

Urban chiaroscuro

Plunging into the obscurity of the city

AbdouMaliq Simone
Morten Nielsen

In this article, we examine those facets of the urban that cannot be captured by conventional scalings of the city. Based on ethnographic reflections from Jakarta, Indonesia, and Maputo, Mozambique, we suggest that the notion *urban chiaroscuro* may offer a productive analytical heuristic for urban theorization of those manifestations of urban life whose nature is never fully captured in any given specification or determination of its conditions. As a massive over-production of stuff is relaxing and unfolding the composition of both existing and emerging socio-material infrastructures, modular elements intended for the making and remaking of the city are being produced, but without a clear sense of proportion. The paradox is that without the coordinates by which to orient oneself in terms of the ongoing reconfigurations of clarity and obscurity, it is not clear what the city is, let alone what it can and should become.

Keywords: Urban chiaroscuro – Jakarta – Indonesia – Maputo – Mozambique – Infrastructure – Obscurity – Compression

Introduction

Urban life has always constituted an invitation for interventions of all kinds. Centred on the consolidation of volume, the amassing of things, forces, bodies, and actions into coordinated relationships, urban interventions have aimed to produce definitive outcomes that leave marks, often monumental, all-encompassing (Scott, 1998). Such outcomes were to be testaments to the capacity to organize, expropriate, command, and elicit—whether it be labour, skill, or loyalty. These testaments were architectural and material, physical instantiations of the ability to exceed any discernible instrumentality (Hall, 2002).

In cities across the world, volume has been amassed to constitute gravitational pulls and centrifugal propulsion—a machine for generating momentum (Elden, 2013; Hall and Savage, 2015). Urban politics was thus largely about mediating the need to tie things down and let things go (Adams, 2014).

AbdouMaliq Simone is Senior Professorial Fellow at the Urban Institute, University of Sheffield,

and Honorary Professor at the African Centre for Cities, University of Cape Town.

Morten Nielsen works at the National Museum of Denmark.

For volume was conceptualized as proximity and density, bodies and things tightly packed in; where, at the same time, the productivity of volume was to set things in motion—to disseminate, propagate, disperse (Mezzadra and Neilson, 2012; McFarlane, 2016).

The amassing of volume requires dispossession: dispossession of livelihoods, land, ways of life, and potentiality. Here, the urban becomes a marker of what counts and what does not, of what will be eligible to be a participant in something voluminous, be it public or otherwise (Ghertner, 2014; Nail, 2015; Ruddick, 2015). Despite the urge to do otherwise, any emergent order of volume could not simply assign prospective components into specific actions or characters, but initially relied upon provisional relationships among these components in order for them to ‘find their way’ through and with each other in ways that minimized friction and dissipation (Thrift, 2011). Volumes were territories that were never definitely settled (Bishop, 2015), and so long histories of trying to settle urban questions and populations once and for all remained a ruse, a necessary deception.

Of course, the techniques and politics of enclosure, consolidation, and consumption that provided the containers of volume—all of the forms of polity and system—were prone to leakage. Bodies with their porosities, environments with their exchanges and resonances, turned every ‘ship’ into something that leaked. No matter how much the urban was a human affair, a locus of continuously exceeding whatever was taken for the human at a given time, the assemblage of such efforts, in bringing together so many entities, engendered intensities that set loose and recomposed fields of sensations, sympathies, antagonisms, and entanglements. These were fields that could not always be discerned, named, or administered through human engineering.

It is this infrastructure of that which ‘is gone yet here’, that which has ‘stolen away into the night’, that which never comes to the fore, never appears in some concrete empirically discernible instance, which concerns us here. Not so much an invisible infrastructure that haunts the urban or a force that disassembles the frameworks of volume, but instead an aesthetics that renders any overarching organizational logic inoperable. We may walk through the streets as we always have, may be caught up in the same routines, and expect the same results of these redundant actions. But these are invested and enacted with a sense of always something beyond, right here and now, through which the familiar could veer off into new directions. An eerie form of an aesthetic arithmetic that suggests that whatever appears in front of us is always ‘less than’ and ‘more than’ at the same time.

What we want to do here is not to take things apart or propose new dispensations or worlds. Rather, it concerns dealing with the city and its many spaces and times as the profusion of details, as an *urban chiaroscuro*. A term borrowed from Renaissance drawings, chiaroscuro refers to the arrangement of light and shadows so that the obscure vitality of the latter pulsates through the former—and vice versa. Similar to the aesthetic affirmation of darkness

in the brightness of Caravaggio's paintings, we argue that the distinct character of the urban arises from the constant movements in and out of obscurity. There are no movements, no temporal orientations or seizures of spaces—no matter how provisional they may be—that are free from a residual confusion of what their proportions, scope, and qualities actually are. Urban chiaroscuro, then, implies a state of secretion beyond the clarity of available frameworks; it assumes the predominance of movement over inhabitation. When Deleuze points out that clarity 'endlessly plunges into obscurity' (1993, p. 32), what is opened up is a space where things 'don't count'. Not in the sense that they no longer have meaning or usefulness, but rather that the available means of calculation can't keep up or somehow miss something, unable to fold whatever is observed into categories.

Urban theory has been replete with efforts to grasp how relations among bodies, forces, materials, institutions, and things compose the structural conditions of urban everyday life while, at the same time, being constituted by them. The implicit question being, of course, whether the urban is something machine-like that brings particular collectivities and their relations to life, or whether the urban is an expression of these relations. By formulating a question about the urban in this way it is also assumed that somehow all relations are operationalized—that they come into existence as either the concrete manifestation of forces or are a force in their own right. But is there something between these two positions? Need all relations that we might sense or feel necessarily be operational? And if not, what do indiscernible and inoperable relations actually do? What is the functionality of those urban elements which by their very nature can never be captured by the models, calculations, and framing procedures by which we figure the urban?

As we walk through a large market, or take a busy commuter train, there are certainly models and framing procedures going on, both in our heads and in various institutional settings, that indicate all of the ways in which those that populate these settings have both something and nothing to do with each other. So in everyday calculations about what we should pay attention to, how we assess the validity of our actions, we must decide how relevant all of those others are. How detached can we be? How related? This matter of proportionality, this assessment of more or less, is always at least potentially troubling, as we work out the right categories along a basic gradation of 'friend or enemy', 'known or unknown'. Each proportion, each version of more or less than, has its particular value.

Part of the 'persuasiveness' of capital is that it seems to work through and ultimately resolve these challenging conundrums by offering a generalized mathematics for the recalibration of the value of anything in terms of its relationship with others—in what Tsing (2000) calls the operations of scalability. Here, capital subsumes the particularities of an action that takes place in the present to the 'promise' of expansion. Whatever exists can potentially make money, be part of a general equivalence, be part of an endless circuit of

exchange where nothing that exists has any inherent worth, does not have to inevitably be what it is at this given moment, but potentially acquires other values simply on the basis of how it is marketed or sold, or what speculative use it might have in either the near or distant future. It is as if a message is being issued: 'go ahead, act now, do something, anything, now, because it won't mean what you think it will mean, as it gets carried away into other calculations'. Risk and hesitation are thus conflated as if orchestrated by a partially hidden or unknown algorithmic rationality.

But what if despite this seemingly endless capacity for exchange and general interrelatedness we managed to forget about 'hunting things down', finding the right proportion to public-private partnerships, or of quantitative easing, or even the optimal proportioning of everyday detachments? What if we based our knowledge of urban processes on other forms of aesthetic *detection*, where the contributions of component variables were unclear, and thus accorded an opportunity to more freely affect and be affected in all kinds of ways? What if instead of the impulse to bring all that is obscure to light, we played around with other rhythms, which even made the difference between obscurity and light difficult if not impossible to detect? This, we claim, is an important impetus at work in our research fields in urban Africa and Southeast Asia, and which we seek to demonstrate here.

Detective agencies

As we know from classic film noir detective stories, standard forms of detection always assume a truth that is to be uncovered, even if what is detected exceeds the existent terms of understanding. Something *needs* to be known. So it is not so much a matter of whether the truth uncovered is the final truth, but rather the self-confidence of detection to generate a sufficient reason, to reiterate the definitive method for establishing the basis for decision. But in drawing upon both classic and more recent so-called Nordic film noir, the detective who is less interested in the 'real story' than in trying to work out the unanticipated complications that the pursuit of the mystery has unwittingly thrown up, detection seeks less to uncover complicity and conspiracies than to detach itself from the accruing story. It is more interested in the tactics of ensuring that things do not come to light, for to understand the crime to be solved means seeing how the crime has permeated into all aspects of living, and how the transparency of detection might leave nothing in its wake. In fact, it often seems as if detection operates by strategically investing the narrative with additional opacities, which can never be exposed so much as imperceptibly sensed. As it advances towards an always deferred truth, detection itself becomes the mystery, the conundrum.

1. The article's empirical discussions are based on longstanding and ongoing empirical research carried out in Jakarta, Indonesia, and Maputo, Mozambique, by the two authors.

Here, we call upon Laruelle's notion of *generic* detection, where the objective is not to find the relations among things, not to put together all of the clues and variables into a sufficient explanation, but to stay with insufficiency (2011). Instead of the diligent pursuit of the ways in which one thing leads to another, of all the unrepresented articulations of spaces and times, it is also important to step out of and suspend a unilateral focus on relations. This is what the generic does, for it breaks the possibility of detection being the method through which individuals and populations are subsumed into a system of relational proportionality—more or less healthy, more or less immune, more or less eligible, more or less valuable. Instead, the generic connotes a space or composition capable of holding within it things and processes that may be related to each other, or not; where what something is may be multiple, but it does not owe its existence to how it is positioned within a network of multiplicities, through which it is accorded particular statuses and potentialities. It is impossible to tell what the generic is; there is no way to affirm the value of a particular instance except in terms of indicating what *it is not*. As Alexander R. Galloway puts it, in reference to the generic, 'the generic is, essentially, nothing, or as close to nothing as it is possible to be while still remaining "something"' (2014, p. 31). The generic is a negative universalism that is indifferent to the difference of ontogenetic flux, a lived immanence that is always detached from the elements that it connotes and that precedes difference and refuses to ontologize the real.

An urban chiaroscuro points to a way of generating urban knowledge, of being a detective who discovers within his or her 'beat' a 'real' that is 'this one, right now, right here' and that has no definitive connection to anything else. But by doing so, such detection levels the playing field, renders something no more or less important than anything else, and thus avails it to unthought-of (so far) courses of action. One could see detective work as a form of rendering, of making things (up), of making something available to a particular (wider) use, of putting things in people's hands that they didn't have before or couldn't imagine using. Less uncovering than rendering, detection is then a way of keeping things moving along, of telling stories that extend a person's relationship with the world, rather than detection being the grounds to legitimate the removal of persons from worlds.

We will now present a series of vignettes that embody this notion of urban chiaroscuro as an operation of an open-ended, generic detection.¹

Vignette 1: The Ambassador (Jakarta, Indonesia)

The Ambassador and Kuningan ITC are adjacent thirty-year-old malls set in the midst of the accelerated expansion of a central business district in Jakarta. Mega-towers now spread across decomposed working-class districts. The mall is full of small stores and is known for its supply of cheap electronics and software. It is always crowded with consumers actually shopping rather than simply

soaking up the ambiance of a newer generation of malls. With the exception of the Carrefour supermarket, none of the outlets are parts of brand stores. The operation is largely managed by a collection of brokers orchestrating oscillating supply chains, managing intricate subcontracting arrangements over commercial space and use, and sculpting layers of complementarity among sellers, providers, and customers in ways that generate interacting specializations and piece together different scales of deals.

The Ambassador continues to enfold many different sources of goods, types of knowledge, and networks of contact that keep prices affordable and customers engaged. But those who have worked in the mall for a long time also point to a much more opaque and intricate space of operation that is situated in the dense strip of a working-class neighbourhood in Pedurenan that endures just outside the northern circumference of the mall's parking area. This densely packed old neighbourhood, one of the few left in the area, is a repository of a different sort. Several of the brokers who actually manage the comings and goings of the Ambassador have their small houses here and help oversee an 'archive' of stories presented by passers-by in search of family and friends gone missing, or, conversely, in search of interventions for their inability to distance themselves from kin, lovers, and affiliations that always manage to know exactly where they can be found at any given time.

Passers-by also crowd small street-side eating places or the makeshift 'foyers' of makeshift associations presenting projects they want to pursue and searching for partners whose identity they would prefer not to know. This is a neighbourhood that is party to stitched-together deals of all kinds, a place where strangers are put in touch with other strangers, where individuals with no clear purpose in mind can simply get a 'take' on things, garner a sense of what is going on in places beyond their immediate experience. The neighbourhood hosts all-night gambling games where police, politicians, businesspeople, and thugs all show up at the table. It is a place where special prayers are offered and curses exorcized. Secrets can be both widely shared or safely stored, depending on who you talk to.

Whatever transpires here has no direct connection to the mall next door beyond a scattering of 'shared personnel', who insist that the components of their 'multitasking' have nothing to do with each other. But when a piece of knowledge is gained, an inquiry proffered, or a connection made in this Pedurenan neighbourhood, the individual involved usually says that it took place at the Ambassador. So, while it is possible to tell all kinds of stories about how each domain relates to and possibly protects the other, it is never going to be clear which does what to whom. This is not interoperable data. Trying to pin down the details of all of the interventions involved is a constantly frustrating task, although it is widely known that these interventions, whatever they consist of on a point-by-point basis, travel far and wide. Perhaps it is all an urban myth. But if so, it is one capable of engendering weird relationships of all kinds, strange alliances seemingly impervious to contradiction.



Karbella: lane to the house of a local seer, specializing in locating the “disappeared.” Although in a seeming state of advanced dilapidation, this is just one of several properties owned by seer, the rest in the middle-class areas of East Jakarta. © Photo by AbdouMalik Simone, Jakarta.



Site in Karbella for the repairing of nearly everything, as well as a repository for materials that can be "borrowed" for different "projects", all of which are discussed and approved before hand. © Photo by AbdouMaliq Simone, Jakarta.



Key intersection in Karbella, and the location for several "detective agencies" specializing in "future scenario planning" and the location of lost loved ones. © Photo by AbdouMaliq Simone, Jakarta.

The many

What the story about the Ambassador shows us, whether it is in the end two places or a single place, is that when a voluminous archive of urban matters, materials, and events is not subjected to a calculation where things are weighted in their value, or weeded out, we are simply left with the ‘many’. Working again from Deleuze (1994), the ‘many’ is not one thing, not held together by any essential characteristic, even though that which makes up the ‘many’ may experience similar conditions, may be addressed in one particular way. There are no constitutive properties, nor criteria for classificatory inclusion. The ‘many’ is not groups of opposition, analogies, identities; it is the realization of a form of alterity that does not take the form of difference as an imposition of a contrast or a negation (Kockelman, 2012).

We do not mean to suggest that there are not oppositions, contexts, or stratifications. These remain predominant technologies for organizing the interactions of materials and bodies. They are critical standpoints on and through which to look out upon social worlds and processes. On the other hand, the ‘many’ is a different kind of standpoint (Gad, 2013). It is a standpoint from which to envision just how the process of affecting and being affected operates in excess of infrastructures (physical, economic, social), in excess of any invariant background or calculation (Massumi, 2013).

Of course, we are inclined to ask how did all these things, these details, get to be in the same ‘room’? Where did they come from? Where can they go? Each would seem to offer to the others particular ‘lines of flight’ or neighbourhoods of ‘uneasy settlement’. Nothing is offered in the present to settle anything definitively, and as such disinclines us of the need to find out anything for sure.

The key consideration here is that all the details may be ungrounded, but they are not alone, not by themselves; they are in each other’s company and the company they keep and recognize is not simply the contractual kind, the corporate form, but rather a form of mutuality, of being in concert that minimizes the very *details of the details*. This manoeuvre does not undermine relationships but in decommissioning their embedding in long chains of meaning and history renders them indifferent to participation and representation. It enables them to fold in and be folded into ‘weird alliances’, perhaps ‘generic’ modes of being from which they are capable of generating everything familiar as something that simultaneously ‘might be’ something else. Here, the ‘weird’ refers simply to the unanticipated gathering of the disparate, the unexpected—the capacity of things that we otherwise assume do not go together, using that very assumption as the basis to affiliate, to find some grounds on which to cooperate. Here, technicians, thugs, police, clergy, seers, and mechanics find ways to align their skills and agendas with each other outside of any contractual programme or explicit project.

What kinds of urban theories might the city make of itself in these contingent spaces? How does the city subtract from its own structures and scaffolds those inoperable relations? How are the generic and only partially functioning

universalisms that allow new relational configurations to assert themselves with force and direction set aside and left to their own devices (Nielsen and Simone, 2016)? In order to productively respond to such crucial questions, we need to fully allow the city to assume a different mode of appearance, one that provides 'cover' for a heterogeneity of residents and ways of doing things. And, therefore, we also need to recalibrate our analytical gaze to the many ways in which the city productively plunges into obscurity.

Vignette 2: The Gloria Hotel (Maputo, Mozambique)

For decades, the Miramar Restaurant has been a favourite watering hole for Maputo's low-level officials when needing a break from the administrative hassle that seems to be the main output produced by a dysfunctional state machine. Located on the picturesque beachfront that traces the physical contours of the city, the now somewhat sleepy restaurant has survived the massive social and physical changes that have fundamentally transformed the pace of the once-socialist-now-neoliberal Mozambican capital. In less than ten years, the beachfront has become one of the city's main attractions for national and foreign investors whose seemingly unbounded trust in the purchasing power of the growing urban middle class has prompted a building boom of hitherto unseen proportions. Bordering the coastline, a growing number of new high-rise complexes including apartments, shops, offices, and multi-storey car parks are being constructed alongside more than thirty gated communities of five to ten hectares each (Nielsen and Jenkins, 2020).

From the air-conditioned main room at the Miramar Restaurant, there is a clear view of the twin towers of the Radisson Blu Hotel and Residence that is located across the road. According to municipal officials involved in the building process, the hotel complex was built to accommodate the many foreign investors and expats who use Maputo as a preferred platform for expanding their activities in the region. What is slightly less clear, however, are the reasons for building the Maputo AFECC Gloria Hotel that is located next to the Radisson towers. The construction process began in 2014 as the outcome of an ongoing and still expanding partnership between the Mozambican government and the Chinese AFECC Group (Anhui Foreign Economic Construction Group, Ida). Among many other construction projects realized in Mozambique in recent years, it was the AFECC Group that built the Joaquim Chissano International Conference Centre (JCICC), which the Gloria Hotel is now part of. At its opening in September 2016, the five-star Gloria Hotel constituted a US\$300 million investment, and it will supposedly serve as a luxurious hub for further consolidating what party cadres from both countries define as 'very cordial ties' between China and Mozambique.

For the low-level officials enjoying their well-earned 2M beers on the beach terrace outside the Miramar Restaurant, the Gloria Hotel is at an appropriate distance in order for them to speculate about what really goes on



'O Hotel chinês' (the Chinese hotel) is how the Maputo AFECC Gloria Hotel is known to most people in Maputo. The ambitious construction project commenced in 2014 after a contract was made between the Mozambican government and the AFECC Group, a Chinese construction consortium. The Hotel Gloria is but one of a number of large-scale Chinese construction and infrastructure projects, which have been realised during the last decade. Even to high-ranking officials working with urban management in Maputo, it is not always clear what role the Chinese planners and engineers play in the making of territorial planning. So, for instance, during the process of planning the Ringroad and bridge to the Catembe Peninsula across the Maputo Bay, Mozambican planners and architects were often handed blueprints and designs made by their Chinese colleagues where the accompanying texts were written in Chinese. Such peculiar occurrences are being discussed by the municipal officials as they gaze upon the impressive 'Chinese hotel' from the Miramar Restaurant across the road. © Photo by Carla Cortés, Maputo, 2020.

inside the walls of 'China in Africa', as one local journalist recently described the new centrepiece for the JCICC. What is surprising to most of them is that the hotel is almost always empty. Even during the busy summer months, the activity level in and around the hotel is minimal except for the considerable number of Chinese employees whose main work task seems to be to keep the place impeccably clean. But despite the absence of any visible signs of activity, the Mozambican officials also know very well that the imposing hotel plays a decisive role in the making of the city.

Despite—or perhaps because of—the lack of activity at the hotel, it reverberates with the multiple urban layering that allows the city to breathe because things don't add up; because stuff is being produced whose purpose and significance cannot be determined either in advance or after the fact. It is no longer possible to imagine the continuous improvement of the city's infrastructural machinery without the participation of foreign collaborators, and none more

so than Chinese construction consortia, such as the AFECC. But as the city's physical structures are being undergirded by a complex network of governmental memoranda and a dizzying array of commercial agreements and contracts, new social and material relations and spaces also emerge whose effects, qualities, and proportions cannot be pinned down even by their main proponents. Not unlike the economy of awkward gazes that momentarily fixates the vibe at Miramar when a group of young Chinese engineers sit down at a table next to the Mozambican officials, something emanates from the socio-material connections that are being forged between distant counterparts without either one of them knowing exactly what that 'something' might be.

Eventualities

The sensibilities surrounding the Gloria Hotel are certainly not new to cities in Africa or Southeast Asia. The Gloria is an instance where the distinct temporalities of local practices of organizing everyday livelihood and that of speculative capital largely engineered by multilateral institutional policies converge but do not necessarily meet—do not find a ready language of translation. The two trajectories do not so much cancel each other out but rather come to exist in a space that refuses easy categorization, that awaits a future for which any proper form lags far behind. Whatever goes on at the Gloria cannot be inscribed in a broader narrative of economic calculations and political strategies without depriving it of something essential that was probably never really there to begin with. In that sense, the absence of action that permeates all physical spaces in and around the hotel offers itself to the beer-drinking officials sitting across the street at the Miramar Restaurant as a way of keeping an eye on the different temporalities that never really settle in terms of scaling and proportionality and therefore cannot be given any conclusive reading. They are perplexing and strange perhaps, but in ways that can never be disentangled or properly illuminated.

Most of our work on cities has taken place within poor and working-class districts in the so-called Global South. In these districts residents often initiate particular activities, such as making markets, improving the built environment, managing festivals, or undertaking small entrepreneurial activities as a way of signalling, of making visible a willingness to explore collaborations that go beyond the function of these activities themselves. These activities become devices for finding a proper form capable of eliciting an exchange of perspectives. They explore ways of being together that rely on making the relationships visible in the moment. But they can also serve as a platform for residents to feel out the possibilities of collaborations that are not yet and perhaps never will be visible. This is for them a deep relationality, a process of appealing to the possibilities of being enfolded in a larger surrounding on the basis of a fundamental resource to which they have access, i.e., the capacity to elaborate criss-crossing relationships among themselves.

While this form of deep relationality may well remain as vestigial, increasingly circumscribed capacities, it is likely to become increasingly subsumed by another kind of equally deep relationality. This is the capacity to *exteriorize* intricate histories of people working with each other, deciding, and thinking through things onto apparatuses of calculation and formalization (Gabrys, 2014; Stiegler, 2016). Determinations of *who can do what with whom under what circumstances* and what can be produced from these efforts is increasingly subject to a form of *relationship-making* taken over by integrated systems that render experiences of all kinds into some form of *interoperable data*. That is, data that can be compared across different kinds of locations, bodies, protocols, and operations (Crandall, 2010; Kitchin, 2014; Leszczynski, 2016).

The politics of relationship-making through data then becomes a critical facet of capitalist-practised urbanization mentioned earlier. Urban spaces may seem replete with standardized built environments and highly formatted management technologies and systems. Yet the apparent homogeneity requires the work of many apparatuses, organizations, and actors capable of calibrating the volatilities of financial architecture with the specificities of a particular context. Whatever the built environment may look like, its viability depends on the cultivation of mutable social entities capable of communicating new needs, desires, and practices that *continuously* remake what it means to ‘inhabit’ the spaces being *redeveloped* (Read, 2016).

The prospective efficacy of any project—making a building, a company, a deal, or introducing any kind of innovation—requires taking into consideration more and more variables. What does one pay attention to? What is considered relevant or not? It becomes increasingly difficult to dismiss anything, to rule out something as not possibly relatable to a project’s likely success or failure. What stands out in the end is *the many*, an excess that cannot be effectively partialized, weighted, or organized.

Given the exponential increases in the ‘many’, in the number of factors considered relevant to productivity and profitability, there needs to be more and more financial and political hedges against risk (Guironnet and Halbert, 2014). These hedges require a way of visualizing and calculating how behaviours, events, personal conditions, capacities, and inclinations exert particular effects—in various combinations of variables (Bryan et al., 2015). Generating the multiplicity of such hedges, of such visualizations of the various interactive forces of an increasing number of variables, thus drives the expansive production of interoperable data, of a deep relationality (Muniesa, 2014).

To render more and more spaces, things, and people subject to the eventuality of being enfolded as an all-encompassing fabric of this consolidation of capitalist-practised urbanization requires increasingly complex constellations of actors and processes (Martin, 2013). When these constellations are put together, who knows what can happen, what new eventualities might take place. Probability curves will be generated and then deemed reliable. But as Parisi (2013) points out, the more that the ‘many’ is subject to algorithmic

relations, the higher the potentiality for generating incomputable and therefore obscure outcomes.

What is important in the concretization of this process in the actual deliberations, projects, and envisioning of fund managers, developers, pooling institutions, and financiers of various stripes is the ways in which the ‘many’ becomes a kind of endgame. In other words, in cities where we work, replete with scores of apparently failed and useless projects, the objectives of these actors—reflected in how they talk about success and failure—have less to do with profitability than with enacting the capacity to bring about *something* no matter how viable it may be in terms of prevailing notions of success and failure. Clearly, the Gloria is such a something, even though few have any clear ideas of what it really is or will become.

Urban development, at least in Maputo and Jakarta where we work, is less interested in the profitability of development projects, or in developing precise calculations about future scenarios. Rather, it reflects various attempts by shifting constellations of elite actors and often translocal entrepreneurial groupings at more modest scales to control a capacity to give rise to eventualities no matter what, no matter what shape or behaviour they might assume. Infrastructural development here not only constitutes a guess about where the city is ‘going’; it also elicits the possibility of being part of a cascading and lateral chain of significations and realignments not necessarily imprinted with the weight of particular causations or history.

In an overarching environment of proliferating calculation, these eventualities are about a temporality ‘set loose’ from calculation—a process of associating place, people, institutions, finance, and politics that ramifies in ‘many’ unanticipated ways. Indeed, it is at the point where the city generates an excess of signification that is no longer tied to its own scale—or any scale for that matter—that it plunges into obscurity and allows new ‘clear-confused’ zones of urban chiaroscuro to emerge (Kaiser, 2010).

If we are to deal with the expropriation of the ‘many’ into proliferating consolidations of interoperable data deployed to wage battles over the demonstration of the capacity to bring about built environments that are largely informed by the exigency to ‘do something now’, then we might focus on different ways of thinking about this ‘not going anywhere specific’. How might such a concept characterize particular ways of managing urban life, particularly among the working- and lower middle-class populations of Maputo and Jakarta, whose everyday existence may be less precarious than the poor but who face intense instabilities in shelter and livelihood?

Compression

Compression refers back to those generic forms we talked about as the instruments of a more open-ended form of knowledge creation and detection. As a generic form, compression is the by-product of a very specific operation of

cutting. Let's assume that the city is a machine of promises. It promises to translate the specificities of a person's or a group's experiences across ramifying chains of meaning that ensue from the continuous intersections of flows of all kinds. Even the basic infrastructure of urban provisioning is now largely designed to promise future income streams, share prices, bond rates, and risk derivation (Pryke and Allen, 2019). Even when promises fail, negative spaces are availed as generative compensations. Failure can be a laboratory for resilience; ruined neighbourhoods can be phoenixes ascending in a panoply of hipsterisms.

As we have stressed from the beginning, habitation is supported through shifting ecologies of relation—through analogical substitutions, where the components of what enables a place to be sufficiently habitable can assume different valences, substitutions, and compensations. A little more here, a little less there; this exchanged for that. Where the elements express a fundamental 'likeness' for each other that underpins their 'willingness' to recalibrate their functioning in terms of each other. This is the ecological relationship. Where differences turn to and are converted by and translated through each other. The weak and the strong, the natural and unnatural—different though they may be—can participate in a larger frame of commonality. Compression is a cut in this flow of analogies. It is a detachment that, nevertheless, is able to hold many things, but where there is no possibility to detect the differences among those things.

Here, compression does not point to a particular state of being; it is not a commentary on the composition, volume, or density of a particular subject or object. Rather, compression concerns the abruption of transitivity, of lines of flight. It is, as Deleuze would characterize it, a singular commitment to 'this world', and not faith in the asymmetry of a movement from one particular world to another, a movement that depends on considering this world solely as a space for action that enables the charting of a relation outwards (Barber, 2016). Instead of all roads leading to Rome, to a technologically utopian future, compression is the detachment from that possibility of a clearly distinguishing exteriority, while at the same time abolishing the need for something to be something *specific*. Instead of fugitivity, as an escape from the confines of particular forms of capture or captivation, being grounded in the capacity to become something else, compression is instead an 'abolitionist' practice that refuses to convert the present manifestations of anything into something else.

Many new sites of residence for working- and lower-class inhabitants are popularly understood to be transitory, a stepping stone to something else, a marker of passage rather than the culmination of a destination. These are mostly located at the peripheries of cities in vast new extensions of metropolitan areas. But instead of settling in, of substantiating strong points of anchorage and commitment to particular ways of doing things, these new sites are instead approached as provisional launching pads, barely sufficient platforms for hedging bets, circulating across wider expanses of the city. As such, they

are inhabited with practices that often undermine recognition of any discernible status, that refuse both past and future horizons, and that are declined as measures of specific processes of development or transformation.

Vignette 3: Kalibata City (Jakarta, Indonesia)

Take the example of Kalibata City in Jakarta, a seemingly standard group of eighteen high-rise towers, 3,000 units, accommodating a population of nearly 30,000 people. On the surface, there is almost nothing to distinguish this housing complex from the hundreds of other so-called ‘affordable’ developments strewn across Southeast Asia. Unlike many other similar developments, however, there has been an effort to landscape the ground levels with scores of small shops, restaurants, coffee houses, and public spaces, all of which provide opportunities for both residents and outsiders to attain a sense of just how heterogeneous the make-up of the complex actually is. Part of this heterogeneity can be attributed to Kalibata’s central location and proximity to a major commuter train line, which, given Jakarta’s massive traffic problems, is a key factor in the population’s decisions about where to locate themselves.

Even though the complex is only five years old, with most of the units having been sold before completion, it is subject to scores of varying subcontracting arrangements and the layering of use rights, multiple forms of ownership, and internal local governance systems. Kalibata compresses a wide range of financial mobilizations that draw upon: individual and collective savings, speculation, extensive lateral borrowing networks, remuneration for work, favours, money in need of laundering, the pooled assets of many different kinds of associations, and barter, where, for example, land in other locations is exchanged for apartments and, subsequently, sometimes exchanged for jobs and for access to opportunities or equipment.

Kalibata City constitutes a non-proprietary mode of appearance of place that enables actors to ‘write’ themselves into whatever is happening. A place where different actors can recognize something of themselves whenever they look at it. Its residential base is perhaps most exemplary of the ‘many’ that one can find in Jakarta, where people of different incomes levels, religious and sexual identifications, and age groups largely live without conflict in close proximity to each other—an arrangement increasingly unlikely in other parts of the city. Even as particular kinds of identities may be consolidated within specific buildings and progressively colonize blocks of floors, the way in which the character of the public spaces across the complex changes over the course of the day points to the proliferation of niches, differentiated intersections of all kinds.

Yet all of this takes place without continuous forms of monitoring or intervention. In part because the composition is no longer a collection of discernibly differentiated identities but rather provisional formulations, where residents are more or less of many different things at different times depending

upon who they are dealing with both inside and outside the complex. Most don't expect the complex to last more than a decade but are in no rush to foresee something or somewhere else; this complex is not a culmination of aspirations or compensation for past failures. Yet every unit has its own assessed value due to its history, location, connection to other units in a broker's portfolio, or its prospects of being bundled with other opportunities. Unofficial brokers abound everywhere.

Although Kalibata clearly has a particular history of coming into existence, its subsequent proliferation of physical and managerial arrangements over the last five years raises fundamental questions about what it is. Is it subsidized housing? Is it the concretization of laundered money? Is it a new form of auto-construction? Is it a consortia project of local developers? Is it even part of the jurisdiction of the official local government in which it is situated? The answer to all of these questions is *both* yes and no. As a 'clear-confused' manifestation of the urban, Kalibata is fundamentally obscure (Kaiser, 2010). For examining the operations of the complex from different analytical starting points, from different combinations of informants, and from different archives and records of transactions all points to the presence of each of these elements, but without providing a clear framework through which their proportionality—the degree to which these elements are at work in their relationships with each other—can be determined.

Different kinds of money, residents, managerial practices, material readjustments, and forms of ownership and tenancy may indeed encounter each other, but in an overarching atmosphere of indifference. It is difficult to work out how they all impact each other, compressed as they are into a space where so many distinct things seem to be happening. As such, the integrity of any of these elements—their distinctiveness as objects for comparison or integration—becomes inoperable. This is not about the assemblage of hybrid urbanizations but rather a continuous proliferation of non-subsumable details incapable of being made *interoperable*.

Most residents that we talk to do not even know exactly what to call the complex. Rarely is it seen as 'home' or a 'base of operations'. Rather, it is most frequently referred to as a 'place'. Even when asked how the complex works or does not work, specificity is limited, as people usually invoke the word *sesuatu* (something). Because of the plurality of subcontracting arrangements, residents may stay in the complex for years or for days, with all variations of durations in between.

Given the capacity of the complex to enfold so much of the 'many' and the resultant opacity about just how this occurs, Kalibata City is widely known throughout Jakarta, the locus of a multitude of stories, rumours, and impressions. It is seen as something both accessible and impenetrable, a place incapable of judgment.

If anything, one could look at Kalibata in terms of the mostly 'silent' contestations among various kinds of residents and lifestyles—Islamic, queer,



Food stalls and broker in Kalibata City, Jakarta. Every kind of item and service is available for delivery, and the complex is replete with scores of brokers making deals about apartments, parking, supply chains, and security, to name a few. © Photo by AbdouMaliq Simone, Jakarta.



Prospective short-term tenants waiting for their Airbnb flats to become available. Kalibata City offers accommodation for all kinds of temporalities. © Photo by AbdouMaliq Simone, Jakarta.

young professionals, nascent (barely) middle-class families, immigrants, sex workers—for control over floors in specific buildings, leading segments, clusters, to emerge. But there are so many variations of people passing through, staying long, coming in and out, that it is never really clear who is who, what is what. When one begins to follow residents as they leave the complex, it is clear that the trajectories of external movement cut across a wide range of territories and institutions in Jakarta—evidence of which then loops back to the complex, something that can be ‘mined’ by others. What is important for residents, then, is less the curating of an ‘inside’ than a collective penetration and cultivation of a larger surrounding. There is a tacit understanding that residents should be accorded some latitude to develop their own networks and ‘projects’ beyond the neighbourhood as a means of providing new inputs and ideas for everyone. Everyone should be accorded the possibility of not being ‘recognized’, where notions of self-possession, or of possessing a consistent public self-performance, are suspended.

Here, dispossession becomes something other than simply eviction, indebtedness, or devalorization. Instead, dispossession operates as a more ambiguous device, or even as the prerequisite for the deployment of collective effort that lives in conditions of what *might be taking place*—something that exceeds the available vernaculars of verification or affirmation—which is experienced as not all that far from *what is taking place*. Recognizing these possibilities is only possible if residents are dispossessed of their normative orientations, their familiar ways of dealing with things. Yet these expenditures that risk dispossession, these proximities, the feeling out of attachments, the working out of conditions to coexist, the obligations to both extend and be indifferent to one another, and to continuously invent new terms for collaboration that need not look like it actually takes place, are the grounds of urban sociality (Nielsen, 2012).

Urban chiaroscuro

Kalibata returns us to the chiaroscuro. We don’t know what this complex is for sure, even though we know a great deal about how it functions, its different rhythms of visibility and invisibility. Clarity appears to emerge from the fixation of things (Taussig, 1993). As people, concepts, and spaces are conquered and momentarily stabilized, scales are invoked that offer a universal readability of those very same phenomena that were vital in the making of the former as a ‘conjuring of a dramatic performance’ (Tsing, 2000, p. 119). But, of course, we also know that scales are not just neutral frames for somehow viewing the world objectively. For while we may continue to insist that scales are set up prior to measuring the effects of actions, it is, in fact, by contextualizing, scaling, spacing, that the idea of the scale itself is achieved (Corsín Jiménez, 2005; Latour, 2005). To be sure, we would never know what actions to gauge for their effects without the distinctions we impose upon them through the use of scales,

and so the instruments we operationalize when measuring things end up also producing their particular qualities (Wagner, 1981).

What happens, then, if we remove something from the constraints of scale and proportion; that is, if we move beyond the acts of measuring and proportioning that seem to offer the only available form of readability of the city? What kinds of perspectives might be available to us if the contrasts, differentiations, and distinctions that make up urban relational infrastructures were momentarily bracketed and we left the city to its own devices? Would that even be possible? In a sense, we would have to imagine the 'many' as no longer held in place by a conceptual twin, but still without it losing its specificity (Patton, 1997).

In his discussion on Leibniz and Baumgarten, Barnouw writes that 'no concept is ever wholly free of a residual confusion from its sensuous origin' (1995, p. 31). Chiaroscuro articulates precisely the relativity of clarity; while we may know colours, fragrances, velocities, moods, pressures, and forces clearly enough to discern them from each other, this happens through our immediate sensations of whatever we are confronted by and not by the scalings and representational identifiers that we may have attributed to such phenomena. Something appears as distinct not because it is completely readable but because it articulates the relationship between clarity and obscurity in a particularly succinct way. Indeed, as Deleuze tells us, clarity comes from obscurity and 'endlessly is plunging back into it' (1993, p. 89).

Considered as a particularly succinct form of urban chiaroscuro, the 'many' is something other than the differentiation that emanates from a classificatory imposition. Crucially, while it does emerge from the specificity of urban life, it is also beyond the subjective. In a sense, we could argue that the 'many' is what happens to the individual who is no longer contained by the sphere of the specific but nevertheless maintains its distinctiveness as a limited generic universality. This could be taken to suggest that the 'many' is nothing but a particular productive instantiation of the authorless apparatuses of power that have been so brilliantly captured in the genealogical writings of Michel Foucault (1977; 1982; 1991). But the 'many' fails to articulate the 'dominant strategic function' that may otherwise flow through thoroughly heterogeneous meshworks of 'discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic proposition' (Foucault, 1980, p. 194).

As a form of obscure urban chiaroscuro, the 'many' is in a position of eternal exteriority in relation to those fields of action whose relational coordinates it may also come to determine. It asserts itself not as a clear realization or identifiable standpoint from which to gauge the effects of actions but, rather, as an often uncanny sensation that something exists *aside* structures of explicit articulation (Degnen, 2013).

As such, urban chiaroscuro may come to articulate a distinct utopic function. *Can you dream of that which can never be captured by scalings and*

representational classifications? We can have a sense of something without being able to differentiate the experience into particular components. That is what characterizes obscurity. In his discussion of the relationship between clarity and obscurity, Leibniz uses the analogy of reading a musical score and perceiving the melody (1969, p. 580). In order to appreciate the beauty of music, it is not necessary to recognize the sequence of notes, Leibniz argues, 'it suffices that the soul has included them in its confused thoughts in the same way that it has a thousand things in its memory without thinking of them distinctly'. What is important, then, is that we have a 'clear-confused' sense of the melody; if we focus only on the individual notes, we lose the sense of the whole.

According to Leibniz, the context of the musical example is a clear vindication of the idea that 'the present is pregnant with the future' (Leibniz, 1969, in Barnouw, 1995, p. 31), and we may make the same argument regarding the obscurity of urban chiaroscuro. For what is the obscurity of the city if not an unknown rhythmic tension that forever moves us forwards? It is not tied to fields of action as a vibrant potentiality that opens up the present towards the future (Crang, 2001; Stoler, 2013). Were it so, urban chiaroscuro would invariably end up being enfolded within existing registers of articulation. Rather, because of its fundamental 'unfoldedness', urban chiaroscuro maintains a non-relation to the world. It is the excess that we may dream of in words that cannot be articulated and that therefore carry ideas that can never be fully realized; they are, we may argue, utopian (Grosz, 2001).

Vignette 4: The rooftop village (Maputo, Mozambique)

Maputo is a city that stretches out horizontally from the colonial downtown, which is nowhere near as central to anything as it might appear. Until very recently, there were only a handful of high-rise towers in or near the old city centre, and they were all known by name, such as the '33 Andares' (33 Floors) and the 'Torres Vermelhas' (Red Towers). Walking along the streets near the legendary Piri-Piri Restaurant on the corner of Avenida 24 de Julho and Avenida Julius Nyerere, where the late journalist Carlos Cardoso used to hold court, an immediate sense of the city arises from locking one's gaze onto the horizontal topography of the colonial arrow-straight streets, which can be traced for miles until they disappear in the thick, warm asphalt haze. Following Avenida 24 de Julho from the downtown area through the neighbourhoods of Alto Mãe, Luis Cabral, and further beyond, it is the ambiguous and indeterminable endpoints of the city and not the agglomeration of all kinds of provisionally gathered stuff that become its most alluring and perhaps also most telling feature.

In the absence of a dominant spatial nodal point, it is as if Maputo 'is everywhere without really being anywhere' (Canclini, 1995, p. 748). There might be social relay stations, critical connection points, and junctures where the flow of information about whatever is being planned and is about to happen is particularly intense, but there is no consolidated spatial focal point from

which all things emanate. Instead, the city offers a set of always unclear horizontal coordinates. Moving around the city, you get your bearings and orient yourself by looking outwards and sideways. In this regard, Maputo emerges as a series of expanding concentric circles that are always defined in relation to one's immediate position. This also happens to be the structuring principle behind the organization of Maputo's colonial architecture (Morais, 2001).

Horizontalism carries with it a promise of transparency, which it is not capable of fulfilling. It conjures up an image of a territory that is completely visible, with more and more details and specific features appearing the further away from the physical space you look at it. Not just today but in all historical presents, horizontalism has therefore deceived and disappointed its spectators. For even when everything is illuminated there is still something that cannot be seen (Strathern, 1991, pp. xiv-xvi). But maybe there are other cities within urban localities such as Maputo. Cities that do not adhere to the principle of horizontalism and its implicit emphasis on circulation, visibility, lateral expansion, and connectedness. Cities where whatever is legible is also opaque through and through. And where expansion is just another word for compression and compactness. All it requires in order to get a first glance of one such city is to lift one's eyes away from the physical movements and material connections that fill up the street and to look towards the buildings' rooftops.

There are very few apartment buildings in Maputo that do not have some smaller constructions added to their rooftops. Depending on age and architectural style, apartment buildings range between three and eight storeys, with sloping roofs towards the front and back. Projected vertically from the sloping roof that faces the street, the additional constructions look almost like dormers that the homeowner has inserted as a clever way of taking advantage of the eave spaces. Upon closer scrutiny, however, it appears that the additional constructions do not connect with the buildings' existing apartments. In all their opaque visibility, the rooftop houses constitute an urban realm entirely of their own.

In a strategic attempt to shed itself of its colonial past while at the same time wedging a still evolving nationalist version of socialism into the material fabric of the country, shortly after independence in 1975 the Frelimo government nationalized all apartments and urban housing stock previously owned by Portuguese settlers. Suddenly, thousands of dispossessed national citizens were given access to permanent housing in the very same buildings where they had previously worked and some even lived while serving the needs of the Portuguese elite. Less than two decades later, the residents were offered the opportunity to buy the nationalized apartments, which made them not just homeowners but also responsible for running the apartment blocks and their general maintenance. Today, former state cadres who are no longer constrained by ideological commitments to a social experiment that never really materialized readily admit that the selling of the apartments was a political act of despair. Without the resources or political will to properly manage the

apartment blocks, they bet on the moral economy of private ownership to carry the weight of reproducing an urban collectivity. And maybe it did. Not long after receiving the formal documents from the government proving that they were now homeowners, residents began to rent out their apartments, opting instead to move into shacks, small storage rooms, or former servants' quarters on the rooftops. Many of the first rooftop occupants or their immediate relatives still live in these elevated spaces, which were never intended for permanent occupation and therefore have no electricity or water installed. Through intricately engineered systems of connections and rewirings, which always involve more than one apartment, the rooftop occupants therefore hook up to the buildings' existing but increasingly fragile systems of power cables, water tubes, and drainpipes.

In nearly all of the apartment blocks, 'dirty water' (*água suja*) seeps down through the physical structure and connects the different apartments with the rooftop houses as if it was the lifeblood of the building. When the rooftop occupants, who are actually apartment owners, 'hack' the buildings' infrastructure systems, they inadvertently establish a form of connectivity with their tenants, which neither one expected and rarely knows how to control or operationalize. The plastic tubes that the rooftop occupants attach to the buildings' old zinc pipes never fit, and so the tenants have to live with the consequences of the 'infiltration' (*infiltração*) of rancid 'dirty water' dripping down through the ceiling. Often, tenants cover their pots and pans with tinfoil in order to avoid the most severe and damaging consequences of this form of invasive connectivity with their landlords, which they never asked for.

Although 'infiltration' is considered by apartment owners and tenants alike to be a major cause of frustration and even anger, no one really knows how to change the untenable situation, let alone whose fault it is that things ended up the way they are. Occasionally, a chairman of a residents' committee will convene a meeting for all residents living in their apartment block and may even reach out to officials at the Department of Urban Planning of the Maputo Municipality, but few proposals are being formulated and even fewer carry a plan for direct action. And, still, to many residents, the everyday hassle of dealing with 'infiltration' is considered a very annoying and putrid but ultimately unavoidable consequence of living in a building, which literally feeds on itself. 'Each one takes care of their own life' (*cada um cuida da sua vida*), residents will say, with the implied connotation that the less you know, the easier everything will be.

If clarity emerges from the stability and fixation of things, then Maputo's rooftop village is in constant movement. The ceaseless approximations and detachments of relationalities, histories, emotions, and things instantiate a particular configuration of clarity and obscurity that seems to never really allow for meaningful scalings and assessments. For the residents living in the dilapidated buildings, there are no privileged positions from which it would be possible to figure out what exactly is going on; there is no one who



Housing block in the neighbourhood of Alto Mãe (Maputo) with rows of informally built rooftop apartments. In many apartment blocks, access to the rooftops is possible only via a separate small staircase, which was initially made for servants and guards. This organisation of the buildings' spaces has resulted in a separation of residents between those living in the apartments and those living in the rooftops. Oftentimes, people living in the apartment do not even know who live in the rooftop except for those that they might have installed there. © Photo by Morten Nielsen, Maputo, 2015.



A rooftop in Maputo. It is an immense task to erect a cement building on a rooftop. All building materials are being raised to the roof using ropes and buckets. Since it is illegal to erect new constructions on the roofs of existing apartment blocks, it usually happens during the night or weekends when there is less movement in the street. Today, no one really knows how many rooftop occupations there are in Maputo. The best estimate is offered by David Simango, the former head of APIE, who did a small historical survey of Maputo's rooftop and backyard occupations in 2015. According to Simango, there are approximately 6,000 'residential units' on the rooftops, in garages and annexes. By using INE's 2007 census, which sets the median number of residents in informal housing to five persons, Simango concludes that there might be 30,000 residents living in 'special informal occupations'. © Photo by Morten Nielsen, Maputo, 2015.

might untangle the intricate complexities of living with ‘*agua suja*’ dripping down through the ceiling. Although it might be assumed otherwise, there are no centrally positioned external agents—state officials, neighbourhood leaders, politicians—who are refusing to figure out what the situation is all about; there is simply no available knowledge that would allow such assessments to be made. The slowly collapsing physical structures that still allow residents to live in spaces that were never intended for habitation are essentially made from the same interplay of obscurity and clarity as the frustrations that move the residents towards and away from each other.

Conclusion

Based on a series of ethnographically driven reflections from Jakarta and Maputo, we have explored certain obscure facets of the city that defy scaling and fixation to specific registers of conceptualization. Through an incessant and ever-more intensified *compression* of persons, things, and ideas occurring in cities throughout the world, a massive over-production of stuff is unfolding the composition of both existing and emerging socio-material infrastructures. In and through these processes, none of which operate in terms of discernible magnitudes of quantity and proportionality, modular elements intended for the making and remaking of the city are being produced, which lack the properties and classificatory criteria that would be necessary in order for them to align with those sections of the city that function in terms of clearly defined procedures and protocols. This is what we term *the many*. At the same time, there remains a conviction that *eventually* things will work out, become useful, profitable, recuperable in some normative sense, even if the language of that normality is not yet present. To be *dispossessed* of such clarity, of an unwavering association between individual or collective identity and specific agendas and aspirations, is an integral step towards such eventuality.

These operations of compression, eventuality, dispossession, and the ‘many’ are then critical aspects of what we have defined as urban *chiaroscuro*, as a domain of obscurity, where things could go in many different ways but without clear antecedents or trajectories. Here, generic modulations of the city come into being unaccompanied by those spatial dimensionalities that might allow a reasonable reading of the effects of socio-material actions. These urban phenomena plunge directly into obscurity, as it were, from which the city is made and remade anew. The paradox is, of course, that without the coordinates by which to orient oneself in terms of the ongoing reconfigurations of clarity and obscurity, it is not clear what the city is, let alone what it can and should become.

For many residents of Jakarta and Maputo, what was formerly known as the city has largely disappeared in the spiralling conversions of space and built environment into financial ephemera. The city no longer holds out a promise or, rather, is reduced to a panoply of promises with little interest or need to

substantiate them. Residents are increasingly pushed to the peripheries, saddled with the debt that is the only concrete sign of their inheritance of citizenship. Many of the built environments to which they are consigned literally fall apart within a few years. In other instances, peripheries pack in impenetrable and largely ungoverned self-built environments contiguous to various forms of gated communities, some nearly empty, some completely rearranged, sometimes in gestures to communal ownership, sometimes to privatizing the minutest spaces. Industrial estates both lie fallow or in anticipation of future demand. The ruins of various speculations sit side-by-side with the emergence of thousands of 'pilot projects'.

Among these built environments, large numbers of people are constantly on the move, commuting, seeking, escaping, and circulating through temporary positions and homes of all kinds. Peripheries reek with temporariness, and it seems that the majority have themselves 'disappeared'; they, too, have become a kind of chiaroscuro, fading in and out of obscurity and illumination. Perhaps a new modality of auto-construction has thus taken place, less concerned with the outlines of a sustainable heterogeneity in place than with the very constructs of urban bodies themselves.

Bibliography

- Adams, R. E.** (2014), 'Natura Urbans, Natura Urbanata: Ecological Urbanism, Circulation, and the Immunization of Nature'. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, vol. 32, no. 1, pp. 12-29.
- Barber, D. C.** (2016), 'The Creation of Non-Being'. *Rhizomes: Cultural Studies in Emerging Knowledge*, vol. 29. <https://doi.org/10.20415/rhiz/029.e10>.
- Barnouw, J.** (1995), 'The Cognitive Value of Confusion and Obscurity in the German Enlightenment: Leibniz, Baumgarten, and Herder'. *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, vol. 24, pp. 29-50.
- Bishop, R.** (2015), 'Smart Dust and Remote Sensing: The Political Subject in Autonomous Systems'. *Cultural Politics*, vol. 11, no. 1, pp. 100-110.
- Bryan, D., M. Rafferty, & C. Jefferis** (2015), 'Risk and Value: Finance, Labor, and Production'. *South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 114, no. 2, pp. 307-329.
- Canclini, N. G.** (1995), 'Mexico City: Cultural Globalization in a Disintegrating City'. *American Ethnologist*, vol. 22, no. 4, pp. 743-755.
- Corsín Jiménez, A.** (2005), 'Changing Scales and the Scales of Change. Ethnography and Political Economy in Antofagasta, Chile'. *Critique of Anthropology*, vol. 25, no. 2, pp. 157-176.
- (2017), 'Auto-Construction Redux: The City as Method'. *Cultural Anthropology*, vol. 32, no. 3, pp. 450-478.
- Crandall, J.** (2010), 'The Geospatialization of Calculative Operations: Tracking, Sensing and Megacities'. *Theory, Culture & Society*, vol. 27, no. 6, pp. 68-90.
- Crang, M.** (2001), 'Rhythms of the City: Temporalised Space and Motion'. In J. May & N. Thrift (Eds.), *Timespace: Geographies of Temporality* (pp. 187-207). London, Routledge.
- Degen, C.** (2013), '"Knowing", Absence, and Presence: The Spatial and Temporal Depth of Relations'. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, vol. 31, no. 3, pp. 554-570.
- Deleuze, G.** (1993), *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*. London, The Athlone Press.
- (1994), *Difference and Repetition*. New York, Columbia University Press.
- Elden, S.** (2013), 'Secure the Volume: Vertical Geopolitics and the Depth of Power'. *Political Geography*, vol. 34, pp. 35-51.
- Foucault, M.** (1977), *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York, Pantheon Books.
- (1980), 'The Confession of the Flesh'. In C. Gordon (Ed.), *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews & Other Writings 1972-1977* (pp. 194-228). New York, Pantheon Books.
- (1982), 'The Subject and Power'. In H. L. Dreyfus & P. Rabinow (Eds.), *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (pp. 208-229). Chicago, University of Chicago Press.
- (1991), 'What Is an Author?'. In P. Rabinow (Ed.), *The Foucault Reader: An Introduction to Foucault's Thought* (pp. 101-120). London, Penguin Books.
- Gabrys, J.** (2014), 'Programming Environments: Environmentality and Citizen Sensing in the Smart City'. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, vol. 32, no. 1, pp. 30-48.
- Gad, C.** (2013), 'A Postplural Attitude'. *NatureCulture*, vol. 2, pp. 50-79.
- Galloway, A. R.** (2014), *Laurelle: Against the Digital*. Minneapolis, MN, University of Minnesota Press.
- Galloway, A. R., & J. R. LaRivière** (2017), 'Compression in Philosophy'. *Boundary 2*, vol. 44, no. 1, pp. 125-147.
- Ghertner, D. A.** (2014), 'India's Urban Revolution: Geographies of Displacement beyond Gentrification'. *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, vol. 46, no. 7, pp. 1554-1571.
- Grosz, E.** (2001), *Architecture from the Outside: Essays on Virtual and Real Space*. Cambridge, MA, MIT Press.
- Guironnet, A., & L. Halbert** (2014), 'The Financialization of Urban Development Projects: Concepts, Processes, and Implications'. LATT Working Paper hal-01097192 n14-04; December 2014.
- Hall, P.** (2002), *Cities of Tomorrow: An Intellectual History of Urban Planning and Design in the Twentieth Century*. Oxford, Wiley-Blackwell.
- Hall, S., & M. Savage** (2015), 'Animating the Urban Vortex: New Sociological Urgencies'. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, vol. 40, no. 1, pp. 82-95.
- Hui, Y.** (2016), *On the Existence of Digital Objects*. Minneapolis, MN, University of Minnesota Press.
- Kaiser, B. M.** (2010), 'Two Floors of Thinking: Deleuze's Aesthetics of Folds'. In S. van Tuinen & N. McDonnell (Eds.), *Deleuze and The Fold: A Critical Reader* (pp. 203-224). New York, Palgrave.
- Kitchin, R.** (2014), 'The Real-Time City? Big Data and Smart Urbanism'. *Geojournal*, 79, pp. 1-14.
- Kockelman, P.** (2012), 'Biosemiosis, Technocognition, and Sociogenesis: Selection and Significance in a Multiverse of Sieving and Serendipity'. *Current Anthropology*, vol. 52, no. 5, pp. 711-739.
- Laruelle, F.** (2011), 'The Generic as Predicate and Constant: Non-Philosophy and Materialism'. In L. Bryant, N. Srnicek, & G. Harman (Eds.), *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism* (pp. 237-260). Melbourne, re.press.
- Latour, B.** (2005), *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Leibniz, G. W. (1969), *Philosophical Papers and Letters*. Dordrecht, Reidel.

Lemanski, C. (2006), 'Spaces of Exclusivity or Connection? Linkages between a Gated Community and its Poorer Neighbour in a Cape Town Master Plan Development'. *Urban Studies*, vol. 43, no. 2, pp. 397-420.

Leszczynski, A. (2016), 'Speculative Futures: Cities, Data, and Governance beyond Smart Urbanism'. *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, vol. 48, no. 9, pp. 1691-1708.

MacKenzie, E. (1994), *Privatopia: Homeowner Associations and the Rise of Residential Private Government*. New Haven, CT, Yale University Press.

Martin, R. (2013), 'After Economy? Social Logics of the Derivative'. *Social Text*, 114, pp. 83-106.

Massumi, B. (2013), 'Technical Mentality Revisited: Brian Massumi on Gilbert Simondon'. In A. De Boever, A. Murray, J. Roffe, & A. Woodward (Eds.), *Gilbert Simondon: Being and Technology* (pp. 19-36). Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press.

McFarlane, C. (2016), 'The Geographies of Urban Density: Topology, Politics and the

City'. *Progress in Human Geography*, vol. 40, no. 5, pp. 629-648.

Mezzadra, S., & **B. Neilson** (2012), 'Between Inclusion and Exclusion: On the Topology of Global Space and Borders'. *Theory, Culture & Society*, vol. 29, nos. 4-5, pp. 58-75.

– (2015), 'Operations of Capital'. *South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 114, no. 1, pp. 1-9.

Ministério das Obras Públicas e Habitação (1976), *Aldeias Comuns: Contribuições para o planeamento físico da zona habitacional da aldeia comunal*. Maputo, República Popular de Moçambique.

Morais, J. S. (2001), *Maputo: Património da estrutura e forma urbana topologia do lugar*. Lisbon, Livros Horizonte, LDA.

Morton, D. S. (2018), *Age of Concrete: Housing and the Shape of Aspiration in the Capital of Mozambique*. Athens, OH, Ohio University Press.

Muniesa, F. (2014), *The Provoked Economy: Economic Reality and the Performative Turn*. London; New York, Routledge.

Murray, M. J. (2015), 'Waterfall City (Johannesburg): Privatized Urbanism in Extremis'. *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, vol. 47, no. 3, pp. 503-520.

Nail, T. (2015), *The Figure of the Migrant*. Stanford, CA, Stanford University Press.

Nielsen, M. (2011), 'Inverse Governmentality: The Paradoxical Production of Peri-Urban Planning in Maputo, Mozambique'. *Critique of Anthropology*, vol. 31, no. 4, pp. 329-358.

– (2012), 'Roadside Inventions: Making Time and Money Work at a Road Construction Site in Mozambique'. *Mobilities*, vol. 7, no. 4, pp. 467-480.

– (2017), 'Ideological Twinning: Socialist Aesthetics and Political Meetings in Maputo, Mozambique'. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, vol. 23, no. S1, pp. 139-153.

Nielsen, M., & **P. Jenkins** (2020), 'Insurgent Aspirations? Weak Middle-Class Utopias in Maputo, Mozambique'. *Critical African Studies*.

Nielsen, M., & **A. Simone** (2016), 'The Generic City: Examples from Jakarta, Indonesia, and Maputo, Mozambique'. In P. Harvey, C. Bruun Jensen, & A. Morita (Eds.), *Infrastructures and Social Complexity: A Companion* (pp. 128-140). New York, Routledge.

Patton, P. (1997), 'The World Seen from Within: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Events'. *Theory & Event*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 1-21.

Parisi, L. (2013), *Contagious Architecture. Computation, Aesthetics, and Space*. Cambridge, MA, MIT Press.

Pryke, A., & **J. Allen** (2019), 'Financialising Urban Water Infrastructure: Extracting Local Value, Distributing Value Globally'. *Urban Studies*, vol. 56, no. 7, pp. 1326-1346. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042098017742288>.

Rancière, J. (2004), *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*. London; New York, Continuum.

Read, J. (2016), *The Politics of Transindividuality*. Leiden, Brill, 2015/ Chicago, Haymarket, 2016.

Ruddick, S. (2015), 'Situating the Anthropocene: Planetary Urbanization and the Anthropological Machine'. *Urban Geography*, vol. 36, pp. 1113-1130.

Scott, J. C. (1998), *Seeing Like a State. How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. New Haven, CT, Yale University Press.

Stiegler, B. (2016), *Automatic Society, Volume 1: The Future of Work*. Cambridge, Polity Press.

Stoler, A. L. (Ed.) (2013), *Imperial Debris: On Ruins and Ruination*. Durham, NC; London, Duke University Press.

Strathern, M. (1991), *Partial Connections*. Totowa, NJ, Rowman and Littlefield.

Taussig, M. (1993), *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses*. New York, Routledge.

Thrift, N. (2011), 'Lifeworld, Inc—And What to Do about it'. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, vol. 29, no. 1, pp. 5-26.

Tsing, A. L. (2000), 'Inside the Economy of Appearances'. *Public Culture*, vol. 12, no. 1, pp. 115-144.

Wagner, R. (1981), *The Invention of Culture*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press.