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‘Organize, organize, organize’: The act of surrounding, one to another

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It has been an honour to have such wonderful scholars, whose work I really respect, put in the work to read and say something about this book. Many salient questions are asked, and points raised in the commentaries. Narayanan Palat invokes the once again controversial notion of ‘the field’ as a medium in which researchers both are surrounded by particular conundrums and surround the everyday practices of those with whom a certain distance is constituted through a practice called ‘research’. What is the surrounds here, they ask, and what are the ethics and politics of a ‘figure’ that both belongs and is detached from a situation, or where neither belonging or detachment is an adequate term for the positionality entailed. Who surrounds who, and where this is not a question that can be attributed to a specific designation or geography?

While Lalitha Kamath views the surrounds as an atmospheric condition for a subaltern politics – something to which I might only partially subscribe, they nevertheless, point out the almost intractable dilemmas entailed in apprehending the resourcefulness of the working poor who continue to reinvent the conditions of endurance – but barely. And certainly not in terms that are just or sufficient. Kamath is attentive to the multiple archives of itineraries evident in the working poor peripheries of Mumbai, itineraries that reflect a constant sense of movement; that things don’t stand still; that one is fully captured by a specific position, even as possibilities are intensely gendered and subject to sweeping ‘counter-insurgencies’ by various forms of state power. Here the questions about the extent to which autonomy can be materialized by being left to one’s own devices and

the concessions to be made by being ‘taken care of’ through the reciprocal responsibilities of state and citizen are not easily reconciled, and must ‘taken on’ as a matter of a constant re-arrangement of their mutual relations as surrounds.

Additionally it is important to emphasize the conceivable ways in which researchers are both imbricated and co-producers of surrounds, the south, and the metropolis, and how these are in an always oscillating relationship with each other. And as they are repeated in some kind of integral relationship – meaning that that the south might surround the metropolis, as the metropolis surrounds the south – as well as researchers being surrounded by often impossible positions from which they nevertheless try to do something – that the surrounds becomes the term for shifting relations of encompassment and detachment, of reciprocity and rupture. This is not just a matter of the perspective of researchers but a structural condition. A structuring that always entails a multiplicity of conceivable conjunctions, of what might be. Even if metropolis and south are limiting terms, their very repetition points to the possibilities of something else besides what we know and assume, that might have been present all along.

One can begin quite literally and take ‘the surrounds’ as that atmospheric, morphological, metabolic, architectural, topographical, social and lived space, which surrounds ‘you’, the actor, and

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‘others’ more or less bounded, defined. That space in which you are imbricated, locatable, positioned, moving to or away from. A space within and outside various frames, perspectives, scales. Each ‘arrangement’, each enforced series of relationalities, is ‘partial’ – that is only part of a story that narrates a particular judgment or value. The surrounds is also the immediate presence of the *maybe*. What indeed ‘may be’ as a plethora of registers, apertures, potentialities *and* an ontology of indeterminacy, that things only exist provisionally, and at the expense of elision, subjugation, and omission. The surrounds is the accompanying condition of valuation and definition, constantly shape-shifting and polyrhythmic.

The surrounds are thus those spaces beyond capture, not immune from it, not free of it, but rather something aside it as a locus of continuous rebellion. This is rebellion that might not always look like rebellion. Often bordering on a kind of wretchedness that is nearly impossible to look at directly, such rebellion nevertheless enables us to stay focused on seeing something in the now, of making what we have presently available in a different way. The surrounds then are not only those of social refuse and refusal, but also of re-fusing and remaking that *accompany* such refusal. So this work is not about specific political tactics or even political critique, but rather disorientations, living slightly askew, but ever active in terms of pulling together, putting things together.

The surrounds are not some alternate reality just over there, just beyond the tracks or the near horizon. Sometimes they are heterotopic, exceptional, intensely specific, hidden in plain sight, prefigurative, or dissolute. In all instances the surrounds are infrastructural in that they entail the possibilities within any event, situation, setting or project for something incomputable, unanticipated to take (its) place. Cities are replete with clearly designated spaces – industrial, carceral, administrative, domestic, festive, and logistical. But there is always something ‘leftover’ in their operations, something not completely captured by the terms of their respective functioning.

Then there are spaces that seem to *converge* elements of all of these functions. Spaces that are partly carceral, domestic, administrative, and so forth. But spaces where the proportions of each characteristic

are too difficult to discern or to stabilize within any particular calculation.

Just as soon as you think you know what they are, they ‘move on’, or the function you have staked your analysis on is suddenly superseded by others. So, the surrounds is the relationship between spaces whose complexion exceeds their function, while maintaining them, and spaces whose functions are never clearly stabilized because they seem to absorb a multiplicity of characteristics. Each of these distinct circumstances *surrounds* the other. It is a means of pluralizing a topographical imagination, of spatial configurations that persist through a generalized ‘flattening’ of surfaces – as in that occasioned by the planetary exoskeleton of surveillance. Instead: notions such as *hollows*, *furrows*, *shoals*, *eddies*, *mangals*, *heads*, and *wilds* come to the fore – so as to destabilize notions of ‘freedom’ captured by static, determined dispositions. Rather, a notion of freedom here is reiterated as something aside any determination of whether or not something is really ‘free’.

In one instance in this dialogue, it is a dear friend who deploys that friendship to enable me to ‘stand corrected’ about the elisions and absences. In a book that seeks to disrupt the calculus of proportionality as applied to what it is worth doing and living, the absence of attention to all of the inventiveness, sacrifices and persistence of radical organizing in the pursuit of abolition does threaten to undermine the book’s very premise. I am grateful for being reminded of this, particularly by a person whose entire life has been dedicated to finding the openings, exuding the determinations, and just putting in the hard work to make small things happen, which in their temporal assembly constitutes an accruing emancipation. While not marshalling any of defence – there can be none in this instance – I just want to say a few words about what I had in mind.

In Ruth Wilson’s Gilmore’s renowned incantation, ‘organize, organize, organize’, the immediate thing that comes to mind in this repetition is an emphasis (Gilmore, 2022). That we need to be constantly reminded, that to register any kind of fundamental transformation of the police-politics-media-race laden-computational-mining operations that capture

our souls, we must continuously organize. That there is no magic show *abracadabra* redemption around the corner, no miraculous awakening, nor inevitable immanence that arises for and from the orchestration of all the murmurings and faint strivings that might emerge in the myriad of backyard territories across the world. That anything that we might continually and viably sense as a horizon, a possibility just over the next hill, has been the outcome of determined and strategically honed struggle.

Yet in Gilmore's repetition there is another generativity embodied in the repetition: that while we are reminded of the familiar responsibility lest we forget, the repetition itself always entails a difference. That we repeat, not to bring something new into the world or to stabilize that which we already know, but to also bring to enunciation that which exists already – or might exist already – but which has been kept away or remained occluded just because a language for its visibility did not exist. Or that has tactically removed itself to preclude being extracted from, captured. Whether Gilmore intended such a perspective or not is not as important here as is the way the use of this form of repetition points to multiple modalities of organizing. Modalities embedded in and manifested by the often inexplicable decisions that people make to suddenly 'turn a corner', to pay attention to something for the first time, to accidentally witness or overhear fragments of conversations from actors and geographies to which they have never have been exposed. It concerns how these decisions and their implications accrue in a thickening of sensibilities and small behaviours that organize a multiplicity of fields that set the stage from which more discernible and disjunctive forms of activism emerge.

Here the question is how to tap into the 'chorus' of simultaneous events occurring within a territory – all of the people who gather in their compounds at the same time of day to pound yam, wash their children, change their clothes, make love, and in the repetition of these quotidian activities generate small deviations or circumventions. A choir where the vernacular of 'representation' is music, not only in the sense that all of this cacophony of making, repairing, arguing, reassuring, challenging

constitutes a music but also is composed musically, organized according to a different 'score'. That the only way to apprehend the simultaneity of all of these gatherings is to think and feel musically about one's positions in the world. For here it is important to understand that one is an extension of an organizing that exceeds one's ability to steer, or even navigate – yet something can be done.

Additionally, in the repetition of organize $\times 3$, it is important to consider the ways in which an interrelationship among different forms of organization themselves might be 'organized'. Here, Tina Campt's (2019) reflections on the affective work of *adjacency* is important, that is, the making of relations in spite of and because of the differences of experiences and power. Something which is not empathy for the other but an acknowledgement that there are no words or feelings sufficient to do the work of translation or to put yourself into someone else's shoes. Rather, it is necessary to confront and address the divergences, the extensiveness of unacknowledged suffering, and rework the possibilities of proximity, of people being together. For there is always 'something else besides' what we know. That confounds what we know.

But we can never forget the question as to who gets to use this 'something else besides'? How not to let these new connections, and knowledges slip into the 'master's' hands and agendas. This is a task that requires a constant interplay of 'hit and run', visibility and invisibility, new ceremonies and gatherings, where everyone enables everyone else to develop the skills of everyone, but without obligation. It is a question of how to maintain the physicality of things *touching* (upon) each other. And this cannot happen without an interplay of 'organizings', of which the kind of practices Kelly Gillespie talks about are indispensable.

In the familiar theorizations of the urban, the assumption has been that even though driven by the unruly, the individualized, and the divisible, there remained trajectories and imaginaries of completion, of settling fundamental conundrums once and for all. This entailed identifying the proper place of things and people, of specifying zones for specific operations, of piling on regulatory structures to every conceivable transaction, and

heightening the visibility of every desire or affect. But at the same time, maximizing the value inherent in converting any of these things into anything else, of borrowing from the uncertain futures in terms of specifying their trajectories through the obligations of indebtedness. Where even turbulence – climatic, economic, social – could be repurposed as a medium of speculative exchange.

So what does organizing mean in a situation where urbanization processes do not arrive at a specific disposition. Where they always operate in the *middle of things*. Where an array of antagonisms, contradictions, binaries, refusals are already incorporated in the extensionalities of the urban. It might even be possible to consider *unsettlement* as the predominant modality of urbanization: dispossession, displacement, distributed agency, dispersion as standard operating procedures. Not just for endless accumulation, but also to elaborate urban operations, spaces, and times that do not aim for a final disposition, that are anchored in multiple sovereignties, fiscal calculations – *logistical ‘cities’* capable of becoming *everything for everyone* even if only a few benefit. Here any definitive function, assessment of viability is continuously deferred – in a continuous conversion of value regardless of whether a currency is known or not.

The urban has entailed the long histories of give and take, of struggling against dispossession of land and liveliness, of engaging the various purveyors and conditionalities of seemingly interminable colonialities. The subjugated have always sought to tactically seize the opportunities accorded to them, to re(de)fine themselves and create habitable spaces.

But besides these practices, there was something else at work all along: Something else that was *them* in an aggregate without precedent or discernible form, to which ultimate responsibility is accorded, but without the discursive tools to describe exactly how that responsibility was materialized. Something that does not evidence a people closer or more distant from specific goals or objectives. It is something that does not arrive but not in the sense of falling short, bypassing or exceeding; it is not something other to itself or to others. It refuses each and every term applied.

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