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Abdullah, A., Cardoso, R., Dasgupta, S. et al. (7 more authors) (2023) Re-arranging the urban: Forms, rhythms, politics. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 48 (4). pp. 718-744. ISSN 0020-2754

<https://doi.org/10.1111/tran.12604>

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Re-arranging the urban: Forms, rhythms, politics

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Abstract

This intervention is by a collective of scholars working on various facets of urbanisation in Asia. Focusing on the notion of arrangements/re-arrangements, it seeks to extend the consideration of urban politics as a matter of surges, a provisional consolidation of intensities, inhabitants and their practices, affiliations and orientations that give rise to continuously mutating forms of sense, care, and collective action. Whereas the work and effects of institutions, with their genealogies, remits, and competencies, are to a large extent specifiable according to their operating norms and the various regulatory frameworks that govern their operations, the dispositions of arrangements – what they do, what they actually bring about – are not readily definable or clear, enacting a form of performative ambiguity. Involving workarounds, collaborations, exchanges, and agreements that exceed the familiar protocols of interaction among households, local authorities, markets, civil institutions, brokers, and service providers, arrangements entail the enactment of caring, provisioning, regulating, mapping, and steering as the purview of more provisional, incessantly mutating forms that fold in bits and pieces of discernible institutions. In this heuristic intervention we seek to further the ‘urbanisation’ of urban geography itself, in the sense of complexifying both the terrain and the methodological practices brought to bear. It attempts to open a way of speaking about urbanisation processes that exceed binary formulations, countervailing scales, or structural absences to encompass a broader range of processes at work in shaping dispositions that are materialised or simply potentiated. It proceeds from a process of collective composition whose objective is to diversify the working tools of urban analysis rather than simply offering new conceptual formulations.

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KEYWORDS

arrangements, Asian urbanisation, urban geography

1 | INTRODUCTION

During the height of the recent pandemic, the terms of survival were often thrown into question. In Mumbai, for example, accessing cylinders of oxygen became an intricate puzzle forcing residents to re-arrange their notions of how different geographies of the city and its various terrains and landscapes were connected to each other. For no matter how much social capital one might have accrued over the years, no matter one's institutional standing or past relative privilege in accessing specific affordances, all of this was thrown into question in terms of getting one's hands on those cylinders. What seemingly appeared now as a matter of chance, of hundreds of WhatsApp messages desperately exchanged back and forth reporting on the siting of cylinders across increasingly obscure locations, on closer scrutiny assumed a logic of its own – a logic based on the circumvention of conventional supply chains and those histories of exchange that focused on 'strange' barterers and disparate favours. The 'sensible' arrangements of what kinds of goods and services were expected to go together were therefore upended through what might be construed as irrational circulations, where bales of discounted jeans traded in the hallways of a community health clinic might have been exchanged for pilfered medical equipment that ended up in some back room of a market stall. These are arrangements that perhaps only come to light in a time of vast 're-arrangement', when the protocols and practices of making do face new contingencies and demands.

This 'themed intervention' is an extended meditation on these notions of re-arrangement. Urban processes sometimes entail a vast substrate of proximities, transactions, and alliances that on the surface seem feeble and ineffective – perhaps because they do not show signs of going together, or due to appearing simply exceptional or transgressive. Yet, in the frictions of everyday contact, in the need for urban life to make space for all kinds of heterogeneous and sometimes disparate activities, objects, actors, and experiences will touch each other, affect each other in unanticipated ways – ways that precipitate new apertures onto the otherwise occluded relationalities of the city; ways that work around obdurate, power-laden procedures; ways of inventing access to experiences and resources that carry with them specific statuses. What then follows is a series of forays into different operations of re-arrangements.

Composed by a collective of primarily junior scholars, all of whom are institutionally and/or academically connected to different Asian contexts, this 'themed intervention' is the purposefully transactional outcome of a collaborative effort to think through the various shapes and dynamics of re-arrangements. The intention has been to pose some provisional conceptualisations that are messy, overlapping, intersecting, and in doing so hopefully generate a fertile ground for breeding newer orientations in the reader's mind. In that sense, it is not our intent to tie re-arrangements down to a particular form, process, or history. Although we offer a range of different illustrative vignettes, our goal is less to develop an empirical field than to explore an inventive language – a kind of poetics of urban operations that is not anchored or weighed down by the dominant economic and governance discourses. The aim is therefore to explore how the urban is always in some sense experimental, as some kind of collective tinkering that tries not to mess everything up yet still retains the potential of 'messing around', extending the resourcefulness of urban lives to its different components in different ways.

1.1 | Of Asia and our method

The past two decades have witnessed an emphasis on inter-referencing within scholarship on Asia. A mobilisation of 'Asia as method' seeks to establish platforms of collaborative knowledge production where diverse Asian contexts and problematics turn to each other for reference, support, and new ways of being in the world (Chen, 2010; Morita, 2017). The challenge raised is to consider such epistemological interdependencies, drawing on different instantiations of Asian thought and practice, as ways of generating social transformation and collective resistance (Goh, 2019). This can be materialised through circulatory histories and concrete exchanges among people and places (Duara, 2021), which then undergird more abstract mutual borrowings in terms of, for example, the development of urban built environments (Ong & Roy, 2011). Writing collectively, the authors of this 'themed intervention' seek to extend these notions in thinking through urban fields most recently altered by pandemic conditions. Here, 'Asia' does not constitute a fixed geographical terrain but extends across various territories, rendering traditionally non-Asian contexts substantially 'Asian' with respect to the processes of economic exchange and social encounter that underpin them (Appadurai, 2000; Roy, 2009a, 2009b).

What this means concretely is that a group of Asia-affiliated scholars have turned to each other as a way of opening up their thinking and engagements with specific sites of research, some of which are not 'Asian' per se. Just as common references to the 'Asian century' were deployed across the Global South, and just as a great deal of what passes for the South today is being folded into the economic and security orbits of Asia, what is important to our concerns is how to think of this oscillating relay between Asia and the world, of how the singularities of specific Asian urban contexts are substantiated or even qualified through the vast heterogeneity of its global relations. This collective thus came together to think through a method of grappling with urban change using the same methodological impetus that informed the notion of 'Asia as method', i.e., as a collaborative process – a method that could attend to the fact that the urban itself is a product of multiple collaborations that constantly affect each other, adapt, reshape, and calibrate forces of different valence and scope. Such a conceptualisation essentially means that it is possible to talk about 'Asia' as including geographies that are not strictly Asian and Asia-based scholars can venture further afield than the usual geographical parameters to think about issues and dynamics that might be specifically related to those parameters. Thus 'Asia' in such an instance does not necessarily need to be restricted to particular geography, even though most of our national identities can be construed as Asian or Asia is the site of our institutional affiliations. While acknowledging the existence of regional specificities (in terms of capital formation, resource flows, or urban governance), our 'Asia' mostly stems from an aspiration to further explore the openings that 'Asian scholars' have made available to us in terms of a spirit of regional knowledge production.

We are, therefore, 12 scholars primarily based in urban Asia who have turned to each other to garner new perspectives on our work and research contexts, as these seem to be fragmenting, with components and spaces veering off into new articulations across distances and different cities. As conditions and structures of urban space simultaneously appear more common and more divergent, the question of how to operationally reconcile such contradictions becomes a crucial one. We found our way into this conundrum by approaching urban life as a series of constantly shifting arrangements. In our 'Asia', an unbroken re-arranging of the urban steadily and recurrently congeals disparate rhythms, forms, and politics of urbanisation, which then continually gains new intelligible, differentiated, and ever-fleeting dimensions. For instance, the coherence of the city has long relied on a particular way of seeing, representing, and positioning. This entails the uniformity of constituent elements: orthogonal, equidistant units of analysis that presuppose a rational 'interior', such as when individuals maximise their self-interest so long as there is no disruption in the balancing of individual interests, rights, and functions 'proper to them'. As such, a geometry of power is expressed in the very material and calculable form of the city (Martin, 2016), a power that is further shaped by flows of capital and ensuing fast rates of urban growth within the region (Shatkin, 2017).

Yet in the spirit of Asia as method, such a geometry in urban Asia sits uneasily with competing narratives that do not separate individuals from the varying social constellations in which they are – by opportunistic choice or by precarious compulsion – inextricably embedded. We therefore found the need to collectively grapple with these constellations not as fixed cultural constructs but as overlapping registers of belonging and authority that are less reliant on strict demarcations than they are on the unceasing coordination of a cacophony of claims, passions, and livelihoods (Evers & Korff, 2000; Perera & Tang, 2012). It is to the elements of such coordination and the re-arrangements of our 'themed intervention' that we now turn.

1.2 | Re-arrangements and their convocation

In this extraordinary time of a post-pandemic, a period of constant adjustments, many aspects of urban 'operating' systems are being re-arranged. The arrangements being altered entail an entire substrate of firmly transitional and incessantly mutating constellations of effort, provisioning, care, and regulation. While family, school, or the panoply of welfare systems and neighbourhood associations that might comprise the city – i.e., the institutions that are usually recognised as sites of social reproduction – may in separate moments retain their basic shape and functioning, they do so with an always different arrangement of compositions, external relations, and divisions of labour. Alongside easily recognisable social forms and institutions of care there are many accommodations, resources, and actors that are 'stitched' together, working in concert without a clearly discernible form or framework. These are systems which operate in tandem, and sometimes in conjunction, with more conventionally organised social and political institutions (Keil, 2022; Neuman et al., 2021).

Let us take the emergence of notions of re-wilding across various ways of life in Bangkok (Jensen & Sangkhamanee, 2022). From the 'curation' of new forest lands within the urban core, the proliferation of a plurality of horizontal democratic movements, the subterfuges of intensely exploitative labour markets across Chinese-dominated

industrial plants along the Eastern seaboard, to 'pop-up' settlements on precarious landscapes, a range of experimental practices are being deployed to grapple with conditions whose futures are difficult to envision. The term re-wilding is used to forge provisional connections among disparate practices, often with different sensibilities and aspirations, but without subjecting them to any common referent. Rather, the implicit objective is to find ways to allow such heterogeneities to co-exist, offer potential affordances to each other without employing specific measures of value or efficacy, without enforcing a sense of responsibility that each must demonstrate to each other. Rather what ensues is a kind of profligate unsettling in anticipation of a rearranging of the rationales and institutions that inform the spatial planning of the city.

Arrangements make up a kind of 'biome' of caring and reproductive operations that runs underneath the discernible infrastructures of urban life – efforts that are often not detectable unless they are being re-arranged (Coutard & Florentin, 2022; McFarlane, 2016; Perrotti, 2022). While arrangements might be understood as compensatory and adaptive, they are also at times heuristic. Rather than the corollary of deliberate actions, these are operations that offer hypothetical propositions for how things might take place or indeed might already be taking place (Lury, 2021).

Whereas the work and effects of institutions, with their genealogies, remits, and competencies, are to a large extent specifiable according to their operating norms and the various regulatory frameworks that govern their operations, the dispositions of arrangements – what they do and what they actually bring about – are not necessarily readily definable or clear. Rather, they enact a form of performative ambiguity. They involve workarounds, collaborations, exchanges, and agreements that exceed the familiar protocols of interaction among households, local authorities, markets, civil institutions, brokers, and service providers. As such, arrangements entail the acts of caring, provisioning, regulating, mapping, and steering as the purview of more provisional, incessantly mutating forms that often fold in bits and pieces of discernible institutions (Esposito & Chiodelli, 2020; Lindell, 2008; Recio, 2020). At the same time, arrangements might also entail the orchestration of deliberately malicious acts – such as the withholding of information or resources, selective/restrictive access, and the imposition of parochial agendas. Arrangements might assume the faint figuration of a stable entity, whose definitional boundaries stretch and contract to such an extent that it becomes difficult to discern exactly what is in or out. Arrangements are also propositional, not in terms of the advocacy of a specific scenario or resolution, but as an opening up, a disruption of the available analytical vernaculars, and a figuration of sense and action whose time is only arriving now (Chiappone-Piriou, 2020; Chuang, 2020).

This is also why arrangements exist on the cusp of re-arrangements. In other words, their specific shapes and operations assume particular forms and conventions that enable and prepare them for a wide range of shapeshifting adjustments, which is to say that they instantiate a mode of temporariness and recurrence as a default position. This is a situation where not only do they respond to present conditions and anticipate future ones, but where they already 'know' that the complexion of everyday life, no matter how habitual and ensconced in predictable rituals of management, is altered through its repetition – a point well-rehearsed by Deleuze (1994) and Robinson (2022). Here, the volatility of urban conditions requires both the sedimentation of learned responses, durable ties, and practices, and readily mutable, mobile consolidations of alliances and collective problem-solving. As such, re-arrangements are not only a matter of spatial form but of time as well. They comprise a process of living through and with conditions that simultaneously prolong and alter themselves – a polyrhythmic response system where the protocols of living can both be enduringly the same and incessantly different.

The notion of urban re-arrangements we are working with was first developed, at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, during a series of monthly discussions organised by the Urban Institute at the University of Sheffield. Involving about 35 urban researchers from the Institute's partners and affiliate urban labs around the world, these free-wheeling discussions – known as the Convocation – gave participants an opportunity for reporting on their respective cities and sharing anything that was on their minds. Given the salience of what was discussed, the Urban Institute embarked on an initiative to assimilate and further think about the idea of re-arrangements.

What was raised in these convocations, particularly from Asian colleagues, was a concern that the predominant ways of reading the entities of the urban – its compositional elements – did not quite get to what was taking place in face of the marked upheavals of the pandemic. Seemingly contradictory things were happening with greater intensity. Family ties were being solidified and falling apart, often within the same households. Inhabitants were desperately holding on to their patch of territory as they were also dispersing across multiple patches. Social networks that had never been noticed before became visible across vastly divergent districts with seemingly nothing in common. The accessible frameworks of social analysis, which accounted for access to resources and affordances in terms of class and social power, increasingly lost explanatory power in terms of who could get hold of much needed oxygen masks, hospital beds, and valuable information. It wasn't so much that the conventional social arrangements were structurally falling apart as much as what was being made increasingly visible were other planes of operation – ways of gathering up materials, resources,

and bodies into collective entities that were hard to define or assign some history to, but which the Convocation participants felt were marking differences among contexts that on every other usual social category seemed to be very much alike. The re-arrangements were neither good nor bad. There were times when observers could construe either good or bad within them, but these moral dimensions often seemed hopelessly entangled.

1.3 | A re-arranged intervention

Assembled in the aftermath of the Convocation, a group of dedicated junior scholars institutionally and/or academically connected to different Asian contexts came together to grapple with those other planes of operation. Starting in 2021, in a series of regular discussions and online collaborations facilitated by the pragmatics of time zones, what came to be known as the Re-Arrangements Asia Collective (hereafter referred to as the Collective) began to analyse and speculate on the range of spatial and temporal processes entailed in urban re-arrangements. This led to the creation of several working groups in order to facilitate a process of collective writing and a subsequent suite of texts resonating the work and interests of the participants was developed. This text and its three associated pieces should therefore be seen as a re-arranged intervention into the ideas that had been first developed by the Convocation as well as the Collective's contribution towards the furtherance of both the terrain and the methodological practices of urban geography itself.

In seeking to mobilise 'Asia as method' (see above), the Collective has specifically attempted to come to grips with the multiple trajectories of urban transformation across and beyond diverse Asian contexts. These are places and processes which converge on a range of global shifts in modes and logics of accumulation, provisioning, and governance, but also often diverge in terms of distinct national development agendas, spatial strategies, and the curation of specific capacities for (and control of) urbanising populations. The objective, however, has never been to develop any form of unitary or all-encompassing lexicon to deal with those places and processes. Rather than producing knowledge as information, which then has the effect of reducing the capacities of all localities, turning them into 'points' (identities) along the same line, our work has been prompted by the need to find various ways to suture together the experiences of care, intimacy, and social reproduction in new arrangements of adjacency. This after all, was the spirit of 'Asia as method', i.e., not taking territorial contiguity as the primary basis of regional relatedness, but rather to find forms of 'neighbourhood' in the ways in which actual exchanges did and could take place. Arrangements that parallel the ways in which urban lives seem increasingly extended across different registers of livelihood, emplacement, and reference, while being simultaneously fragmented and parsed in place. Most importantly, the members of the Collective have tried to come up with a language for reaching each other, for finding connections among each other's work, for sharing multiple narratives, and for unpacking conundrums that go beyond the reference to sectors, crises, or established institutions.

One year into the pandemic, all of us were trying to make sense of things, witnessing among our interlocutors a progressive unravelling of once valued social collaborations, an impulsive rush to jump into new opportunistic forms of accumulation and social networking, as well as strong feelings of resistance to being pushed around. Worn-out by the circumstances, we all found it difficult to assess what was taking place. Many of our increasingly footloose interlocutors were entering into very varied constellations of group effort, which often dissipated as soon as responsibilities were assigned. Others were retreating into reified forms of religious and political identification capable of generating great passions, which frequently also made them complicit with the powers they were fighting against. Regardless of its efficacy or judiciousness, however, there was always something happening. But just exactly what was taking place was often confounding, and so many of our conversations were grappling with ways to find commonalities among very different situations and actors.

Faced with often countervailing imperatives and demands from a citizenry increasingly fragmented in terms of aspiration and notions of efficacy, it seemed to us that the politics of composing urban space and temporality were being extended into a series of wavelike propulsions of force which cut across various functionalities and territories of operation for residents – an interstitial and shifting domain of surges cutting across normative categories and institutional forms. The intellectual agenda of the Collective is thus to give voice to these surges as an energetic, relational, and provisional deployment of intensities that unsettle and reorient 'customary' arrangements among inhabitants, their livelihoods, affiliations, ethos, and modes of belonging. Instead of 'case studies', our method has been to take 'slices' of situations and empirics to generate montages as modalities for imaging the adjacencies of discordant, contradictory elements. This is after all how Chen (2010) envisioned 'Asia' was put together.

The Collective has thus considered various forays into these surges of re-arranging. As there is no iterative, step-by-step map that progressively traces the structuring of effects from one scale to another – something which has been established

for some time now by Brenner (2000) – we aspire to identify more imaginative scales of reciprocal shaping. In the spirit of ‘Asia as method’, we ask ourselves how localities from all over the place might affect each other as an instance of locality, rather than some overarching structure. Thus, the ensemble of papers in this ‘themed intervention’ represents our collective effort to further develop the idea of urban re-arrangements along three interrelated dimensions:

- A. (IM)PERMANENCES. The urban is underpinned by intense temporalities. What might appear as durable holds for life, livelihood, and politics might indeed constitute only provisional and temporally precarious forms of inhabiting. Such holds are ever subjected to myriad forms of material and temporal duress, as ‘a dwelling process that continually reshapes the ways in which people, materials, ideas and resources come together’ (Simone, 2010, p. 5). The temporally bracketed manifestations of such holds belie their more complex, arrhythmic, unpredictable, and unchartable nature: they are pieced together only to be dismantled and re-arranged, in endless reiterations. These temporally pulsating holds are also subject to intense relations of power, through grounded but contingent relationalities and negotiations between actors, beyond simplistic dichotomies.
- B. (TRANS)CONFIGURATIONS. Comprising fluid modes of transmutation that draw in an ever-evolving range of materials, institutions, and social practices, urban re-arrangements emerge in everyday life as patterns in the making that go beyond (hence, trans) capitalist consolidation, that are (trans)global-and-local, and are shifting in their making in terms of both scale and time (trans-scalar, trans-temporal). One could describe these patterns-and-pattern-making as (trans)configurations. So as to focus on the commonality of this unassumed character of inbetweenness, of transgressions from categories easily imposed from outside, to generate a vernacular of what we mean as (trans)configurations, we dive into our empirical slices from Dhaka, Luanda, and Mumbai to articulate three inter-weaving aspects of the conditions of (trans)configuration. They are structured by iterative conveyances that transcend modes and forms of consolidation (of matter, settlement, capital, desire); they are composed through transmissions that constantly overstep the substance of a particular goal (always exceeding the ‘original’ intention); and they are carried out by means of extensions that spill over from the processes of urban settlement. In other words, rather than seeing processes as air-tight, fully-fledged, well-oiled machines, (trans)configurations allow us to see the excesses, the extras, and the excuses that are contained in the very processes to do things more than what was intended, to never settle, to never consolidate with the primacy of the aspects which allow easy generalisation and categorisation.
- C. (RE)ENACTMENTS. Arrangements are performed, enacted. As such, how are spaces for negotiation put together? How do different socialities become constitutive of politics? This piece is about how surveillance, regulation, and archiving operate through speech and actions by those not in positions of power. Migrants live across the gaps left between nations, between rural and the urban, between skills and jobs. Urban residents grapple with material transformations occurring largely beyond their control. These gaps are sutured through both individual and collective efforts, by striking new kinds of negotiations, new effects, and new discourses about themselves and others. Such re-conceptualisations and the collating together of disparate pieces of information create new norms, sometimes in the absence and sometimes over and beyond the state. This in turn leads to acts of compliance as well as defiance. Suturing gaps often does not lead to lasting holds. Together, such patchworks of familiar refrains, improvised compensations, fragmented authority, and partial, fluctuating modes of information re-enact varied acts of urban belonging.

Our Re-Arrangements Asia Collective began with a few fundamental questions. If re-arrangements are simultaneously ameliorative, reparative, elusive, propositional, and even, at times, malicious, what is it that they propose? What kinds of work do they do? What kinds of dilemmas, scenes, or problematics do they address? Each of the essays in this ‘themed intervention’ develops particular answers to these and other questions. In the remainder of this introduction, we describe some of the literature that has been important to our work, tell a few illustrative small stories to amplify the salience of re-arrangements, and present some of the issues, quandaries, and possibilities we reflected on in our various discussions.

2 | FROM SALIENT LITERATURES

This ‘themed intervention’ proceeds from a process of collective composition whose objective has been to extend the working tools of urban analysis rather than simply offering new conceptual formulations. In that sense, we are attempting both to actualise the experience of the conjunctural in terms of our working relations, and also to deploy this sense of the conjunctural as a way of thinking about our respective fields (Saym et al., 2022). For instance, we have used this opportunity as a means of opening up further explorations among work largely done in media studies and the

philosophy of technics. For the most part, rather than fighting against specific formulations in urban studies, we have tried to see what an expanded palette of considerations from a select number of other fields might bring to the table. As such, we have been less concerned with coming up with something ‘new’ than we have been with highlighting the dilemmas and experiments of a group of scholars sensing profound changes in their fields of inquiry. As we grappled together with a way of talking about these changes, we kept coming back to four particularly salient bodies of literature.

2.1 | Urban assemblages

Our collective efforts owe a major debt to the work of Deleuzian geography, particularly to the ways its proponents have staged new conceptual openings, unique points of contestation, as well as unfamiliar modes of intersection among politics, media, economy, ethics, and ecology (Cockayne et al., 2017; Dewsbury, 2011; Doel & Clarke, 2007; Roberts & Dewsbury, 2021; Woodward & Jones III, 2005). The various strands of assemblage theory have opened up multiple possibilities of speaking about urbanisation processes in ways that exceed binary formulations and their structural absences. Social assemblages encompass a much broader range of processes at work in shaping dispositions that are sometimes materialised and in others simply potentiated (DeLanda, 2016; Dovey et al., 2018; Farias, 2011; McFarlane, 2011a, 2011b; Robbins & Marks, 2010). Our intervention attempts to take the work on urban assemblages further. Specifically, we seek to emphasise an expanded range of co-engineering where diverse entities not only mutually reshape the figurations of urban space but also simultaneously enact urbanisation from a plurality of perspectives. In other words, we are interested in the ways in which different kinds of human, non-human, and material entities – and here, most particularly, different slices of urban life – might be said to apprehend each other. Each perspective continuously repositions the character and function of components such as land, labour, and material resources in terms of the other, sometimes unsettling reified hierarchies or, at least, signally the constant, simultaneous existence of different forms of valuation, use, and transaction (Savransky, 2021; Viveiros de Castro, 2019).

2.2 | Fragments of the city

Our conversations also kept coming back to the extensive body of work around the ways in which urban life is composed of a series of fragments and partialities – entities and practices that never quite cohere into a system or a concerted set of operations but which nevertheless carry an affective charge while also registering heuristic propositions about what could or even might be taking place (Keil, 2018; King, 2008; McFarlane, 2016, 2021; Simone, 2022). This is related to a focus on the tacit, perhaps opaque dimensions of inhabitation – those seemingly coordinated movements that bring to life relatively ephemeral collectives and the claims of legitimacy they might end up making (Benjamin, 2008; Lombard, 2014; Simcik, 2018) – as well as arguments for a sense of epistemological pluriversality when it comes to urban knowledge production (Buckley & Strauss, 2016; Bunnell & Maringanti, 2010; Roy, 2009a, 2009b; Ruddick et al., 2018). From our collective perspective, as we tried to make sense of urban re-arrangements, the focus on the simultaneous existence of multiple logics of structuration allowed us to bring out the more affective dimensions of urban life, its variegated surges and intensities, and the ways often inexplicable passions gather up things in collective formation that do not represent discernible social or political categories.

2.3 | Urban collective life

The third body of literature that has inspired us encompasses wide-ranging considerations around the changing forms of urban collective life. Focusing on modes of concerted, coordinated action among urban inhabitants that extend beyond normative categorisations of household, community, social network, and institution, this is a body of work that helps explain various aspects of collective life: from tacit modes of organisation that are no less concrete than more normative ones and may in fact enrol those in mutually shaping ways (Bayat, 2013; Brighenti, 2016; Caldeira, 2017; Simone, 2014; Stavrides, 2019) to the formation of informal and popular economies that sustain the lives of the most dispossessed urban dwellers (Bandyopadhyay, 2016; Gago, 2018; Gaiger, 2019; Lemaître et al., 2016; Roy, 2005). The many insights of this literature have helped us in understanding the constitution of social life around the built environment, often in social and urban assemblages (see above); they have also aided us in explaining the different forms of association that shape social

consolidation in urban areas (Maloney et al., 2001; Meagher, 2010; Sabet, 2008) or the ways in which various materials and actors continuously remake each other in varying forms of complicity, autonomy, entanglement, and detachment (Bear, 2014; Berlant, 2016; Brancaccio & Vercellone, 2019; Ebrey, 2016; Jensen, 2015; Knox, 2017; Moten, 2018a, 2018b; Ramakrishnan, 2014).

In fact, the wealth of knowledge provided by this body of work is immense. We know well that the possibilities of collective life are greatly impacted by enduring poverty and social exclusion (Bremen, 2010; Brickell, 2014; Das & Randeria, 2015; Parikh et al., 2015), but we also know that organised forms of collective life, which are aimed at promoting greater social inclusion, do not necessarily produce improved livelihoods (Allen et al., 2006; Bakker, 2003; Cesafsky, 2017; Jaglin, 2015; Mahali et al., 2018). For the truth is that maximising social capacity often entails residents generating their own forms of value and endurance (Chari, 2013; Doshi & Ranganathan, 2017; Gandolfo, 2018; Harms, 2013), something which is partially done through generating new imaginaries and instruments of belonging, particularly for populations spending large amounts of time in motion (Clare et al., 2018; Escobar, 2008; Locatelli & Nugent, 2009; Roy, 2015). So, in grappling together with urban re-arrangement, we have built on all this knowledge to emphasise the ways in which collective life is always in the making, responding to new conditions, generating new imaginaries, and intersecting with enduring forms of the social, reworking old forms, and assuming different degrees of stability and constant mutation.

2.4 | Technicities of urban life

Last, but certainly not least, we have been greatly inspired by contributions from media philosophy and cultural studies that open up our understanding of the technical as a means of composing things, whether they are specific entities, functions, or territories. A conventional way of understanding the urban technical is as technological operations that structure the material, spatial, and temporal dimensions of urban life. The way the urban technical – and what it means for everyday life – has usually been informed by Western models of inhabitation: as technical instruments of decision-making and regulatory mechanisms that enable particular forms of statecraft that are not universal or generalisable – for instance, cartography, surveys, spreadsheets, strategic plans, biopolitics, administrative protocols, smart operationalisation.

Yet the technical is more than this, and here the work of Bernard Stiegler (1998, 2009, 2010) and Hui (2020) is particularly generative in terms of the process of re-arrangement. The technical mediates everyday life: what is recorded, what is made visible, how we communicate and move around, what we see and hear, and the air we breathe. Whatever takes place in everyday life and in territorial operations relies on distinct forms of technical mediation, all of which filter, transmit, and generate data and information in ways that are neither neutral nor transparent. This is not just about plans and tools, written down or improvised. How we live in cities is impacted as much by invisible infrastructures and operations as well-understood technologies. Away from a narrow focus on technology, a concern with the technical or the varied technicities of urban life means opening up imaginaries, and draws attention to the way in which things come together in a process of energetic transmission and as a means of configuring a plurality of scales of action (Hayles, 2021).

A broadened focus on urban technicity shifts focus not only to control and the calculative operations at work in planning practices and mechanisms of urban provisioning, but also to subtle forms of refusal, resistance, and possibility. Not only navigating, selling, transacting, fixing, redoing, chatting, transporting, buying, watching, avoiding, greeting, driving, gathering, dispersing, repurposing – all these technical operations of everyday life – but also for many re-arrangements for which there is not yet a clear language of description.

Here, Luciana Parisi (2021) states that the techniques for interacting the abstract materialisations of signals, syntax – the building blocks of calculation – can posit unanticipated and indecipherable meanings and propositions that suggest a completely different way of being in the world. Whereas the former characteristics of the urban, replete with the symbolic mixtures applied to different kinds of bodies and physical and social arrangements took on the status of real and natural existences, their stabilisation demanded something that simultaneously exemplified both a natural state of abjection and a domain of existence beyond anything that could be subsumed under the clear lines of demarcation between ‘man’ (human) and the world.

3 | TO THE SALIENCE OF RE-ARRANGEMENTS

The COVID-19 pandemic amplified the biopolitics of the urban. With legitimated control on the basis of securing the prolongation of life, state and urban authorities have shattered the social body in terms of enhancing the freedom of the

individual to pursue that which maximises its value and endurance (Lorenzi, 2021). But none of this really mitigated the enduring fragility of life. A life whose every impetus towards coherence or integral form is interrupted by the very artifice that is relied on in order to engineer such coherence.

Emerging out of the pandemic context, our preoccupation with arrangements then seems consonant to life as conceived as something all over the place, constantly vulnerable to forces and interruptions beyond its control, and where every endeavour to attain a measure of control relies on 'artificial means' that simultaneously defer entropy but open up new exposures to unanticipated conditions of vulnerability. Life is by 'nature' then always bordering on its dissipation; that the enactment of liveliness seeks less to prolong itself than to express itself, and the expression is always a risk, a potential transgression of the very conditions of its possible prolongation (Colebrook, 2019; Povinelli, 2016; Thacker, 2010). In such a formulation of life, the necropolitical diminishes as a form of power, as life is indifferent to its repetition. Or rather, the repetition can result in something unrecognisable, something beyond inhabitation, yet occupiable nevertheless. It is this terrain, this notion of liveliness that drives our concerns and writing on re-arrangements. Even as re-arrangements are not definitively virtuous or generative, this is the risk we take.

So how to open up such liveliness? Here, we see re-arrangements as operative across and within the intersecting realms of space, time, and power. This is to say that their efficacy is expressed within and as a matter of forms, rhythm, and politics. When we talk about (im)permanences, (trans)configurations, and re(enactments), as we do in the pieces associated with this paper, these are particular instances of the process of re-arranging operations within these three domains. Before we examine these operations further, a few quick words then about the domains themselves.

3.1 | Forms

Arrangements open some things up and fasten others down. Existing as they do on the cusp of re-arrangements, they also instantiate ways of living amid dehiscence, among things that cannot be healed or stitched together. Many Black scholars have written about this gap, about how blackness came into the world to register an essential gap within human life, and about how then blackness is a condition that can never be 'healed' or become the locus of 'reparation', but which at the same time exceeds the terms of the human boundaries it was constituted to mark (Jackson, 2020; Moten, 2018a, 2018b).

Even with the contemporary emphasis on valuing repair (Mbembe, 2021), things sometimes simply break. Urban environments are replete with things that can be useful time and time again no matter how long they have been around, and there are other things that can simply fall apart almost immediately. In most instances there are plausible explanations for both, but not always. Here arrangements are not interested in being a 'new order', nor a rectification of the calculus of injustice. They propose forms of liveliness that seem disinterested in – or indifferent to – sustainability. In fact, such forms might deliberately be brought about only as temporally bracketed entities, with foreknowledge of their eventual dismantling. A part of that proposition is the elaboration of strange alliances – forms of constructed kinships (Haraway, 2016), all of those things that do not seem to go together and, at the same time, kick down the doors that divide 'separate rooms'. This is why they often seem to have the character of some kind of 'biome' – a substrate of feral liveliness underneath the pavements.

3.2 | Rhythms

Given the transitory grounds through which re-arrangements operate, the liveliness of the urban, as we indicated before, does not rest with its disciplinary apparatuses or statutory provisioning. Rather, it revolves around its inoperativity. In other words, the liveliness of the urban rests on the details of technical operations (including scripts, rehearsals, cues, role plays, deceptions, absences, gestures, movements, extensions, and transactions of varying rhythms and mediums) that do not constitute labour or produce anything specific, or more precisely, of a specific use. All of these 'technicities' are less representative of self-projects than an apportioning of selves and bodies to and with each other in ways beyond the calculation of proportionate value. This apportioning is something specific, not readily translatable. It is not an archive of cumulative meaning or best practices. Just as Chen (2010) emphasised in his original conceptualisation, Asia was not a matter of figuring out how much any particular culture or nationality contributed to a regional identity, but rather the ways in which thinking about such regionalisation opened up the possibility of all kinds of reciprocal shaping that resisted being measured in specific ways.

Again, this is what our collective was grappling with. All of the ways in which our interlocutors in the field continuously were able to change course, not always for the best. Their seemingly implicit recognition that what was right next

to them, immediately available, and which often offered both solace and material support, just did not feel sufficiently right for them. That it sometimes came at high, unexpected costs or was too familiar and thus did not pose a challenge to them. They often expressed that there was something 'out there', just over the hill, in another part of town, that was 'waiting' for them.

3.3 | Politics

So, in the mundane contexts we are interested in exploring, any care-full emplacement is less about 'collective organising' – albeit it can reach that point – and more about what Tina Campt (2019) refers to as the affective work of adjacency, i.e., the making of relations in spite of and because of the differences of experiences and power, as well distances among geographies. Here, again, is the persistence of local experimentation, the experiences of affective proximity and intimacy across distance. The migrant enclave in Singapore, for example, may be a site of intense state surveillance. But the form of the enclave is also reproduced through the re-enactments of implicit civilities and explicit regulations by migrants themselves. In so doing, they reproduce the form of the enclave through aligning themselves with legitimate uses of space while being subjected to the same powers themselves. But these are localities that have to be composed rather than inherent in the consolidation of a physically demarcated neighbourhood (Appadurai, 2003; Brickell & Datta, 2016). 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 adjacency means confronting and addressing the divergences, the extensiveness of unacknowledged suffering, and reworking the possibilities of proximity. For there is always 'something else besides' what we know.

This is always the challenge for researchers battling the conceit of 'finding out for sure' or offering various gestures of solidarity with their interlocutors and fields. What kinds of vernaculars then are useful in demonstrating respect, both for what our interlocutors are up against and their own intensive wranglings and experiments to go beyond the grain, but not too far that it leaves them hanging? While we certainly do not pretend to have found the answer, many of our deliberations were concerned with coming up with ways of speaking that covered the angles, demonstrating at least some understanding of the different hedges people make on a daily basis.

Configuring such landscapes of touching is difficult work both in the way it operates and reflected through readings of our work. Resulting from a collective exploration of the openings and foreclosures, our work aims to open up space for thinking along these extended landscapes. As Campt points out, the haptic is 'an effortful practice of exertion and a very particular form of struggle: to remain in relation to or in contact or connection with another. It is the labour of love required to feel across difference, precarity, and suffering. Hapticity is not empathy; it is not 'feeling for' another. It is the work of feeling precarious or feeling precarity in relation to differentially valued and devalued bodies in the absence of any guarantee of respite, respect, or recognition' (Campt, 2019, p. 43).

4 | WHAT COMES NEXT

So, re-arrangements entail a modality of living simultaneously with gaps that cannot be closed and holds that cannot be opened – all of which, sometimes inexplicably, can both be opened and closed. Within pandemic conditions that challenge the conventional ways in which people feel a part of each other, and apart from each other, urban re-arrangements stand out as continuous experiments with bringing together and setting loose – practices of opening and closing, of exposing and insulating oneself and others according to polyrhythms and heterogeneous compositions. At all moments it is the substrate of liveliness – the 'bass line' at work – that underscores the insufficiencies to adequately protect life and, at the same time, the debilitating implications of those very same protections.

What follows then are a series of forays into different operations of re-arrangements composed by different constellations of members of the collective, and according to three emphases or orientations: (im)permanences, (trans)configurations, (re)enactments. Rather than a mutually exclusive and a 'clean' framework of distinct separations, these three operations are best seen as different provisional and propositional slices through the intensities of arrangements/re-arrangements we have encountered, and are necessarily messy, overlapping, intersecting, and hopefully a fertile ground for breeding newer orientations in the reader's mind. Rather than closing down, we mean to open up; rather than an induced 'framework', we mean to work with these three forays or operations and be implicated in the process of re-arranging the familiar notions with which we have come to represent the urban.

5 | (IM)PERMANENCES

In the peripheries of Urban Asia, seemingly indestructible entities – landscapes, institutions, routines, and discourses – are, by chance or by design, only momentary fixations in the flow of social, spatial, and temporal urban processes. These re-arranged entities represent variegated snapshots across the broader, markedly more uniform urban temporal horizon. They depict the ways in which different urbanisms coalesce and start to appear permanent. Crucially, such re-arrangements carry with them intense effects of accumulation by dispossession and they are hardly immune to their own dispossession. In thinking about the temporalities (Adam, 1990) of Asian urbanisms, we examine how the ordinary and the subaltern speak and act for themselves: tentatively, provisionally, and always cognisant of the temporal precarity of the re-arrangements they manage to orchestrate. From this view, the urban periphery is constituted by temporal uncertainty and precarity on the one hand, and hope and speculation on the other.

These everyday acts – however marginal or insignificant they appear – have the potential to remake the holds that anchor urbanism, all the while staying subject to dispossession themselves. We take the notion of '(im)permanence' to underscore how the everyday urban is essentially emotive, and is centred on uncertainty, precarity, and aspiration. We examine how hope, speculation, and negotiation frame everyday urban re-arrangements, where temporalities and materialities are constantly pulsating in arrhythmic and opportunistic ways. In such instantiations of the urban, breaks in the rhythm of temporariness destabilise the intimate entanglements of various kinds, simultaneously enabling and limiting the potentialities of how the urban unfolds.

Acknowledging the dialectics of (im)permanence, we posit that all asserted permanences in the urban are – inherently – temporally fragmented (Shirani & Henwood, 2011). They hold, yet cannot bring to any resolution, the tensions between duress and durability. This forms the underlying logic through which urban life is repeatedly exposed to new(er) contingencies: where all that is urban melts into air over time and the agencies and subjectivities of urban residents (whether embedded in local space or transplanted from elsewhere) are foregrounded. People might become infrastructure; such infrastructures might disintegrate; myriad potentials of urban socio-space might be forced into perverse uniformities, or threatened with obscurity; political (in)sensibilities might limit or even destroy such opportunities. Yet such de-potentialisations are also permanences subject to their own deconstruction. Even state institutions, however powerful or flexible they assert themselves to be, are always in the process of being reconfigured, through actors who themselves form parts of impermanent everyday relations, embroiled in processes that cannot be conceived or planned for in advance (Abram, 2014).

But (how) does this matter? In this intervention, by examining temporally bracketed re-arrangements in three sites from urban Asia – Karachi, Shenzhen, and Beijing – we propose and address three questions on the (im)permanence of urban re-arrangements. Over time: (1) how are the precarious rhythms of urban spaces produced, (2) how are urban power dynamics rearranged, and (3) how are the oscillating trajectories of migration and spatial fixity being (re)arranged in and through the urban? Our intervention is meant to tease out the temporally convoluted facets of contemporary urban practices by focusing on the intersection of spatiality, temporality, and power in the process of re-arrangements.

5.1 | Precarious rhythms of urban spaces

The urban periphery is not merely a physical space: its delineation inherently encompasses the people who need to inhabit that space, in order to stake a hold. Its (im)permanence thus constitutes a profoundly spatio-temporal dimension: it implies, but also delimits, precarious processes of dwelling through construction and inhabitation – a product of countless everyday acts of adjustment, assembly, negotiation, and improvisation (McFarlane, 2011a, 2011b, p. 656).

Incomers on the margins of Karachi who have just acquired land (whose status they acknowledge to be legally ambiguous) build rudimentary, un-plastered, load-bearing block masonry walls, and prop up an asbestos sheet. Sometimes, they extend their living space using bamboo scaffolds and light metal roofs (Figure 1). This physicality, the semblance of a permanently impermanent dwelling, is the first step into the new urban lifeworld: at times lasting a few days, at times several months, before some state machinery will come and wreck the structure. Then they have to build it back up again. These are the rhythmically erratic pulsations punctuating the temporal spectrum of their urban life: building, demolishing, scavenging, salvaging, repairing, and building again, to be demolished yet again. Here, repeated rounds of dispossession are countered with the cobbling together of provisional material-spatial holds, in never-ending attempts at chronometricalisation (Charmaz, 1997). Possessing – and dwelling in – material urban space signals permanence to these



FIGURE 1 A permanently impermanent dwelling in Karachi's periphery. Most materials used can be quickly disassembled and salvaged, such as T-girders, I-beams, concrete blocks, cement vent grilles, and bamboo poles. Credit: Author, February 2019.



FIGURE 2 Nantou Village in Shenzhen undergoing renovation. Credit: Author, 16 November 2017.

residents, but the physical, emotional, and financial labour involved in re-arranging and holding together this promise of permanence can be overwhelming.

In Shenzhen, the impermanently permanent nature of dwellings in the urban periphery appears to be held together with more stability, yet still in a precarious way. Here, farmland requisition takes on a more piecemeal approach, reflecting the pragmatism of the government to avoid the politically and financially costly process of relocating villagers. Yet the small, individual plots of land on which the villagers have built their homes and been left with are getting less useful. Former farmers take advantage of loopholes in planning prescriptions and turn themselves into property developers (Kan, 2019; Wong, 2015). They gather their own materials, expertise, and networks to build tenement buildings over their former homesteads – in ‘urban villages’, neither fully urban, nor quintessentially rural – to provide affordable housing to migrants in search of work and a better life in the city. The architecture of such buildings is often temporary, intricate, and precarious, subject to consistent and compromised works of repair and maintenance (see Figure 2). Furthermore, such holds can easily be dismantled – and by the very people who assembled them in the first place. The tenuous bonds between villager landlords and their migrants pale in comparison to the opportunity to be recruited into one-off windfall gains through land expropriation by the state. Permanence might thus be an impediment to these villagers' urban aspirations. Why do the work of managing property and tenants, and holding off the government, when one could potentially live a luxurious life elsewhere in the city or overseas?

5.2 | (Un)holding urban power dynamics

The (im)permanence of the urban is intricately linked to power, for there is a strong sense of mutuality between the state and the urban periphery. The urban periphery is left – to borrow Roy's (2011) term – ‘deregulated’ because it provides a function the state cannot – or will not – acknowledge as its own. The permanently impermanent nature of dwelling in the urban periphery suits the state: the periphery holds the supplementary space of the city while providing the opportunity for development to move forward. Those who constitute and dwell in the urban periphery move along to this rhythm of (im)permanence, sometimes with profoundly autonomous motivations, at other times merely speculating.

Such rearrangements are thus always on the cusp of provisionality and permanence; they ebb back and forth, in an arrhythmic fashion that at times opens up opportunities for governance innovation and at other times cordons off such opportunities. This paves a new way for our diagnostics of urban power.

Karachi's periphery, for instance, presents interesting political re-arrangements. It captures the impermanence of socio-political structures, of institutions and arrangements that depend inevitably on particular subjective genealogies coalescing into present contingencies: uneasy alliances, collusions, opportunism, risky ventures, calling bluffs. Here, malicious opacity reigns in the absence of hard data, maps, papers, files, and regulations. And is this not an entry point to gaze into the political dynamics of Karachi's urban arrangements, exemplified (non-exhaustively) in the provincial/local government standoffs over land, tenure, utilities, and infrastructures? Yet, in the periphery, social-political arrangements are dictated by the makers of a brave new urban: driven no doubt by ethnic disparities, but not exclusively. Money is the opium of the power-brokers and makers-shakers here; ethnic-linguistic exclusivity within arbitrarily held spatial jurisdictions no longer remains the primary concern. The structures of political re-arrangements spring from pre-urbanised societal linkages, transmuted into new hierarchies and polyrhythmic cycles of opportunistic extraction as they penetrate the urban spatio-temporal fabric. Bluffs are called, subjectivities orchestrated, and relationships of respect enforced: the village elder decides whether and how to bring in new residents to 'urbanise' the village and its surrounding commons. Such deals hinge on favours, blessings, and approvals as a filtering dynamic – not everyone can get in. These impermanent arrangements encapsulate symbiotic relationships – or more so, parasitic ones. By their very nature such arrangements of land and people start off as temporally contained. Cycles of extraction repeat predictably and seasonally to extend such temporal containment: religious festivals and donation monies, peak summer months, and water prices. These are the conditions of possibility orchestrated herein: the holds that simultaneously define, limit, and afford opportunity to those embroiled in these arrangements.

Over in China, urban villages and their inhabitants are constantly threatened by demolitions brought about under the guise of urban development, albeit simultaneously asserting a highly enduring, if precarious, spatial presence. A closer look into how those residing on the urban periphery leverage, orchestrate, and inhabit connections to loci of power when faced with physical disposessions can help us to better understand this (im)permanence. Seeing that the expropriation of land from urban villages has been increasingly costly, the municipal governments have been aspiring to move towards a more viable model of upgrading such settlements (Wong, 2015). This move has required rearranging relations between the municipality, villager-landowners, and developers aimed at maximising the rent gap. With a new pattern of distributing revenues, enabling a one-off windfall of for villagers, this orchestration of an alternative growth coalition is yet often subject to temporary suspension due to breakdown in negotiations (Teo, 2022).

In the case of Beijing, another pattern of transforming periphery emerges. In line with the municipal agenda of building the city up as a 'first-class' and 'international' city, peripheral settlements have been selectively re-arranged to better accommodate the modern and international imaginations (Zhao, 2020a). For some settlements, for instance, their proximity to IT industries or rivers render such locales ideal to construct new parks, yet at the cost of local history and social spaces (Zhao, 2020b). For some others, the agglomeration of waste recycling, small workshops, street vendors, or other informal economies – labelled by the authorities 'low-end industries' – soon invite large-scale demolitions to make them 'blank' for 'better functions' in the future (Pils, 2020). In this process of making spaces blank and/or green, peripheral spatialities are inflected by, and articulated with, various temporal imaginations of the city and the nation. With both discourses of modernity and market society, we observe how the materialities of land, the political economy of the urban, and the daily life of local and migrant residents are folded together – being taken hold of or possessed in – through certain kinds of utterances that are made with respect to the urban periphery (Zhao, 2022). In a sense, these utterances are not limited to the rationales of certain subjects only, but act as the bass lines through which different subjects are held within a single expression. They are hence performative in shaping the great urban transformation of Chinese cities in an (im) permanent way.

5.3 | The urban body on the move

Re-arrangements are also, crucially, embodied. In one of Shenzhen's urban villages, a landlord profits from a gambling den in a hole-in-the-wall unit but at the expense of the ire of her neighbours and the village committee, for allegedly encouraging certain bodies to inhabit a domestic space: space that more 'known' and thus 'desirable' bodies had inhabited, until now. Such bodies are deemed 'undesirable' by those who are already a relatively more permanent part of the neighbourhood: the village space, and the movement of bodies within it, aspires to cognitive permanence in the minds

and lives of those already part of it – newcomers are suspicious bodies, imbued with attributes of foreign vice that might destabilise the relationship of acclimatisation between extant bodies and their corresponding spatial permanences. These holds are impermanent, or anticipated as such; permanence in the urban margins is a matter of re-arranging the right bodies at the right time, while also placing bodies into a myriad of secondary impermanent networks elsewhere, should one hold ever give way and bodies are forced into new spaces.

But can bodies ever permanently inhabit two spaces at the same time? In Beijing, the *jiehebu* area (see Zhao, 2020a) became the hold for the ‘floating population’ when the city’s rural communities were not catered to within the state’s land businesses: this thriving socio-economy has subsequently shaped not only the materiality of the urban periphery but also the subjectivities of migrant bodies (Xiang, 2000; Zhang, 2001). This hold was only disabled when the municipal vision of urban peripheries was articulated with its concern about land revenues. Here, migrant bodies and local residents become exposed to a new, official way of urban life (Shin & Zhao, 2018), which they have neither control over nor full understanding of. Constricted spatially and temporally within new holds that embroil them in a multifaceted intersection of vulnerability and opportunity, these migrant bodies have to appeal to their ‘hometown’ (老家, *laojia*). Instead of investing their futurity into the ever-shifting urban frontiers, they prefer to save and invest in places where they are originally from – with the expectation of going back and living a better life later. The condition of being unheld at present is hence translated into the conduct of holding investment at afar for the future. Here we identify a virtual permanence in motion. The rhythm of urban governance and that of migrants’ urban experiences are juxtaposed and mutually shaped and we have to interrogate the potential closure of exposure (and vice versa) that transforms the spatio-temporality of both hold (possession) and dispossession.

In contrast, in the pulsating cycles of state-led demolition and reconstruction in Karachi’s peripheries, and also its core, newcomers, migrants, and settlers all aspire to permanence within temporally provisional pieces of land they have acquired through financial and social tactics. For these temporally malleable bodies (Haanstad, 2009), permanence means durability: a robust house, plastered, gridded, sealed, painted, connected to the grids. Permanence also means stability and predictability: that the house one leaves for work in the morning welcomes them back at night; that one would not encounter new devices of procedural extraction, through indirect coercion or blatant extortion, to keep the house that way; that by successfully acquiring formal, billed utility connections, a layer of permanence is added to the plot and the address, which can then transform into any physical durability one aspires to.

5.4 | Coda

In the Asian urban periphery, the house, the home, and the household remain, cognitively and materially, forever alert to their own provisionality and dispensability: from the moment of their hopeful, effervescent invocation, to their evanescent banishment, and their opportunistic reincarnation. Yet, across these re-arrangements, impermanence itself becomes permanent, such as threats from those who orchestrate and command temporal truths (Moran, 2013) and who can make some urban realities more permanent than others. In this vein, the moments of impermanence, it seems, can only be delayed, but never fully eliminated. The struggles, manoeuvres, and sutures of eternally impermanent bodies are always temporally constrained, always at risk, always subject to vulnerabilities lying beyond their control. For all these temporally challenged bodies and forms across urban Asia, the only permanence *is* impermanence, in all its manifestations subtle and blatant. But this also marks new openings, inviting us to explore alternative entry points that can puncture apparently rigid patterns of this permanent impermanence. Under the temporal precarity of their – our – material existence, we can keep looking for potentials to manifest temporal autonomy (Goodin et al., 2008); to live and transform uncertainty, precarity, and aspiration in a way that recognises the fragility of urban life, yet at the same time attempts to re-channel the rhythms of the urban political for the many rather than the few (Simone, 2013). This is, in our view, how the experiences of living with impermanence enables a remaking of the bass lines of Asian urbanism and beyond.

6 | (TRANS)CONFIGURATIONS

The emplacements of urban re-arrangements escape the universalising tendencies of both spatial and scalar fixes. They are neither strictly an effect of the immobilisation of capital as a resolution for its crisis tendencies (Harvey, 1978) nor simply a product of scaling/rescaling processes in the purportedly planetary fabric of contemporary capitalism (Brenner & Schmid, 2014). In fact, the emplacements of urban re-arrangements situated in so many locations across the Global

South reveal an ‘irruption’ (Dussel, 2012, p. 42) from universal arrangements of capital consolidation, as well as a ‘transcending’ (Rodríguez, 2011, p. 6) of their configurations. They consist of what we are calling here (trans)configurations – a mode of spatial, scalar, and temporal emplacement grounded on ‘the radical specificity of materiality as iterative materialization’ (Barad, 2015, p. 413).

Comprising fluid modes of transmutation that draw in an ever-evolving range of materials, institutions, and social practices, urban re-arrangements emerge in everyday life as patterns of (trans)configurations. Assuming the form of conveyances, their substance is afforded by transmissions held together by processes of extension. In other words, at least three factors determine the shape of (trans)configurations: they are structured by iterative conveyances that transcend modes and forms of consolidation; they are composed through transmissions that constantly overstep the substance of a particular goal; and they are carried out by means of extensions that spill over from processes of settlement. In this piece, which embraces a lens of ‘process geographies’ (Appadurai, 2000) to focus on the multiple narratives of flows, policies, people, ideas, and capital (Massey, 1999; Shin, 2019) that constitute ‘Asia’, we weave together empirical insights from Dhaka, Luanda, and Mumbai in order to unpack each of these three components of the (trans)configurations of urban re-arrangements. Our intention is not to provide a comprehensive and all-encompassing lexicon for the theorisation of Asian urban geographies, but to read slices of each of these cities into each other. In Dhaka we see the multitude of forms of settling and unsettling – conveyances – of a so-called informal settlement; in Luanda we look through some of the spillover effects of Chinese-built new towns in the outskirts of the city; and in Mumbai we focus on how people produce their own cities through re-arrangements, responding to conditions and generating new possibilities of extensions that contributes to the material, spatial, and temporal dimensions of urban life.

6.1 | Conveyances

To begin, let us descend into Dhaka. Arguably the densest city in the world, this is a quintessential poster child of a so-called ‘megacity’ – a ‘shorthand for the condition of the global South’ (Roy, 2011, p. 224). Its growth has been explosive, its environment is degraded, and there is a general lack of adequate infrastructure and urban services. For the 300,000 people living in Karail, the largest informal settlement in the city, these lacks are expected, accounted for, and are generative, and ‘matters’ have always been taken into their own hands. The production of their housing has been happening on reclaimed (and crafted) land and, as will become clear, it can be useful to see the process through the lens of (trans)configuration. The shifting terrain where their houses are built, on land that was previously a lake, has been slowly handcrafted out of development rubble regularly arriving from the formal parts of Dhaka. With each rickshaw trolley coming in from the city, a new settlement materialises through the granular repurposing of construction debris at the edge of the lake.

Periodically, however, state evictions, arson, flooding, or internal departures erase the emerging urban form, effectively leading to de-settling, which is then invariably followed by periods of rapid re-settlement. In this constant shift of extensions, what may appear as only a sequence of deposition and consolidation is in fact restless movements of materials, people, and technicities operations always in motion animated by aspirations and desires that are also always in flux. These lead to a settlement that is paradoxically never fully settled, an urban re-arrangement that necessarily puts any notions of stability and fixity in question. Multiple ambitions, competencies, and capacities converge in the unceasing reclaiming of land: a neoliberal yearning to build the formal city anew, a municipality’s unwillingness to care for waste management, a pool of labour as a form of infrastructure that carries the materials inwards, and the translation of rural construction techniques that can re-articulate the debris into an urban land formation. While this could be read as a kind of incremental upcycling conveyance, a type of re-arrangement entailing a slow and cumulative movement of materials towards a particular goal, a more structural condition seems to be in place.

Rather than a binary between the everyday and the structural, conveyances allow conceptualisation of the inter-scalar relationalities that underlie the processes of arrangements, instead of reducing them to either. What then becomes important to analyse are the intensities, movements, thicknesses, opacities, attenuations, pulsations of multiple conveyances in action in a place like Karail. Beyond the jargon here lies an ontological shift towards reading the settlement as an unwhole set of arrangements – ruptures and sutures of the conveyances of (trans)configuration (Figure 3).

Conveyances can be read here as the form of (trans)configurations. Unfolding through a kind of precipitous incrementality, the transmissions of waste, energy, techniques, and desires between Karail and the city involve quotidian acts of conveying ever-evolving transformations in forms always disrupting and breaking off from what was already in place. Therefore, in Karail, the act of landfilling cannot be homogenised into just the sum of agentic action of individuals with equal intentions and teleology. Rather, the initial landfilling is followed by others in multiple forms – the same operation



FIGURE 3 Karail 2001–2018: Conveyance of Materialities, Technicities, and Desire. Credit: T Shafique.

is conveyed plurally and in each repetition of it a difference is added. In that sense, conveyances of trans-configurations act as the conduit for processes of transmission to happen. In the case of Karail, precipitous incrementality is no longer only about the material deposition of debris but also encompasses the incremental social approval of local leaders, the step-by-step extraction of bribes by the police to produce a pseudo-legality, the gradual constriction of the water flow, and the progressive upsurge of ecological destruction.

The conveyance of a (trans)configuration, therefore, helps us to speak of the arrangement of different flows of memories of an un-lived rurality, desires of an urban lifeworld and their accompanying disjunction between the state and dwellers, unofficial capital injection from NGOs, and so on and so forth. Arrangements that come together and come apart simultaneously at multiple seams help us to move beyond the notion of static settlements built by ‘bottom-up’ processes by the ‘urban poor’, categories that are inadequate to describe the fluidity with which settlements like Karail are being shaped. It counters any colonising superimposition of a radical politics that we may wish to read into the production of Karail’s land, as it posits an arrangement in flux based on the continuous quotidian abruptions and upheavals that are loosely networked but not set ideologically. In other words, Karail’s urban production may be seen as what Koster and de Vries (2012) see as beyond conventional governmental and electoral politics – a form of ‘everyday proper politics’, ‘the specific ways in which everyday acts and technical practices are political actions that are ongoing and incremental’ (Temenos, 2017, p. 592), what we have pointed out as the ‘politics of mundane re-arrangements’ in the introduction. These conveyances are not immutable or platonic forms of (trans)configurations, but rather they are themselves in a makeshift-yet-definitive process of being shaped by the substance of what is transmitted through them.

6.2 | Transmissions

While Luanda is, of course, not strictly an Asian city, much of its contemporary urban landscape has been shaped through its relations with Asia, most particularly China. In the ‘new peripheries’ of Luanda, which comprise both the after-effect and the foundation of the city’s once-called ‘new centralities’, people tendentially operate from the middle. Situated between the perseverance of being in one place and the incessant act of becoming part of that same place, their collective existence is often located in-between frames. Nowhere is this more evident than in the ever-shifting socio-material landscapes of Progresso, an area not too far out from the Chinese-built new town of Kilamba. Many of Progresso’s residents, the majority of them perhaps, do not dwell in or on the neighbourhood as much as they continually arrive in and depart from it. They do not settle as much as they seem to pass by. They are always establishing themselves as much as they are constantly trying to break away.

In fact, Progresso is a place of transmissions of the multiple modes of transmission that provide the substance of its particular (trans)configuration much more than it is one of stability, fixity, or permanence. Regardless of their cement

FIGURE 4 Kilamba/Progresso 2019: Transmissions of Accompaniment. Credit: R Cardoso.



block walls, which themselves were raised from the middle, as extensions (see below) of authorised planning endeavours forged in between the blind spots of officialdom as well as of Chinese entrepreneurial efforts in the cement industry and its derivatives, the houses most of Progresso's inhabitants reside in are constantly shuffling and forever on the move. Because of their cement block walls, as well as the variable institutional and regulatory arrangements encasing their legal existence – particular conveyances (see above) of this residential (trans)configuration – they are also always about to linger just a little bit longer (Figure 4).

Urban re-arrangements in Progresso, as in so many other areas in and much beyond Luanda, are not quite patterned by discernible built environments or detectable social institutions. Rather, their (trans)configurations are made up of transmissions of accompaniment. In other words, the substance of these (trans)configurations is a becoming. People follow along any itineraries available to them as speculative futurisms, constituting re-arrangements as a necessary but not essential condition of urban life. From Progresso, for instance, many go to Kilamba to work as doormen, gardeners, or housemaids. Sometimes they do it continually, for a number of weeks and even months, most times they are only sporadically engaged. At all times, there's always something else. Working in Kilamba is therefore never a mode of being for those living in Progresso – one is never quite committed to its particular assurances and demands; one becomes a doorman, gardener, or housemaid 'just for now', only until some alternative line of action emerges. And the same is true for the living arrangements – the places of residence – of the majority, which are always produced transversally to a range of materials, institutions, and social practices. As modes of conveyance and extensions of accompaniment beyond settlement, these places of residence configure lines of action that are followed but rarely adopted. Indeed, the patterns of (trans)configurations are made of transmissions.

6.3 | Extensions

In several neighbourhoods of Mumbai, including Sion-Dharavi and Vikhroli, local builders and contractors make use of staircases as extensions. Constructed and repurposed in a multiplicity of ways, almost always with relatively permanent

materials such as metal or bamboo, their specific arrangements or re-arrangements depend on the usage of owners and residents. ‘If the first floor is a rental unit and especially for migrant male workers’, a local builder explained to us, ‘the owner prefers a staircase that is located outside the house. This is to avoid any disturbance to the residents living on the ground floor. This also ensures that the owners can accommodate more rental beds without losing a lot of internal common space.’

On the other hand, ‘building the staircase inside the accommodation is preferred if a single person rents the two-story for both work and residence. For instance, if a garment factory-owner rents it, they use the ground floor as a temporary residence for their workers and the floor on top as their workspace for embroidery and tailoring’. In that scenario, the internal staircase ensures functionalities of operation for residents. Bhutia’s (2018) essay on Dharavi’s shoe production unit also sketches the impressions of the metal staircase inside the accommodation. He observes that some of the staircases were also constructed ‘through an opening in the ceiling’ which gives the impression that the head is visible or tilted at an angle, and the rest of the body of the resident is invisible (Bhutia, 2018). Climbing or crawling up these steep staircases opens up multiple extensions of a factory, dormitory, and kitchen space. ‘Following’ the staircases of Sion-Dharavi and Vikhroli as both form and process of a (trans)configuration shows how the usage of the space is not usually assigned but often takes place in the interstices of everyday operations. All of these spaces extended through ‘staircases’ have been arranged by different actors under different contexts, negotiations, claims, and contestations. It is layered with a sense of original structure and re-arranged notion of speculative practices. The physical and symbolic conveyance of extensions hold a sense of endurance but are also aspirational in nature due to the fluidity.

Urban re-arrangements do not belong to anywhere specific, but can act specifically through extensions of various sorts, including extensions of speculation, desire, and capital. While the staircase is built in a certain way by some owners to maximise the rental value, for others the extended staircase fulfils their desire for extra space and function. During monsoons, the same staircase is choreographed to deal with despair. The height provides the possibility to live and work from the floor on top while the ground is re-arranged with various materials and enduring manoeuvres with local authorities to avoid flooding. These intersections with the materiality of the built environment show how spaces are curated. The processes of (trans)configuration entail extensions as both practice and pedagogy for enacting as well as understanding everyday arrangements and re-arrangements. ‘Following’ this everyday process helps us understand the tentative itineraries, constant adjustments, shifting, and revisions. These extensions can be a spillover from officially designated zones and functions, practices of repair and maintenance, and layering and blurring of shared spaces. We focus on the need to look at the ways in which conventional material, institutions, sites are lengthened, stretched out, and deferred into a series of improvised spaces (Figure 5). We ask how patchworks of extensions matter within these particular ‘instances’.

6.4 | Conclusion

This piece contributes to the discussion on (trans)configurations by focusing on lives that are always on the move. ‘Trans’ emphasises forms of conveyance through constant adjustments, fluidity, and the unfinished nature of the everyday rather than consolidation. These configurations are not just minor or temporary aspects of city-making processes but form a larger part of the discussion on rearrangements of urban lives. First, we have shown how conveyance as a form of (trans)configuration takes place incrementally, shaped by different flows of transmission like capital, desires, and contestations. Second, we have described how these transmissions exist in-between frames of persevering of being in a place and anticipating the move to the next. Third, we have explored extensions to show the interstices of everyday operations. These articulations based on our own research in Dhaka, Luanda, and Mumbai illustrate how everyday life is made through patterns of (trans)configurations. We conclude with the challenge of thinking about cities from this default position of operating from an *intermezzo* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 25) – the multiple middles between stability and improvisation.

7 | (RE)ENACTMENTS

If urban rearrangements are ‘an unbroken re-arranging of the urban’ that steadily and recurrently ‘congeals disparate rhythms, forms, and politics of urbanisation’ (from above), we collectively look at (re)enactments as a way of suturing these rearrangements through action. Workarounds, collaborations, exchanges, and agreements are animated by the individual and collective (re)enactments, contesting and rearranging of social codes, policing, and even acts of moral

FIGURE 5 Sion-Dharavi, Mirpur (Dhaka), and Vikhroli, 2016: Extensions of Speculation. Credit: T. Shafique.



outrage and resistance. This piece on (re)enactments will focus on how urban residents' narratives and social ways of being-in-the-world form ways to re-enact and re-envision cities from within, both conceptually and physically.

As much as we speak about how cities and their materiality transform urban living, individual and collective actions of people shape the urban form as well. Speech, action, and other social phenomena – enacted and re-enacted in varied ways – create spaces and practices that shape the character of cities we live in, especially in spheres where the state is a liminal presence. Overlapping experiences and histories flow with, get entangled with, and sometimes diverge from the kinds of state-outsourced narratives that often control the material fates of urban spaces. Sometimes, as a way to negotiate with these material fates – these transfigurations as it were (see above) – require in some other moments the need to resist or even to play along with them. These re-enactments open up ‘new spaces, questions and categories’, becoming a way that incremental socialities can subtly rework ‘major’ narratives, experiences of capital flows, or the exercising of power (Katz, 2017, 597).

To explore this, we draw from our work in three different Asian cities, Singapore, New Delhi, and Ulaanbaatar, to speak of three specific forms of ‘acts and speech’: regulation, surveillance, and archiving. We explore how people who are often outside shifting ‘official’ domains of power still wield influence through what we call ‘re-enactments’. Attempts to realign and reconfigure relations and material spaces become ways in which inhabitants in these cities negotiate their experiences of laws, processes, or state presences, proving that the effects of the latter are neither ‘stable nor impermeable’ (Das, 2011, p. 321). These attempts also form the undercurrents of politically reinforcing and/or shifting the established norms. While this is not meant to be a comparative piece, our examples point to the forms of alliances, transformations, and subversions that are revealed through intra-Asia referencing (Roy & Ong, 2011).

Feminist literature has for decades convincingly argued that the body as well as its performances are political. Judith Butler's work first drew us to the notion that bodily performances produce gender (Butler, 1990), and then later to speech (Butler, 2013). How do people give an account of themselves? How does the presence of ‘others’ interrupt that account to become recognisable (Butler, 2001), shaping experiences of urban power and giving rise to imagining and living things differently (Katz, 2017, p. 597)? This piece will examine some of the manifestations of ongoing ‘reorientations’ (Nielsen & Simone, 2020) that residents and others engage in so as to understand shifting urban spaces and manifestations of

power. We delve into particular, detailed, fluctuating everyday socialities to see how they reframe understandings of urban power in variegated ways (Gibson-Graham, 2014), where everyday incremental actions can work to recast what constitutes 'political terrain' in urban life (Von Schnitzler, 2013, p. 671). In particular, the cities we draw from reveal ways that these reorientations are collectively negotiated, often through varying combinations of speech and action.

We focus specifically on how 'human action' rearranges urban possibilities. Taking cue from our extremely diverse fields – migrant surveillance in Singapore, residential counternarratives about place in Ulaanbaatar, and organised community control over urban spaces in Delhi – we explore how diverse forms of speech and action contribute to the emergence of urban political spheres. Forms of action and speech have long realigned different kinds of political possibilities and forms of political life (Arendt, 1958). The city's agora has historically been the political space for speech and action. But, for many, especially those without significant forms of 'official' political power, such as Singapore's migrants, Ulaanbaatar's lower-income urban residents, or Delhi's urban poor, and LGBTQI+ people, their narratives and ways of 'being-in-the-world' have been constituted by a diverse array of negotiations, rumours, and performances. Such people can be often constituted in the eyes of law as 'errant', a problem to be 'solved', and 'unreliable' or just 'nuisance' (Ghertner, 2012). But in response, by repeated acts of negotiations and even counter speech, these diverse political actors also deliberately constitute themselves as 'ideal citizens', or 'aggrieved by the state' as a response. These contrasting socio-spatial 'rearrangements' reveal how urban narratives about place have converging histories that have been shaped over time, leading to recent rearrangements instigated by various political actors who may have diverse interests. Re-enactments, ultimately, point to the messiness of urban living, forming a lived experience of the 'permanent impermanence' of urban life (see above).

Feminist geography has drawn our attention to how emotions shape urban possibilities. In collaboration with cultural geography, there is now a renewed emphasis on how transformative politics is possible through emotions (Sharp, 2009). As important as they are, we collectively move away from the transformative politics of such performances. For us, (re)-enactments can form counternarratives to these sometimes elusive power networks behind narratives of urban development and expansion. But re-enactments can also work to expand state discourses, such as shaping expectations of the 'good migrant' in Singapore, the 'amenable resident' in Ulaanbaatar, and the 'autochthonous rightful citizen' of Delhi. The questions we raise here overall are: what are the diverse modes of these re-enactments and what political work are these informal re-enactments doing that are apparent in Asian urbanism? On the one hand, we have residents engaging in divergent socialities, those moving back and forth from rural to urban spaces, or across national borders, and those engaging in surveillance to enact forms of 'ideal citizenship'. On the other, we have forms of state-sanctioned political mobilisations viewing mixed material environments as spaces of extraction, opportunity, and/or control. How do these different forces and divergent subjectivities interact to re-enact complex articulations of urban life?

7.1 | Regulation and surveillance

The state is never the only source of regulation. In cities of the global south, the state is always an absent-present (Truelove, 2021). The state is often fragmented or even absent when it comes to provisioning of services, and present when it comes to arbitrary regulations. The spaces where the state has a liminal presence can be occupied by private forces, NGOs, and local henchmen and mafia, who 'act' like enforcers of their own regulatory processes. Recent work has shown that state regulation is often driven by market forces (Chambers, 2020). In many cases, the urban poor and migrant communities themselves can become 'regulationist' towards each other. They re-enact common suffering, notions of friendships and associations, and sometimes even social sanction. Methods like *Guanxi* (networks for facilitating business) in China, or *sifarish* (recommendations through nepotistic networks) in India, or creating an *archiv* (archive) in Ulaanbaatar are produced within intimate networks of politics (Chambers, 2020). As they are surveilled by the state, people can also surveil themselves, encouraging performances of an 'ideal citizen'. The examples we draw from here present different examples of these relationships between disparate groups and forms of state governance. In some cases, the state allows certain kinds of freedoms that give rise to citizen surveillance that can in turn assist the state. In other examples, state absence allows for divergent narratives and actions that work to diversify what discourses can count as 'official'.

In the Singaporean case, migrants re-enact themselves as 'the good migrant' by adopting and repeating the state's discourses of civil behaviour. Migrants often reinforce the messages of good behaviour within their social networks in these spaces. In this sense, normative discourses and rules of engagement are not only driven by state actors and agencies but, crucially, are re-enacted by migrants themselves. This also reinforces Haggerty and Gazso's point that surveillance is

not centralised but rather is characterised by ‘simultaneous processes of decentralization and centralization’ (Haggerty & Gazso, 2005, p. 174). Often articulated in the language of ‘care’, compliance with a specific understanding of urban order is enforced. There are clear spatial and material impacts of re-enactments. The enclave is reproduced through state-driven technologies of CCTV, auxiliary police patrols, and, during the height of Covid-19, the TraceTogether app that tracked our movements. But the enclave is also reproduced through the speech and actions of migrants who re-enact the explicit regulations and tacit civilities of using space in Singapore by checking how other migrants use the space. In so doing, they pastoralise and perpetuate the regulations of social life. It is this ‘village-level surveillance’ that enforces obligations of using this space (McKay, 2020, p. 323).

In a place like Delhi’s informal colonies where the state is only liminally present, some communities with a longer existence in the city have managed to consolidate their position as both real estate owners and local politicians. Their interaction with the state is articulated through hurt and anger. They are expressions of dissatisfaction about being unjustly treated and ignored by the state. Being rural farmers before their agricultural land became extensions of upper middle-class Delhi, today they feel financially cheated by the state and culturally looked down on by the rich city-dwellers. But as landlords to poor migrants to the city, marking them as ‘deviant’ and therefore unbecoming of city life is another way of expressing one’s belonging in an urban context (Pati, 2022). These re-enactments become primary modes of creation of these political societies of the global south (Partha Chatterjee, 2004). These political societies may not always be circumscribed within civil society forms of politics, but have managed to create their own political vocabularies and their own rhythms despite the precarities and impermanences (see above). Urban politics has often emerged from complex re-enactments of these political vocabularies that are already ingrained within the existing hierarchies. These relationships, though among human beings, often get mediated around resources/objects like land (Murray Li, 2014), water (Contractor, 2012), and housing but are often relationships that get reproduced and reorganised by human action and speech.

7.2 | The social archive – Re-enacting as political reorientation

Such re-enactments can also work to reconfigure narratives, forming a kind of diversification device that moves beyond economy-dominated discourses of urban development and extraction (Katz, 2017). Ögöömör is an area of Ulaanbaatar undergoing transformation. It sits at a pivotal cusp between the city’s two main, overlapping built environments – areas of newer apartment blocks rise up with fresh paintwork, connected to core infrastructure, sitting alongside older ex-socialist apartments. Stemming from this area are the beginning of vast swaths of land plots not connected to running water, centralised heating, or sewerage and often containing self-built houses or *ger*, the collapsible felt dwellings used by mobile pastoralists. Long-term residents in this area living in *ger* or ex-socialist era apartments looked to these changes as signs that they too may trade their land, or old apartment in a dilapidated block, for a new apartment connected to infrastructure. However, stalling projects and unstable flows of capital have resulted in many visions failing to come to fruition. It has been a place of truncated, diverted visions, requiring residents to recalibrate personal temporalities of types of expected futures (Nielsen, 2014). It is a place with different histories that challenge the dominant vision of this district being an extractive site for outsourced urban redevelopment, a lens so convincingly utilised by politicians and other manifestations of the state (Jobson, 2020, p. 264).

Residents navigate truncated expectations of renewal. In order to navigate this, they engage in forms of watching and waiting – of material spaces and each other – engaging in temporary alliances with other residents in order to understand what the next step might be. Here, watching and waiting become a type of surveillance, forms of disparate actions through which residents may discern potential patterns and links. These residential formations underpin reconceptualisations of urban space, that is, how people think about and carry out their daily lives in these spaces. Such conceptual re-enactments are made possible through different kinds of mapping, both social and otherwise. This manifests through the actual collecting of items (newspaper articles, documents) into repositories sometimes referred to by residential organisations as archives (*archiv* in Mongolian). This expands the concept of *archiv* beyond the collection of documents to wider forms of residential knowledge accumulation through rumours and recollections.

This repository, always in-formation, builds up and re-diverts the discussion of Ögöömör as a site of transformation to one that has long been in flux. It was an old district, with people having lived on land plots for a long time. It was also a site where seasonal construction workers lived before annually returning to countryside homes. The social tracing people engaged in also included depths of historical time. Ögöömör was described as an area in which Mongolians and Chinese people had co-inhabited for a long time, getting married, having families together, and running businesses. This social

tracing reveals Ögöömör to be in a state of constant rearrangement – with residents moving in, leaving, waiting, working – in ways that challenge this space being predominantly seen as a site of materialist extraction. The social *archiv*, both made up of matter as well as narrative and rumour, formed a kind of re-enactment of how urban space can be experienced and conceptualised. Here the *archiv* became a constantly expanding form of speech, action, and artefact.

If locally maintained *archiv* in Ulaanbaatar bear witness to the local testimonies, in the abovementioned localities of Delhi, CCTV footage and videos by vigilante groups are made of how a racially different, poor migrant into the city is a much less worthy citizen of the city. These videos made by the young native residents of urban villages are carefully archived on YouTube. They show drunken brawls, fights that the migrants get into with each other, women from migrant community misbehaving. These videos are treated as ‘evidence’ of how the migrants are spoiling the culture of these erstwhile villages of Delhi. But they are more than that. They are archives that create a testimony for the ‘makers’ of these videos as well. In these videos, they are the rightful residents of the city – peace-loving and civilised. They are the hapless native residents of these villages who now find life difficult in the current circumstance. These videos carry no bearing of the violence that they themselves are party to as extractive landlords to the same migrants. In fact, these videos become a marker of the native residents of these spaces who are only invested in protecting their cities and homes from the marauding migrants.

7.3 | Conclusion – What do these (re)-enactments reveal about power?

‘Re-enactment’ carries out important political work and because of this it should not be read as resistance alone. Indeed, in our examples there is a strong ambivalence to re-enactment. Re-enactments are shaped by presences and absences of the state, by alignments and deviances from the state. Re-enactments are surely rooted in human agency that are in response to the forces of capital as well as the state. The orientation is, however, not always resistance. That is, speech and actions carried out by urban dwellers may not always be at odds or disruptive of underlying structures. Sometimes actors are also re-enacting urban violence in order to strengthen their own claim in the city. Re-enactments could be read as ways and means by which communities or individuals occupy the space vacated by the state and ‘act’ as the state. Power, after all, abhors a vacuum. Different kinds of social networks coalesce together through these performances while attempting to fill state absences. In some instances, they act as arms of the state – or, indeed, some other interests folded into said arms, to further that violence of both the state and market. But despite the diversity of cases, and the ambivalence, thinking about re-enactment through the lens of speech and action has enabled us to see human subjectivity as the centre of urban politics. The political manifests in the everyday and is implicated within the personal (Katz, 2017). These ways of being have allowed us to see human emotions as drivers of urban conflict. Our snapshots of different places included in this entry demonstrate that re-enactments reflect the messiness of urban living that draws references from, yet could well exceed, Asian cities. Through the process of re-enacting, boundaries can be re-drawn or reinforced, community alliances can be ruptured or given new life, subjectivities can emerge or become further distilled.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks are offered to the reviewers and editors for their sensitive and diligent work.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analyzed in this study.

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How to cite this article: Abdullah, A., Cardoso, R., Dasgupta, S., Pati, S., Plueckhahn, R., Shafique, T., Simone, A., Teo, S. S. K., Ye, J., Zhao, Y., (2023) Re-arranging the urban: Forms, rhythms, politics. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 00, 1–27. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1111/tran.12604>