to an accelerated rate of subsidence of the geomorphic base of the city as it is. Where you are working in North Jakarta, this subsidence is up to 15 cm per year in some places. You begin to see the implications of this all across the city where house after house has major cracks as a result.

The water supply itself is also becoming more tenuous, so there is a greater competition over it. I mean, you have the problem, as in many other cities, that new kinds of industries are being located on the periphery, and who undertakes the

extension of the grid? Well, in part it is being paid for by selling these new industrial plants low-yield prices for a high-yield capacity, which is a kind of political economy that has plagued water politics and water pricing and supply in many megacities around the world. So that is also at issue.



Luar Batang

The World Bank has approved a kind of loan which will supposedly fund a long-term project along the Ciliwung River to improve flow and drainage—and will require the removal of some 200,000 residents.¹⁰ This has been in the works for a long time, but it hasn't yet started. A lot of the activism in Jakarta has occurred along the Ciliwung River, often as part of environmental rectification programs, in terms of trying to institutionalize the residents there as “tenders of the river.” Now, all of that activity will be dismissed and it will be a big political issue because where will all these residents go? Every relocation program Jakarta has undertaken has been a huge mess. There is a major complex that sits on the coast to the east of the city which is 75% vacant, intended for relocated residents, but no one wants to live there. So, on many different kinds of fronts, water will be an increasingly political issue, whether it is water in terms of flooding, or just basic access to water. No one drinks the water in Jakarta. The water has been thoroughly compromised for many years. It is an expense that all households have to pay, to have drinking water.

It is a very long and complicated story, that is, the way

Jakarta privatized the water system and the way it has calculated the cost of providing it, etc. Karen Bakker has done excellent work on the water politics of the city, a whole series of articles on the history of the way that water came to be a kind of political right, and the way the urban Indonesian middle class was shaped in Jakarta was through the availing of water to a particular style of household. Part of the disciplining of the early middle-class or professional civil servant middle-class was largely accomplished through water provisioning. This is a very important aspect to the contemporary history of the city.¹¹



Glodok

LB We are looking at the city as a site of hypercomplexity, with all these related problems and so many conflicting solutions. In your perspective, do you think the government with its top-down programs can actually work? Or, is it more specifically an issue of organizing bottom-up solutions despite what the government is trying to do?

AS I don't think you can do anything in this city, in the long run, without some kind of deal between property developers and the government, among the class of young, very smart people who have found success through business or worked in government ministries and who now want to do something more with the city. This is a group of financiers who are now in their 40s and 50s with a growing concern for Jakarta. Besides the governor, the only people who are elected are village councils, which have absolutely no job description, though they are supposed to be the advocates of the particularities of their district. But I don't think you can do anything in this city without finding a way to make a deal or a series of deals among very different kinds

of actors. In order to make a deal, you have to experiment with different ways of trying to translate very different realities into a language in which these different actors are willing to listen to each other. At this point, they absolutely live in separate worlds; they have no basis for talking to each other, and they don't see the need. So, there is going to be a protracted period of time where different actors need to deploy their expertise in low-pressure initiatives that give people the opportunity to rehearse some ways of dealing with each other. The only venues in which this currently takes place are some large religious organizations or ethnic organizations like the Betawi, the so-called original inhabitants who sold off their property and are now trying to play a political game to recuperate their power using their ethnicity as an instrument to create links between very different kinds of actors—religious, political, and entrepreneurial. Other than that, there are not many venues that bring these actors together. It is a process that will take a long period of time. But people have to stop being critical in a way; we can criticize the development machine and neoliberal economic policies from now until forever, but we have to try to concentrate our efforts on ways to invite very different kinds of people to contribute by making them feel good, wanted, and important. It may not always work, it may not even work for the most part, but unless people have the emerging capacity to feel they have something to say to each other, then it doesn't matter whether the government does it or the grassroots do it—it won't work.



KRL Jabotabek, Jakarta Commuter Train, Manggarai station

JARED HEMMING Is that due to the long history of colonialism, up to Suharto, where in the end people are more or less “un-practiced” in democracy?

AS I think it also happens in very so-called “politically advanced” cities. It happens even in São Paulo, which has a long contract that provides a very specific series of rights to the city for all residents. But, practically, a lot of what people are able to do gets hijacked by the middle class, and even though you have policies which mandate that there has to be consensus by all people in a particular area, the problem still becomes: how do people talk to each other? They find it difficult even when they are sitting in the same room; they are a million miles away. They don't have an operative series of projects by which they are able to comfortably work together. In some sense, you have to take it out of the politically mandated process that says: you must collaborate. It is an important framework, but in terms of the nuts and bolts of collaboration, you have to have a kind of investment in primarily economic activities where people who are looking to make money see a lot of different ways to do so, and part of that involves folding in people who have historically been marginalized either in terms of employment or in terms of some kind of contribution. So it requires much more creativity about how to make money, and you have to develop municipal policies that enable these kinds of exceptions to take place. For example, here there is the problem of the return of the middle-class to the city because they don't want to be stuck in traffic for five hours a day, and this is an important constituency for demanding accountability and transparency. But the danger is this will potentially disrupt certain other economic practices, or ways of remaking them, that have not been easy to legislate or codify. But of course, these long-term dilemmas are not specific to Jakarta.

ALLEN GILLERS Do you think that might be where architecture's agency lies, in terms of trying to invent and experiment with ways of getting people to talk to each other?

AS It could be... it's a design problem, as well. I mean, if the built environment is a plurality of materialized effort, undertaken by different kinds of actors, the subsequent physical environment is either conducive to certain kinds of speech or interactions, or it inhibits them. So, in some sense, if architects see themselves as thinking about the design of the built environment, then that charge, that task, also has to include the kinds of sentiments and efforts that produced the built environment in the first place—as well as the various potentialities that are possible from those who affiliate with, occupy, or use it. So, in part it's a design issue, but a political issue as well. This is the politics of design: how can you conceive of spaces of transaction that facilitate the possibilities of enhanced translatability in terms of peoples' varied sentiments, perspectives, affects, and ways of seeing things? ○



Luar Batang

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ENDNOTES

- 1 AbdouMaliq Simone, *City Life from Jakarta to Dakar: Movements at a Crossroads* (New York: Routledge, 2010).
- 2 Kampung are one of Jakarta's basic urban units, sometimes referred to as urban villages, and often described as reproducing rural Indonesian village structures. Though this is not always the case, their composition is very diverse.
- 3 Joko Widodo, commonly known as Jokowi, was elected as governor of Jakarta on 20 September 2012 following his defeat of the incumbent governor Fauzi Bowo in a runoff election.
- 4 *Orde Baru*, or "The New Order," was the name given to Suharto's regime.
- 5 A late nineteenth-century Russian anarchist, Mikhail Bakunin argued for the elimination of the State by means of control by the people. See Mikhail Bakunin, *Statism and Anarchy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.)
- 6 See Simone, *City Life from Jakarta to Dakar*.
- 7 See Abidin Kusno, "Runaway City: Jakarta Bay, the Pioneer and the Last Frontier," in *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 12, no. 4 (2011): 515–530.
- 8 FBR, or the Forum Betawi Rempug; Forkabi, or the Forum Komunikasi Anak Betawi. FBR and Forkabi are large, competing organizations who emerged in Jakarta in the post-Suharto *reformasi* era.
- 9 See Simone, *City Life from Jakarta to Dakar*.
- 10 For the World Bank's Jakarta Urgent Flood Mitigation Project, visit: <http://www.worldbank.org/projects/P111034/jakarta-urgent-flood-mitigation-project?lang=en>.
- 11 See Karen Bakker, "Trickle Down? Private sector participation and the pro-poor water supply debate in Jakarta, Indonesia," in *Geoforum* 38 (2007): 855–868; and Karen Bakker, Michelle Kooy, Nur Endah Shofiani, and Ernst-Jan Martijn, "Disconnected: Poverty, Water Supply and Development in Jakarta, Indonesia," UNDP Human Development Report (2006).