Urban Temporalities: Jakarta After the New Order

—Abidin Kusno in Conversation with Meredith Miller and Etienne Turpin

photos by
David Hutama

As part of the *Architecture + Adaptation* research initiative, we brought Professor Abidin Kusno to the University of Michigan for a lecture and a workshop on the politics of spatial justice in Jakarta. Following these events, Professor Kusno generously agreed to an interview with Etienne Turpin and Professor Meredith Miller, who focused on some of the philosophical issues that have emerged from his research on Jakarta and Indonesia, such as the relationship between time and space in the cultural, political and physical history of Jakarta, the agency of the urban poor in the politics of the city, and the specific force of capital in the formation of the city. What follows is a partial transcript of the conversation, conducted in February 2013, in Ann Arbor, Michigan. We are grateful to the International Institute, Center for Southeast Asian Studies, and the Taubman College of Architecture + Urban Planning of the University of Michigan for their support, which made these events, and this interview, possible. A very special thanks to Professor Kusno for his intellectual mentorship, generous advice, and contagious conviction about the value of political engagement in Jakarta. Additional parts of this conversation are published in the book *Jakarta: Architecture + Adaptation* (Depok: Universitas Indonesia Press, forthcoming 2013), edited by Adam Bobbette, Meredith Miller, and Etienne Turpin.

Temporal Coordination

Etienne Turpin Your work is based on a coordination of time and space, which serves as a framework for your analysis of Jakarta. Could you tell us something about how you read this coordination?

Abidin Kusno While every aspect of our activities is largely governed by time, we are in many ways constructing it as well, in social and political ways. We invest time with narratives that gives meaning to our lives. The state, too, invests time with a narrative that gives life to the nation. The state therefore always seeks to control time. The whole ideology of development during Suharto's era (1966–1998), for instance, is based on a temporal assumption drawn from modernization theory. There were a series of five-year plans of development that would eventually lead Indonesia to *lepas landas* (take off) like an airplane. *Lepas* means free, and the plans were to lead to freedom from poverty, so as to achieve the national goal of "a society that is just and prosperous." To arrive at the platform for take off, the whole society would have to follow the order of the state, as development needs political stability—or so the story goes. The whole nation here is thus given a homogenous notion of time centered on the idea of development.

As a member of a generation who grew up in the time of Suharto, I was given the idea (via school and the media) that we were moving

upward as long as we follow the orders of the state. Yet, it was unavoidable that we saw things that contradicted this linear development. I moved to Jakarta in the late 1980s, and anyone who was in the city at that time witnessed not only progress, but also contradictions. This was the time of a construction boom, when capital accumulation and authoritarianism came hand in hand, moving forward frantically in the form of city-building to outpace the growth of *kampung* settlements. This is an example of a contradiction in the time of development. I have since then sought to understand such contradictory expressions in the city; an analysis of space offers such an opportunity. Unlike time, space cannot be fully controlled, and reveals the contradictions of development-time. There seems to be a gap between time and space, which the state has sought to deny by seeing it as a transitional phenomenon. Yet such a gap never seems to go away. I became interested in seeing how such a gap shapes the subjectivity of the people who are living there. Specifically, how did the state, professionals, and citizens respond to the contradictions brought by development?

ET How has the ideology of development changed, or how do you see it as having changed, since the Suharto period?

AK I am not sure if the ideology of development has changed since Suharto. Development has a history longer than the Suharto regime. We could even trace the idea back to the colonial period. Is there a new construct of time after the end of Suharto's New Order? My work on the post-Suharto era is an attempt to answer this question. What have time and space done to each other after the New Order? This is not just a research question, but also a moral and political issue. When we analyze the Suharto era, we assume an "anti-authoritarian" position without much difficulty, but how about today, fifteen years into the *reformasi*? How should we develop a critical relation to the new construct of time?

Framing the post-Suharto era within a new relation of time opens up many ways of conceiving power and constructing possibilities. I remember at the beginning of the reform era, the keyword then was *rakyat* (the poor). Perhaps because of democratization, the notion of *rakyat* suddenly appeared everywhere. The *rakyat* seemed to be the majority at a time when the middle class found themselves in decline as they lost their jobs following the financial crisis. *Rakyat* seems to not only represent the new time, but it has survived the New Order. The development ideology of Suharto was supposed to have emancipated them, but after more than 30 years, the *rakyat* remain poor and marginal. Perhaps the emergence of this concept in the post-Suharto era represents the failure of developmentalist ideology. This has led me to consider how the *rakyat* were situated in the time of Suharto—were they outside the hegemonic time of development?

I feel that there are at least three interrelated temporalities that we have to recognize to grasp the present. The first one is the *longue durée* (from Fernand Braudel) of colonial VOC history.[1] This produced Batavia/Jakarta and connected the city to global commodity supply chains and the international division of labour. Within this long time frame, the developmentalist time of Suharto and its contemporary incarnation is just part of the longer history of capitalism.

The second temporality is the developmentalist time of Suharto, which emerged out of the "revolution" against communism and Sukarno's time. It is still an influence today, haunting like a ghost, even though people want to leave behind Suharto time. Communism is

still a negative reference, and the perception is still there that all Chinese are rich and can be squeezed for money. In other words, whole categories constructed as the New Order's internal other are still working to define national identity.

The third temporality, which I mentioned earlier, refers to the time of *rakyat*, which continues to exist as the other within developmentalist time. The *rakyat*, the *kampung*, and the informal land market occupy a central place at the margins of capital and the state. The production of space in the post-Suharto era needs to be set against these three interrelated temporalities.

The Autonomous Rakyat

ET Let's discuss the third temporality. Is this time of *rakyat* a time of informality? Is it included in the other two times or is it produced by them? Or does it produce itself? This is really a question of how autonomous informal time is, which is a distinction made by AbdouMaliq Simone, who suggests that the informal is extremely autonomous.[2]

AK Simone used to work for international development agencies and knows very well the limits of the developmentalist paradigm, which assumes the poor as a subject in need of guidance. He is interested in the idea of the irreducibility of the human subject. His work puts an emphasis on the agency of the urban poor who are irreducible to the homogenizing onslaught of developmentalist time. His position, however, is not a romantic one. There are images of violence and vulnerability that accompany the vitality of the urban poor. They are autonomous yet dependent on the contradictory structure of development. This approach is useful as it moves beyond the narrative of victimization, yet it shows how the urban poor are always located in a contingent and precarious—but also productive—network that they help establish. In this sense, the urban poor do not resist the developmentalist time which exploits them (they could not afford to resist), but they also make use of the contradictions embedded in development, which needs the cheap labour power of the informal sector. In this sense, the *rakyat* are simultaneously within and outside the time of capitalist development. While the agency of the poor is an important subject, I am more interested in looking at how elites and the government have legitimized their power after the downfall of Suharto, specifically through the category of *rakyat*.

ET The elites may imagine the poor in a singular term, but as you pointed out there are hierarchies within the category of the poor. The card-carrying poor of Jakarta (Jakarta residents) have more social capital than the migrants who do not have Jakarta ID cards, and the latter are often be exploited by the former.[3]

AK Yes, the government can exclude those who are not Jakarta residents from its system of governance. One could say that the migrants with no ID have a broader sphere of autonomy because they escape from regulation (as well as benefits), but they are also very vulnerable and easily exploited and criminalized, not least by residents of Jakarta who are equally poor. I suspect, although I don't have the data, that a large number of workers in Jakarta today are those who do not have Jakarta ID cards. One could assume that many of them used to work

in the peri-urban factories and took up residency there, but the disappearance of secure jobs in the manufacturing sector has forced them to turn to the city and work in the informal sector. In any case, post-Suharto Jakarta is marked by the proliferation of both non-card-carrying workers and poor residents of Jakarta. They are the *rakyat*. They have become more visible and yet they are denied their right to live in the city. One area of my research concerns the responses of the elites—ranging from the government and business groups to middle-class professionals (such as architects and urban designers)—to the appearance of the *rakyat* in the city. Indeed, the emergence of populist politics today can be connected to the emergence of the *rakyat*.

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Informality

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ET NGOs, too, must have responded to the appearance of the *rakyat* who (re)turned to Jakarta to survive the impact of the financial crisis. Back then, you participated in a workshop organized by the Urban Poor Consortium (UPC) to conceptualize the idea of informality.[4] How was it analyzed then?

AK That was a time when Jakarta was still heavily affected by the influx of people from peri-urban areas, who lost their jobs due to the closing or scaling down of factories there.[5] Sutiyoso aggressively tried to stop them from coming in by evicting those from informal *kampungs*.[6] We were wondering if informality—the condition of living in the informal sector—would create an identity for the urban poor, which in turn would shape their struggle for their right to live and work in the city. We were also wondering how this informality could be understood intellectually, morally, and politically. Were they victims? Were they collaborators with capital? Or were they leading an autonomous existence? Little did we realize that we were also trying to give the post-Suharto period a name: can it be called the era of *rakyat* and the time of informality?

There is a feeling that the workshop was an inquiry into a possibility of producing a collective identity for the urban poor to stage their struggles. The term "informal," then, could be understood as a political construct, like the idea of the autonomous subject. I think we tried to show first, the positive contribution of the informal sector to the economic life of the city, and second, that the informal is not a transitional feature. Instead, it is a permanent feature of our city. Such a formulation is intended to register the idea that the informal has the right to stay in the city. This politics of value contains a temporal dimension because it requires patience to trace and show how the economic network of the poor is not only autonomous and self-referential, but also relational and tied to the formal social and economic life of the city. The weakness of this formulation is that it suggests that the government could just sit back, letting the poor help themselves within their own network.

ET Mike Davis says this about the UN and its concern for housing when he considers the valorization of the slums: "Look how they work so well. They are so great. We don't need to build housing. Look at their ingenuity.[7]"

AK Yes, we can say that he problematizes the idea of community resilience and the UN's self-help assessment because it frees the government

from responsibility. The neoliberals have easily appropriated this idea to further the agenda of relieving the state from the responsibility of taking care of the poor. The state can then say that the survival of the poor is their own responsibility, and it is all about them developing their own network to survive. The state may give them a reward by acknowledging their "autonomy," but that does not mean that they won't be evicted.

ET   In the end, it's up to you. You decide whether or not you will survive.

AK   Yes. But we should also note that while the neoliberal idea is quite influential in Indonesia, the state is still aware that it cannot leave the poor alone because the *rakyat* embodies the moral economy of the Indonesian state. There are thus always programs to manage the *rakyat*, either by transmigrating them to the outer islands, or "allowing" them to survive in the city through the provision of the informal land market. It is important for the state to domesticate the notion of *rakyat* by showing care through programs, even though such programs often privilege only one section of the *rakyat*. For example, in the case of housing for the *rakyat* in Jakarta, the target group is those who have IDs and, ideally, those with stable incomes to qualify for state subsidies. While the programs may look inclusive, the requirements often discourage the extremely poor from participating. The state, too, cannot always use violence to evict people, especially today. The method of relocating the poor seems to have become more subtle, by way of land certification. As the affordable, informal land market disappears through land titling, there will be fewer and fewer people living in the city.

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Cosmopolitanism

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ET   Could the scenario that Mike Davis suggests, that is, the rise of fundamentalism, take place in Jakarta?

AK   It is possible that a time will come when the urban poor start to feel that they are not cared for, that they are outside, and that they could create an alternative worldview for themselves. When the urban poor begin to feel that they are really not connected to the ideology of development, when they say: "We won't be able to move up, no matter how hard we try," then they will search for new values, or a new ideology. Davis makes it clear that an extreme version of religious beliefs may come in as this new value.[8] We are not sure whether this could happen in Jakarta, as it seems to me the ideology of development, the dream of becoming middle class, and the image of the "wheel of fortune" are still alive. While nationalist ideology may no longer sell in Jakarta, the city is still perceived as a space of opportunity, where you don't need committed ideologies or values, but creativity and inventiveness. This attitude may continue to prevent Jakarta from moving toward religious fundamentalism.

ET   Is there still a significant residue of the promise of development from Suharto's time?

AK   There is an afterlife of Suharto's promise of development, but generated by the market rather than the state. The capital city continues to be promoted as a site of modernity. Thanks to capitalist modern-

ization, the city encourages you to be secular, rather than continuing with your rural ideals and religion. Jakarta is still a symbol of modernity, national development, and the site for identity transformation; it is a place to take refuge from traditionalism. To become urban is to become a supra-local cosmopolitan Indonesian subject.[9] In some ways, this prevents religious fundamentalism from taking hold in Jakarta. If you look at the geography of the city, the impact of religion is only quite widespread in the peri-urban areas, but not so much in the city. So that counters Davis's idea; it is probably the power of the urban that prevents religious fundamentalism from replacing the ideology of modernity.

ET   Jakarta also has a lot of "modernization," at least relatively speaking, compared to Davis's examples like Kinshasa and other extremely impoverished cities with massive slums. As much as the *kampung* fabric is wound through Jakarta, there is far more development and potential. Even if you cannot move up in obvious ways, there are a lot of ways to try.

AK   Right. Even though we talk about the superblock as excluding the poor, it is not entirely true. If we look at the staff, shopkeepers, and service workers who work in the shopping malls, we know they are from the lower-middle class. There are also a lot of women working there, too. Of course, they could be seen as being exploited with low salaries and long hours of work without proper housing, but there are still more opportunities that the city offers. In some ways, this prevents hardline religious or traditional communities from taking over the city. This characterizes the "cityness" of Jakarta.

Meredith Miller   I am wondering how that complicates the idea of the autonomy of the urban poor. When you consider it spatially—in the sense that there may not be enough of a concentration of *kampungs* to cultivate a religious fundamentalism, as they are strung throughout the city, coexisting with and sometimes relying on the superblocks for jobs—is that a kind of spatial difference, as well as a social one?

AK   You are right. The idea that Jakarta is a divided city consisting of *kota* and *kampung*—the dual city—fails to capture their intertwined sociality and overlapping territories. The idea of autonomy is also not really a satisfactory concept for understanding the work of the urban *kampung* in Jakarta. So far, the super-development of Jakarta is still sustained by the surrounding *kampungs*, even though there are fewer opportunities for workers to live in the city due to the shrinking of *kampung* areas and the expansion of land certification.

So, how do we account for the idea of autonomy of the urban poor when the *kampung-kota* interaction has been quite intensive? I think it may be more productive to think of this idea contextually.

Historically, the urban *kampung* was the first site for migrants to become urban subjects. There they were socialized, learned how to survive, and became connected to urban networks of all kinds. The issue here is that many of these *kampungs* are either disappearing because of new mega projects or undergoing a process of formalization via land titling. While the urban form of Jakarta may still give an impression of a big *kampung*, it has become more and more difficult—and expensive—to live in the existing urban *kampungs*, and workers are increasingly finding themselves living farther and farther away from their workplaces. This displacement has contributed to the

end of an era when the *kampung* served as a space of urban pedagogy.

The displacement of workers to peri-urban areas may shape the way workers think about themselves: "Am I still an urban subject when I could not even find an affordable place to live in the city where I work?" When the workers who serve the city find themselves living farther away from the city, this is the beginning of the end of "city-ness." This could lead to a feeling of exclusion and worsen the anti-urban sentiment among the marginal who have no alternative but to live in the peri-urban.

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The Peri-Urban

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ET Do you think an anti-urban morality could emerge in the peri-urban? Could you say more about the politics of morality in the peri-urban?

AK First of all, the moral economy of the Indonesian state has historically sought to bring justice and prosperity to society. The Agrarian Law of 1960, for instance, embodies such a morality, stating that while an individual can own land, it is the state that controls it. The existence, and to certain degree persistence, of informal land markets could be seen as an in-kind contribution of the state to the urban poor so that they can live and work in the city. However, this approach is being challenged today as the state becomes more committed to the World Bank's idea of land certification in Jakarta to further expand the formal land market, an idea that could be traced all the way back to Hernando de Soto. This move will eventually eliminate informal land markets and make living in the city impossible for the poor. We can thus say that the dissolution of the informal land market means the disappearance of the state's moral economy.

Meanwhile, the disillusionment with the promise of development institutionalized under Suharto, as well as the process of democratization and politics of decentralization, have opened up all kinds of possibilities for different values to develop. Some of them are progressive, but a lot of them are extremely conservative. So, this is the moment of openness that we are now trying to grapple with; the looseness in the centre has opened up a space for new investments in ideologies and contestations over values and worldviews. And space is highly implicated in this kind of struggle.

We only have to remember when Jakarta had its first election for the position of Governor in 2007. The Islamic political party—Partai Kesejahteraan Indonesia (PKS)—were actually hoping to control Jakarta. They had their own candidate, and it was not entirely impossible that the Islamic Party would become highly influential in the city. All the other political parties, suddenly realizing how dangerous it would be if the Islamic Party were successful, all supported Fauzi Bowo, who is quite secular and open to multiculturalism. His election victory showed that the majority of people in Jakarta wanted to keep the city secular and cosmopolitan. However, the PKS was quite successful in winning elections in the surrounding regions of Jakarta.

ET They moved out to the surrounding areas of Jakarta?

AK Yes, as the PKS moved into Depok, for example, alcohol started disappearing from stores. At a conference at Universitas Indonesia that I attended, we had difficulty finding beer. Our international friends were better prepared: they brought beer from their home countries. One even brought whiskey and put it in an empty water bottle. [Laughter]

ET Do you think the "voluntary" relocation of workers to the peri-urban would subject them to fundamentalism and extremism?

AK I do not know for sure, but hypothetically speaking, as mentioned earlier, those who were displaced to the peri-urban may feel that the "cityness" of Jakarta is not for them. Instead, the city is seen as a place for the upper-middle classes only. This is why I thought we had to criticize the massive land acquisition for superblocks and the unavailability of affordable housing for the poor and low-income workers in the city. We also had to problematize the World Bank's formalization of the informal land market by way of land titling because I think such practices will only create more landlords and strengthen the hegemony of homeownership. All the land will just end up in the hands of the rich, and rental costs will go up. We should ask ourselves the question: what is going to happen if there is no space for the urban poor to live in the city? What is going to happen if we continue to displace the urban poor to peri-urban areas? We can imagine a dystopian scenario where marginal workers displaced to the peri-urban could be subjected to an anti-urban politics of morality.

MM If you are talking here about eliminating that boundary and inviting the periphery in, or encouraging the urban poor back into the city as a way of breaking up that type of morality, could we also ask about creating other kinds of centres outside Jakarta? Could the peri-urban be made more cosmopolitan?

AK It would not be fair to say that the peri-urban areas are less than cosmopolitan and underdeveloped. There are new towns with first-rate facilities. They have people from different ethnic, religious, and regional backgrounds. They have been absorbing more and more people from Jakarta and other rural areas. And they are trying to become centres of a certain kind, but with decentralization, each of the regions around Jakarta has become interested in capitalizing on difference—from Jakarta, with their own cultures and values, etc. Religion and ethnicity have become a major source for the construction of identity. Whether the peri-urban can be made cosmopolitan would depend on how the region defines itself. Of course, we hope that they would create a form of "cityness" that is more inclusive and progressive than Jakarta. But so far, looking at the emerging politics of morality and the "gated" new towns built by developers from Jakarta for residents in the peri-urban, it would be a challenging task to make the peri-urban more cosmopolitan.

ET Pushing out the urban poor also connects to the discourse of green governmentality, which you have analyzed.[10] In fact, there are so many things pressurizing these displacements: rising property values, real estate investment, N-11, Goldman Sachs', and Price Waterhouse Cooper's investments in Jakarta, etc. The pressures on the city to exclude the urban poor seem quite severe.

AK Investment in financial capital is different from investment in the manufacturing sector, as factories need cheap labour to remain

profitable. In this sense, enterprises would welcome the informal sector so that the cost of labour can be kept low. Running an office for financial capital does not require a pool of cheap labourers, but rather technology, communication, and a Central Business District (CBD) sustained by high-tech infrastructure and populated by well-paid financiers and managers. This group prefers a quality of environment, which brings us to the green discourse that demands a particular urban form with almost no connection to the informal sector. The interesting thing to consider is how the green discourse and lifestyles of Jakarta's middle class intersect with the need in the city to build a first class infrastructure for financial capitalism. How will this intersection create a new geography for the city?

Wish-Images

ET   All six sites that we researched for the first phase of the project are affected by the World Bank's Urgent Flood Mitigation Plan. One thing that we are really interested in is the rhetoric of that plan: that there will be some visionary technological solution that will just make everything work. The German philosopher Walter Benjamin said that if you propose a technological solution for a social problem, what you are proposing is a "wish-image." I feel like your writing about the "new" waterfront—and the way in which Jakarta is turning back around to face the world, as you say—relates to this idea of the wish-image. The city had turned away from the coast, and now it is turning back toward the international with new technological solutions.[11]

AK   Yes, the wish-image is a useful concept to show that the line differentiating speculation from imagination is very thin. Indeed, the urban problems of Jakarta, developed out of earlier wish-images, could supposedly be erased or forgotten by creating another wish-image on the coast. I was asking whether the coast is the beginning or the ending of capitalist development in Jakarta. The waterfront proposes a new beginning for a global Jakarta, proposing a "technical solution" to the infrastructural problems of the city. But, it is also conceived in an ideological manner where one could see (as in the Nusantara Corridor waterfront project) the unfolding of a "mythical" glorious past from colonial times to independence and the new global era. It is conceived as more than a technical solution for the urban centre; there is a narrative of national origin and destiny for what is, after all, a project of capitalist speculation. I sought to problematize all these ideological constructions. At the end of my story, there is an image of inundation and the sinking of the whole world. To me, that is the most likely destiny of the city. That piece is, in some way, an attempt to wake up Jakarta to realize that that profit-oriented development and ecology do not always work together.

ET   The gateway too, in a way, is a wish-image. These developments are not going to solve any social problems. But do you think the wish-image of the Regatta, or these other excessive developments, represent an ideology that still has some effect on the urban poor? Are these forms charged enough that even the poor are willing to believe in them as wish-images?

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AK Projects such as the Regatta could be seen as wish-images of the upper-middle class who seek to transcend the deteriorating city. The branding of this high-end residential complex incorporates the image of the world. It wants to be an icon of the city, but it is directed to upper-middle-class consumers who are looking for a new wish-image. It is not like the city-nation building of the Sukarno era, nor is it a public monument to glorify national achievements. Projects like the Regatta show quite bluntly the leadership of the private business sector in bringing Jakarta to the next level of development.[12] It is a private enterprise, and its selling point is its secured location, bordered by the sea, in a gated compound within a gated community. On the sea-wall leading to Regatta are signs saying "don't sit here," directed to the lower classes who are often in the neighbourhood because they work there. It is also a common sight, however, to see them ignoring these signs. They go on dates there, occasionally picnic, and even take their pictures with the Regatta as the background. How can we understand this kind of practice? Is the Regatta a wishimage for the lower classes who work in the neighbourhood?

The wish-images of the Regatta and its kind are constructed on the basis of a distinction—a wish-image to consolidate class identity. But, such an identity is marked by contradictions. Most of the daily activities of the people living in a place like the Regatta are sustained by the services provided by lower-class communities. The gate that restricts the movement of the lower classes never quite works, but it works as a wish-image, as reflected in the project's amazing architectural style.

ET But the wish is, in a way, also part of the integrity of the city.

AK That is an interesting proposition. The wish-image that used to be produced by the state under "nationalist urbanism" is being produced and reproduced by capital, as well as by citizens. It takes a range of images from those associated with the world city, those of the green environment, and the religious city. The nationalist ideology is no longer there to unify perception, and this opens up possibilities for different wishes, as well as new dreams and nightmares. For conservative and religious people, their wish may well be turning Jakarta into a more religious place. But, there is also the wish of the cosmopolitan class and the environmentalists. There is the whole idea of the green city. And there are populist politicians. So there are many wish-images waiting to be represented that have given Jakarta a life based on wishing. The city has a lot of energy and people who still want to dream. What is interesting is to see whether there is a shared dream that everyone can identify with, such as that packaged under the nationalist urbanism of the previous era. But, perhaps this is less important than the fact that people still have wishes and that this possibility gives Jakarta its integrated "cityness."

ET How about the wish-image of the poor?

AK In my opinion, it would be the possibility of upward mobility toward becoming urban middle class. The city would need to preserve such a possibility to allow the *rakyat* to feel that, in some way, the city is something that they can continue to believe in, or something they can be led to believe in.[13]

ET But Benjamin says that to posit a utopian future it is necessary to transform the act of wishing into action.

AK Action, according to Benjamin, stems from waking up from the dream world of commodities. The commodities that flooded Paris did not emancipate the poor who dreamed of becoming middle class to carry out a revolution. In the Indonesian case, commodities did not reach everyone in the same way, and national development did not lead to the emancipation of the poor. And once the construction of wish-images was stalled by the financial crisis, the city exploded not by revolutionary force, but through reactionary acts which targeted Suharto's internal others, such as the urban poor, ethnic Chinese, and women.

However, there has been a shift in the mode of governance that, in some ways, has allowed the country to renew itself. The construction of a new sense of time is helpful, even though it continues to be shaped by the past. In Jakarta today, it is the city government (instead of the state) that is under huge pressure to perform. It has to work with the private sector to rebuild Jakarta so that it will not just create more wish-images. It has to take the *rakyat* into consideration, even though space for the *kampungs* is shrinking. It has to come up with a series of progressive, populist projects. Take, for instance, Sutiyoso's busway, Fauzi Bowo's green discourse, and Jokowi's series of pro-poor programs, including his plan to stop the construction of more shopping malls because he believes that commodities and consumerism cannot emancipate people.

ET It is about a dream that could not be fulfilled by commodities. This is very interesting now, if we go back to what you were saying about Batavia under the VOC as being only a place for commodities to pass, but never really a place of its own. So, in a way, some critical perspectives towards commodities are a kind of wake-up call for a city shaped by their circulation.

AK Jakarta has been part of the international commodity chain since colonial times. It built Amsterdam, one could say. As such, its history is inseparable from the history of capital. But capital did not come only to exploit; it came with ideologies and wish-images. The colonial government started a new kind of uneven development and filled the city with social problems, while making it the centre of almost everything, including commodities. The wish-images are a product of capital and they, in turn, reproduce capital. But this process is not totalizing, for it carries with it cleavages, gaps, and contradictions that allow critical perspectives to come and go.

ET But the project of wealth accumulation becomes a virus. Mrázek's book, in a way, is really about how the Dutch colonial disposition toward modernization is very contagious.[14] It is hard to resist!

AK Yes, capital accumulation can be taken over by postcolonial subjects. Today, capital also moves around the city by leap-frogging from one profitable area to another, leaving gaps and cleavages in the city. For instance, after exhausting the central part of the city, capital intends to jump over to the northern cost to build a waterfront city. It may yet come back to the city to take over the remaining *kampungs*. But Mrázek also mentions in his book how the Dutch in the early twentieth century always felt that Jakarta was constantly on the move. The

city belonged to "the age in motion," though compared to Surakarta, its movement was less threatening to a colonial order.[15] Today, we seem to be seeing Jakarta undergoing another age of motion.

Memory

ET I want to connect this back to the question of memory, something that your work has in common with *Engineers in Happy Land*, which begins, as you know, with the Proust quote about extracting memory from objects.[16] It seems to me that you do this through the city itself. Could you talk about this as a strategy and what it means to "reactivate" memory?

AK The issue is how to bring space into a dialogue with time so that memories lost to history can be retrieved as a political project. In principle, the built environment (the object in Proust's terms) keeps and releases the memories of people living in it. It often takes the form of ruins (following the flight of capital) that not only express the wish-images of their time, but it also represents the efforts made to shape society.

ET Benjamin takes this idea from Proust. I think the idea of retrieving certain forms of agency, or of delaminating them, from national-ist narratives is really important. I think this is the other revolutionary agenda in your book. You accept that, through appearance, the activation of memory can be through something that was connected to nationalism, but not *necessarily* connected to national-ism, in the same way as in Benjamin's reading of Paris, a city of nineteenth-century capitalism that reveals other struggles.

AK Time cannot always domesticate space, and space, in turn, can haunt time. This makes memory work important, especially when history is colonized by the state. If history has been hijacked by official nationalism, then to rewrite the history of Jakarta is to re-activate memory with the aid of the built environment. And, as I indicated earlier, there is the contradiction of developmentalist time, which finds expression in space. These are some ways to make memory a political project.

The Times of *Banjir*

ET Where does *banjir* [flood] fit into the diagram of space-time relations?

AK Flood has a temporal dimension because it occurs at certain times, such as high tide and the rainy season. The spatial dimension can be found in words such as *banjir kiriman* (flood caused by rain from upstream) and *daerah rawan banjir* (flood-prone areas often associated with the *kampung*). It reflects the spatial order of the city. When some parts of the city are flooded, people often ask if the major thoroughfares such as Sudirman Street, or elite housing areas such as Pondok Indah, or the presidential palace, are inundated. The scale of the disaster is measured by whether these elite areas are flooded. It will not be an item of major news if only the *kampungs* are flooded. Flooding visits Jakarta so often that it that does not seem to warrant a serious response. We can find accounts on *banjir* in early twentieth-

century literary and popular representations, where it was represented not only as a threat or a disaster that causes misery, but also as an adventurous, festive or even humorous event. It is very contradictory. There is also a mysterious feeling surrounding *banjir*. Why was one area flooded last year but not this year? *Banjir* comes and goes bringing misery, critical awareness, and fortunes to some who make money from the disaster.

MM How has *banjir* shaped people's behaviour?

AK Historian Restu Gunawan wrote a wonderful book about canals and *banjir* in Jakarta.[17] One interesting depiction is that when *banjir* comes, people all escape, and when *banjir* is over, people come back again. People know that *banjir* will come back, but they never seem to forget that it will go away too. There are three types of people. First, those who are flooded. Second, those whose houses are not flooded, but who do a lot of helpful things for those suffering, ranging from distributing food to providing shelter—but like the first type, they never protest. The third type includes those who make money from flooding by charging (a lot) for the services they provide to the victims, such as transporting them to safe areas. So *banjir* produces different types of subjectivities. It would be interesting to see how the World Bank's flood mitigation plan could end *banjir* and alter or eliminate these subjectivities.

ET It is also interesting with respect to Bangkok, another city where people say, "Well, it happens and we move out of the way, people do different things than they normally do, then the water goes away and we go back to normal time." In a way, it has an almost religious temporality, like a religious calendar. It is like this week: you have Mardi Gras, and then you have Ash Wednesday, and then you go into a different kind of time, a theologically intense time. I think it is interesting that ecologically, up to a certain point, you can have a displacement of normal time that is almost theological. *Banjir* comes, *banjir* goes.

AK Like a ritual of renewal?

ET But at a certain point, it becomes more serious, and people say, "Okay, we can't get rid of *banjir*, but we have to mitigate the scale of its effects."

AK The scale of its effects points to the question: who are the victims? People who live in the *kampungs* are not only seen as the victims, but also as contributors to *banjir*. They built houses and settlements along the riverbed, which over time has narrowed the river, and they throw garbage into the river (similar to the dumping of industrial waste by enterprises), so they were thought to be the cause, the perpetrators. Both as victims and agents of *banjir*, residents of the *kampung* are subject to what Foucault would call "regulatory discipline" or the "regulatory framework," and they become docile subjects. When there is a flood, the government comes in and gives them "everyday needs" like rice, and even the middle class and the rich donate a lot of money toward this. This allows the victims to feel that the state is still protecting them. They also become the subject of disciplinary practices because they are said to be perpetrators too, which gives justification for the state to relocate them. It allows the state to say, "You should

be away from the riverbank; it is dangerous and is actually causing flooding in the city." This opens up a space for "technical solutions."

ET So it allows people to assert that the poor pose a danger to the city?

AK Yes and no. Yes, because the government and the middle class continue to blame the urban poor. They say, "You narrowed the river, you threw garbage in the river," but there is nothing new in this charge. People are getting tired of it. Nowadays, people know that there are other practices that cause the flood, such as the rich building their villas upstream, in water catchment areas where water is held before it goes down toward the city; now these areas are disappearing to make space for the villas. People in Jakarta today are aware that the causes of *banjir* are multiple. And there is an increasing awareness that the business elite who built superblocks and new towns in catchment areas are the main contributors to *banjir*. Blame is also being directed to city hall for its inability to mitigate flooding. The latest *banjir* has really removed the association of *banjir* with the *kampung*, because several rich areas were badly inundated,[18] including Menteng (in the city centre), Pluit (in the north), and even Sudirman Street, where the government displays its spectacle of economic development. Here, *banjir* has created a new spectacle of dystopia.

ET You cannot blame that scale of *banjir* on the *kampung*! In the public consciousness and in the mass media, who is to blame for the recent flood?

AK The coverage on the recent flood has been quite comprehensive. It had the courage to tease out issues of land use violations by developers, the shrinking of water catchment areas, the narrowing of rivers (caused by irregular settlements), the poor maintenance of embankments, pumps, and dams. The problem is no longer just the irregular settlements at the riverbank (although this contributes to the narrowing of river), but all sectors (including developers, the government and the upper-middle class) that lack environmental consciousness. While local factors have received attention, translocal forces like climate change have also been highlighted.

ET Sure, there is the upstream developments, deforestation, the exponential increase in impervious surfaces in the city...

MM Right, but the collective consciousness is also related to the physical infrastructure itself, such as in the map you showed us where all the floodgates in the city are independently operated. Maybe the cause of *banjir* cannot be traced precisely, but the effects of it, the distribution of the floodwaters, is something that—with access to the right information—you would be able identify with the floodgates' operations and determine why the water is here and not there.

AK In Jakarta, you have all these rivers coming in, and the whole canal system and all the gates are supposed to channel the flows and control the volume of water that goes through the city. The task is to keep the balance in such a way that certain places will not be fully inundated because you can redistribute the flow here and there. And, of course, there are political decisions involved, because you have to preserve the Menteng area and keep the presidential palace dry—unless you have no choice, and then you have to open the gates there.

So human intervention is involved, but what is happening now with *banjir* is that this intervention is no longer enough.

For instance, during the last flood, President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono gave permission to open the gate that caused flooding in the presidential palace. This kind of decision is needed to moderate flooding in other areas. We do not know the system of control, but we know that the areas prone to flooding do not follow the contours of the city. While the design of this floodgate system was engineered based on calculations, its operations are inseparable from social and political considerations. It has been like this since it was constructed by Dutch engineer Hans van Breen to make sure that the Menteng neighbourhood where Europeans lived would never be inundated. Not surprisingly, the Manggarai central floodgate located in the South of Menteng has been guarded by police since the colonial period.

Again, while the floodgate system can shape the distribution of water in Jakarta, it can't save Jakarta from flooding. The capacity of the city's water infrastructure to mitigate floods not only depends on a range of other parts of the system, but it also faces a major challenge in the continuing development of mega-projects, which neglect the ecosystem of the city. The uncoordinated urban renewals and development of mega-projects like superblocks and new towns have overwhelmed the canal system. These projects create for themselves their own system of flood mitigation such as levelling the ground of the property in such a way so that water would flow out of the property to the surrounding, lower areas. The centralized floodgate system is still playing a role in flood distribution but its effectiveness has been compromised by the ad hoc development of the city.

MM And is the infrastructure management not coordinated at all? Is it completely ad hoc and decentralized?

AK I think it is fragmented by capital, which advances without the support of a coherent infrastructure. It is common to hear developers seeking ways to maximize gains by requesting that infrastructure be provided by the government. Yet it has never been clear who should take care of what. There is some confusion, too, between the central and the local government when it comes to infrastructure provision, so in the end Jakarta is left with an ad hoc system of infrastructure management.

MM Does anyone know about the floodgates and the decision making process?

AK Interesting question, but I don't know the process.

ET We need to interview some controllers, we'll give them a bottle of whiskey and get them talking. [Laughter]

AK I think they would say that better gate management would not help much anymore because all the infrastructure that supports the gates is deteriorating. The embankments are collapsing, and the pumps need maintenance. They are all old. As a matter of fact, the scale of the recent flood is largely a result of the poor maintenance of the embankment and pumps; a canal wall collapsed and water went into Menteng, and Pluit, which is below the sea level, was flooded because more than half the pumps there were inundated. The gates distribute the water, but the flood has a deeper cause. Now, we should

add, as pointed out earlier, that the mega-structural superblocks and new towns, along with their self-centered localized system of flood mitigation, have made Jakarta more susceptible to *banjir*.

To go back to the six projects that you picked up from World Bank's flood mitigation initiatives, I don't think they will help much since they overlooked changes in Jakarta's urban form. The city has been fragmented by capital, which circulates without a coordinated infrastructure. Perhaps it is within this pattern of fragmentation that the new Governor, Jokowi, has proposed a deep tunnel system to resolve, once and for all, Jakarta's flooding problem. But it is not clear whether his project will just become another of the wish-images we talked about.

Climate Change

ET I want to go back to the question of the *banjir* and how the causes, previously understood to be informal settlers, now include the rich. I am curious about climate change, both in the discourse around spatial justice and the discourse around the recent flood. The United States is the country that believes in climate change the least in the world, and then Australia, I think. I am curious about Southeast Asia; is there an increasing discourse about unequal exposure to climate change risks? Are some poorer countries making claims, like, "We should receive more development money, aid, loans, etc., because we have to deal with it, but we did not create this problem. Affluent countries are responsible, and we are the ones who deal with the results." Is this being articulated?

AK I have not had a chance to get to know the Indonesian response to this debate, but if I am not mistaken, President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono has stated his commitment to follow the Kyoto Protocol and help tackle climate change. But, of course, there is also a deep commitment to pursue economic growth. The Indonesians' take on this whole issue is to follow "ecological modernization." There is still a belief that you can continue to have economic growth without damaging the environment. To this end, the issue of climate change could be resolved through technology, and the whole discourse on "green architecture," for instance, embodies this paradigm of "ecological modernization."

ET But the green discourse is more about lifestyle. The "go green" paradigm is not an environmental project as much as it is a lifestyle project where people can say, "We want to be in a park, it's nice and fresh."

AK I guess your question is whether there is a systemic response to climate change issues?

ET Well, we could see, in a certain sense, that an abstraction related to the *rakyat* and this question of how a certain set of class demands, like a class consciousness, could be connected to an environmental consciousness. It is not just the poor people of Jakarta, it is not just the poor people of Bangkok, it is not just the poor people of New York—it is the global poor who will suffer the most. So, in the Benjaminian way, maybe, the articulation of a certain project connects to a threat—the threat of erasure.

AK You mean a transnational consciousness among the urban poor in the region who see that climate change will have an enormous impact on them?

ET Right, and while the *banjir* in a certain rhythm provides opportunities, at a certain threshold, it becomes much more dangerous. It becomes an irreversible threat.

AK Could the ecological threat be translated into a struggle for the poor to survive? It is an interesting line of thought. Elsewhere, I wrote about how the "green" turn—the wish-image of the middle class—has been used by the urban poor, with the help of NGOs, to claim their right to live in the city. The Urban Poor Consortium (UPC) tried to frame the everyday life of the urban poor in terms of their ecological practice. They tried to show that ecological living is, in fact, a part of the urban poor's life and without knowing it, their lives are quite "green." The urban poor live with many recycled things (this is just one example), and they are already participating in green discourse, even though they do not articulate it in that manner. This discourse stems from the affluent middle class, as do the ideas of climate change and ecological awareness. The main concern for the poor is really how to continue to live. It is still difficult to see how climate change movements could be coming from the poor.

ET The example you just mentioned shows how the green discourse can be constructed for a political project.

AK It is a political construct, yes, for the urban poor want to be allowed to remain in the city. Green becomes the rallying point, with the idea that they should not be relocated because they have contributed to greening the urban environment. However, even though this has been quite a substantial claim, it is largely ignored by the authorities. The poor continue to live under threat of eviction no matter how green they claim to be.

ET It does not matter how green you are!

AK On the issue of climate change, it is difficult to imagine how the poor would come together behind that idea when they need to think about their survival the next day. Climate change may become a rallying point for the urban poor if an understanding is formed between the middle class and the government that *banjir*, for instance, and potentially larger catastrophes, are issues of justice (not only issues of engineering), and thus inseparable from global injustice. The North-South debate can then be put on the table.

The North-South debate, I think, is quite substantial, for it acknowledges the history of colonialism and the contemporary unevenness of global power relations. As you point out, the North knows that the problem of climate change cannot be resolved without cooperation from the South, and they blame it on the South. The North says: "They are developing too fast. It is true that we were responsible in the past, but now they should not repeat what we have done."

ET So now it's the South's fault.

AK Yes, but it is also linked to the fact that corporations continue to externalize environmental costs. They continue to build with what

they call "green technology," but they assume no ecological cost. The mega-projects we discussed could introduce "green superblocks," build "green new towns," and plant more trees—which is not a bad contribution—but they are not addressing the environmental degradation of the city. It is interesting to follow Governor Jokowi, who has instigated the idea of "no more shopping malls." When it comes to the scale of climate change, this proposal is probably insignificant, but the local politics embedded in his argument are more to the point. What is important is the emergence of a critical consciousness that the environment can only be sustained by limiting consumption and the accumulation of capital.

ET The question is, if you can use the climate change discourse strategically, as a political construct, then can you still force concessions? Maybe you do not solve it completely, but you still move in a productive direction...

AK I think these issues have to be part of a global struggle. The world must demand that capital internalize ecological costs: "If you want to continue to expand, you will have to assume the costs to the environment." This would mean that capital would not be able to profit as much anymore, which would therefore lead to new ways of thinking about development. It would no longer be a model based solely on economic growth, which is the current World Bank ideology, but it would have to look at something called justice.

MM But how does the idea of justice work in relation to overcoming the problem of climate change?

AK The Global North (after years of capital accumulation) is aware of the fact that they owe the Global South for the environmental costs from their enterprises operating there. The United States continues to deny climate change, because their capital accumulation is at stake. If we can't make enterprises pay, what options does a place like Jakarta have? Cities in the Global South such as Jakarta have engaged in inter-city competition to attract foreign capital investment to achieve economic growth. To win the competition, a friendly investment climate is often offered to investors, and this may include no environmental considerations. Suppose that if cities in the Global South begin to impose regulations on enterprises such that if they want to invest, they have to pay for environmental costs. This would be a starting point for sustainable development. The Global South would be promoting a completely different system of development that no longer depends on the endless accumulation of capital without ecological limit. The problem is that the Global South is always badly positioned when competing for foreign investments.

ET It is a race to the bottom in that sense. But there is a very important history in Indonesia, and in the region, which began with the Asian-African Conference. In the Bandung Museum of the Asian-African Conference, there is an amazing collection of newspaper front pages from the North, saying: "How dare these people meet without us? We weren't invited? How rude!" It is amazing, this sense of moral indignation, like: "How could you not invite France? How could you not invite America?" This question of Sukarno and the idea of collective action, of the global margins—it had a huge impact. This was an engine for the decolonization of the Global South.

We could say that one of the most significant global movements that we could look to as an example today comes out of Indonesia. It is a utopian project.

AK Such a moment requires a strong sense of collective subjectivity that would say: "This is who we are. You want to deal with us, fine. But it will be on our own terms."

ET On our own terms...this is the position of Frantz Fanon as well.

AK Yes, but Asia today seems to have little capacity to produce a collective subjectivity. It is economically and politically divided. Can Asia unite with a collective voice to save the environment and to stop competing for foreign capital investment? It would be a major step towards addressing the problem of climate change, but would require structural transformation—not just mitigating flooding, even though this can be a strategic starting point for dealing with climate change.✕

Endnotes

1 *Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, or Dutch East India Company.
2 AbdouMaliq Simone, *City Life from Jakarta to Dakar: Movements at the Crossroads* (New York: Routledge, 2010).
3 *The Kartu Tanda Penduduk* (KTP) is the Indonesian identity card, which among other things indicates place of birth and place of issue.
4 The workshop was called "Informality in Motion: The Urban Poor's Struggle over the Urban Space in Indonesia," Urban Poor Links and Jakarta Urban Poor Consortium, Bali, September 9, 2006.
5 See Abidin Kusno, "Whither Nationalist Urbanism? Public Life in Governor Sutiyoso's Jakarta," in *The Appearances of Memory* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 25–48.
6 Sutiyoso was governor of Jakarta from 1997 to 2007.
7 Mike Davis, *Planet of Slums* (New York: Verso, 2006).
8 Mike Davis, "Planet of Slums, Urban Involution and the Informal Proletariat," *New Left Review* 26 (March–April 2004): 5–36.
9 Jakarta still holds a place in Indonesian society that Pramoedya Ananta Toer wrote about in the 1950s: "The wind blows through the provinces whispering that one cannot be fully Indonesian until one has seen Jakarta." In "Letter to a Friend from the Country," in *From Surabaya to Armageddon*, ed. and trans. Harry Aveling (Singapore: Heinemann Books, 1955).

10 Abidin Kusno, "Green Governmentality in an Indonesian Metropolis," *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 32, no. 3 (2011): 314–331.
11 Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge: Belknap/Harvard University Press, 1999).
12 Abidin Kusno, "Runaway City: Jakarta Bay, the Pioneer and the Last Frontier," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 12, no. 4 (2011): 513–531.
13 James Siegel, *Fetish, Recognition, Revolution* (New Haven: Princeton University Press, 1997).
14 Rudolf Mrázek, *Engineers of Happy Land: Technology and Nationalism in a Colony* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).
15 See Abidin Kusno, "Colonial Cities in Motion: Urban Symbolism and Popular Radicalism," in *The Appearances of Memory* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), 155–181; and Takashi Shiraishi, *An Age in Motion: Popular Radicalism in Java* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990).
16 Mrázek, *Engineers of Happy Land*, xv.
17 Restu Gunawan, *Gagalnya Sistem Kanal: Pengendalian Banjir Jakarta dari Masa ke Masa* (Jakarta: Penerbit Kompas, 2010).
18 Jakarta was extensively inundated throughout January 2013. For a comprehensive report on the 2013 flood in Jakarta, see the special issue of *Tempo*, 28 January–3 February 2013: 44–57.

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