



An Interdisciplinary Workshop

Constructing Asia

**Materiality, Labour and Capital
in the Making of an Urbanizing Landscape**

12-13 May 2016

Asia Research Institute, NUS

Jointly organized by

**Asia Research Institute's Asian Migration & Asian Urbanisms Clusters;
and Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences' Cities Cluster
at the National University of Singapore.**

Photo © Eli Elinoff

This workshop is jointly organized by Asia Research Institute's Asian Migration and Asian Urbanisms Clusters; and Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences' Cities Cluster at the National University of Singapore.

Across Asian cities, provincial towns, and peri-urban spaces, construction sites have become markers of the region's rapid transformation. Cranes, concrete, and hard-hatted humans are ubiquitous emblems of this tumultuous moment of building. It is well established that Asia is rapidly urbanizing, yet the physical and material processes through which the region is being built are less well understood. Given the wide scholarly attention to cities and urbanization, it is surprising that urban and peri-urban sites of construction, and the political, financial, and material processes that structure them, remain relatively opaque.

In this two-day workshop we propose to show how intense flows of material, capital, labor, and knowledge associated with the construction of Asian cities offers rich empirical and deep theoretical possibilities for understanding this region in transition. *Constructing Asia* will explore these possibilities by investigating the places where cities and towns are physically turning themselves inside out in the name of new futures. Such transformations are not simply a matter of the emergence of new buildings, infrastructures, and spaces, but also radical reconfigurations of everyday life. Construction not only transforms the landscape but also composes new networks of people, arrangements of things, configurations of expertise, and especially agglomerations of capital and power. To build the region, real estate developers, migrant laborers, politicians, municipal authorities, building inspectors, architects, engineers, and bankers mobilize money, knowledge, land, and things. By bringing together critical scholars from urban studies, anthropology, architecture, and geography we will interrogate these "building environments" to understand the emergence of the region in imagination and in practice.

CONVENORS

Dr Eli Elinoff

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SECRETARIAT

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12 MAY 2016 (THURSDAY)			
09:45 – 10:00	REGISTRATION		
10:00 – 10:30	WELCOME & OPENING REMARKS		
	<p>Brenda S.A. YEOH Asia Research Institute and Department of Geography, NUS</p> <p>Eli ELINOFF Asia Research Institute & Department of Sociology, NUS</p> <p>Malini SUR Asia Research Institute, NUS</p> <p>National University of Singapore</p>		
10:30 – 12:00	KEYNOTE ADDRESS		
<i>Chairperson</i>	HO Kong Chong National University of Singapore		
<i>10:30</i>	<table border="1"> <tr> <td>Abidin KUSNO York University, Canada</td> <td>A City with a Thousand Dimensions</td> </tr> </table>	Abidin KUSNO York University, Canada	A City with a Thousand Dimensions
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<i>11:30</i>	QUESTIONS & ANSWERS		
12:00 – 13:00	LUNCH		
13:00 – 14:30	PANEL 1 – LANDSCAPES		
<i>Chairperson</i>	Till MOSTOWLANSKY National University of Singapore		
<i>13:00</i>	<table border="1"> <tr> <td>Victoria NGUYEN University of Chicago, USA</td> <td>Slow Construction: Alternative Temporalities and Tactics in the New Landscape of China's Urban Development</td> </tr> </table>	Victoria NGUYEN University of Chicago, USA	Slow Construction: Alternative Temporalities and Tactics in the New Landscape of China's Urban Development
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<i>13:20</i>	<table border="1"> <tr> <td>Timothy KARIS Bennington College, USA</td> <td>The Wrong Side of the Tracks: Construction Projects and Contested Political Authority on the Annexed Margins of Hanoi</td> </tr> </table>	Timothy KARIS Bennington College, USA	The Wrong Side of the Tracks: Construction Projects and Contested Political Authority on the Annexed Margins of Hanoi
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<i>13:40</i>	<table border="1"> <tr> <td>John P. DIMOIA National University of Singapore</td> <td>Security Roads, Civil Engineering, and Transport Infrastructure: The Thai National Highway System and the Role of Regional Contractors, 1947-1963</td> </tr> </table>	John P. DIMOIA National University of Singapore	Security Roads, Civil Engineering, and Transport Infrastructure: The Thai National Highway System and the Role of Regional Contractors, 1947-1963
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<i>14:00</i>	QUESTIONS & ANSWERS		
14:30 – 15:00	TEA BREAK		

Constructing Asia: Materiality, Labour and Capital in the Making of an Urbanizing Landscape
 12-13 May 2016 | Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore

15:00 – 16:30	PANEL 2 – CAPITAL	
<i>Chairperson</i>	Mike DOUGLASS National University of Singapore	
15:00	Sylvia NAM University of California-Irvine, USA	Phnom Penh’s Vertical Turn
15:20	Marten BOEKELO University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands	Urban Politics in the Margins of Big Capital: Small-Time Entrepreneurs, Residents and the Production of “Middle Class” Space in Beirut
15:40	Shekhar KRISHNAN National University of Singapore	Mumbai’s Apprentice: The Construction of Trump Tower Mumbai
16:00	QUESTIONS & ANSWERS	
16:30 – 16:50	TEA BREAK	
16:50 – 18:00	PANEL 3 – LABOR	
<i>Chairperson</i>	Anju Mary PAUL Yale-NUS College, Singapore	
16:50	Brenda S.A.YEOH Grace BAEY Maria PLATT Kellynn WEE National University of Singapore	Bangladeshi Construction Workers and the Politics of (Im)Mobility in Singapore
17:10	Adam C. SARGENT The University of Chicago, USA	Translating Plans, Transforming Production: Mediations of Paperwork on a Delhi Construction Site
17:30	QUESTIONS & ANSWERS	
18:00	END OF DAY 1	
18:15 – 20:00	WORKSHOP DINNER (For Speakers, Chairpersons & Invited Guests)	

13 MAY 2016 (FRIDAY)		
09:45 – 10:00	REGISTRATION	
10:00 – 11:30	PANEL 4 – MATERIALITIES	
<i>Chairperson</i>	Tim BUNNELL National University of Singapore	
10:00	Eli ELINOFF National University of Singapore	Concrete and Corruption: On the Material Forms of Politics in Thailand
10:20	Malini SUR National University of Singapore	The Blue Urban: Colours of Contestation in 21st Century Kolkata
10:40	Wasqas H. BUTT University of California-San Diego, USA	The Afterlives of Construction: Distributing Destruction in Urban Pakistan
11:00	QUESTIONS & ANSWERS	
11:30 – 12:30	LUNCH	
12:30 – 13:40	PANEL 5 – AIR	
<i>Chairperson</i>	Rita PADAWANGI National University of Singapore	
12:30	Joshua COMAROFF Independent Scholar	The Materiality of Air
12:50	George JOSE National University of Singapore	<i>Hawa Khaana</i> in Vasai Virar: The Commodification of <i>Air-space</i> in Mumbai's Periphery
13:10	QUESTIONS & ANSWERS	
13:40 – 14:10	TEA BREAK	
14:10 – 15:20	PANEL 6 – EXPERTISE	
<i>Chairperson</i>	Nausheen ANWAR Institute of Business Administration Karachi, Pakistan	
14:10	Andrew TOLAND University of Hong Kong	From Generic to Specific?: The 'Dirty Realism' of Contemporary Asian Cities in the Global Architectural Imaginary
14:30	Tyson VAUGHAN National University of Singapore	Unreconstructed Japan: Generating Power, Regenerating Society
14:50	QUESTIONS & ANSWERS	
15:20 – 16:00	CLOSING REMARKS & PUBLICATION PLANS	
	Eli ELINOFF National University of Singapore Malini SUR National University of Singapore	
16:00	END OF WORKSHOP	

A City with a Thousand Dimensions

Abidin KUSNO

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The notion of construction refers not only to the action of building something, typically a large structure, but also suggests a construction of meaning or an interpretation of a reality. A city thus is not only constructed by architects, developers, and government through techno-socio-economic and political processes, but also by people (especially those at the domain conceptualized as the periphery) who build, use and invest meaning into the materiality of the urban space. My paper, through some illustrative materials from an Indonesian city, will explore multiple forms of construction in the urban space and the contexts within which they operate ranging from landscapes of war compensation, nation-building, capitalist modernization, and ecologies of risk to those of autoconstruction, legal exception, urban informality and artistic interventions. The multiple forms of construction will be linked to different regimes of capital formation, labor networks and the concomitant production of a variety of urban materiality, dimensionality and imaginary which characterize an urbanizing landscape of an Asian city.

Abidin Kusno is a Professor in the Faculty of Environmental Studies at York University. His research interests, with a focus on Jakarta/Indonesia, include urban/suburbanism, politics and culture, history and theory of architecture, nationalism, colonialism and post-colonialism. He held a Canada Research Chair in Asian Urbanism and Culture (with University of British Columbia) and currently serves as President of Canadian Council for Southeast Asian Studies. Kusno is the author of several books in English and Indonesian, the most recent of which include, *After the New Order: Space, Politics and Jakarta* (Hawaii University Press, 2013) and *The Appearances of Memory: Mnemonic Practices of Architecture and Urban Form in Indonesia* (Duke University Press, 2010). Kusno has served on the editorial boards of *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, *Journal of Architectural Education*, *Journal of Planning History*, *Pacific Affairs*, as well as on the International Advisory Board of *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*.

**Slow Construction:
Alternative Temporalities and Tactics
in the New Landscape of China's Urban Development**

Victoria NGUYEN

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Whereas once the policy and practice of wholesale eviction and demolition (*chaiqian*) was ubiquitous across the urban landscape of Beijing, today, development discourse in the state capital has shifted to embrace the strategic terminology of *tengtui*, or “voluntary” evacuation. Concomitant with this discursive shift has been a critical rearrangement of urban development politics on the ground. Although the visibility of forced eviction disputes in the city have decreased since Beijing’s pre-Olympic building boom, in their stead one is now more likely to find a complex array of “site fights” between local residents and building crews as construction breaks ground on new development projects.

This paper tracks varied incidents of on-site construction conflicts in the redevelopment of Beijing’s historic old city to examine how this shift from the eviction site to the construction site is accompanied by the articulation of alternative temporalities that belie the linear, progress-orientated time of construction, planning, and development in contemporary China. I show how these construction conflicts are catalyzing and recasting new networks and alliances that stretch across time and space, mobilizing a sometimes surprising cast of animate and inanimate actors to halt, slow down, and impede new building efforts. Offering new tactical ways of using and measuring time in urban space, these modes of resistance recall a right to the city that pivots more on the temporality of the *longue durée* than the fetishization of land and space. Through their resolute emphasis on the durative present, I suggest that it is not the ruptured eventful time of eviction, but the liminal and protracted time of these construction disputes that may pose the greatest threat to the architects of China’s utopian futures.

Victoria Nguyen is a PhD Candidate in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Chicago. Her research interests include urban studies, development, material culture, affect and embodiment, and the politics of heritage spaces. Her work has been supported by the National Science Foundation, the Wenner-Gren Foundation, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, and the University of Chicago Social Sciences Division. Her dissertation is tentatively titled “Urban Interrupted: Rethinking Urbanization and Development in Beijing’s Old City”. Based on over two years of fieldwork among developers, state planners and policymakers, local residents, and preservationists, this work will analyze the proliferation of urban-rural grey zones and “un-urban” city spaces in the context of global urbanization, with an eye toward how new ideals and metrics of the urban are shaping social and material life in contemporary China. She holds a BA from McGill University and an MA the University of Toronto.

**The Wrong Side of the Tracks:
Construction Projects and Contested Political Authority
on the Annexed Margins of Hanoi**

Timothy KARIS

Bennington College, USA
Timothykaris100@gmail.com

As part of Hanoi's most recent master plan for extending "urban civilization" (*van minh do thi*) in the region, officials have annexed dozens of peri-urban villages, remade local landscapes according to "rationalized" forms of development, and embarked on an ambitious elevated railway project meant to ease the city's chronic traffic congestion, link faraway urban locales, and showcase the city's modernity. Drawing upon recent ethnographic fieldwork in Phu Luong Ward—one such annexed space in the railway construction zone—this paper explores what kinds of places, and what kinds of politics, emerge in the folds of urban peripheries yet to be ironed into their final forms. Examining both the production and contestation of political authority, it looks to the ideological foundations, sources of capital, material manifestations, and local perceptions of this large-scale urban infrastructure project. Putting contestations over land use in the context of other emergent forms of popular resistance in urban Vietnam, the paper demonstrates how politically disempowered citizens nevertheless engage a "politics of presence" to provoke policy concessions and the expansion of rights, as people ignore, circumvent, or refuse to follow official directives, in this case by contesting displacement and repurposing urban places in ways that conspicuously undermine the authority of coercive state visions and directives. Finally, the paper address the local specificities and wider implications of that fundamental paradox facing many modernist projects of urban transformation: in building the city of the future for new types of middle-class citizens, Vietnamese leaders and planners must utilize and work within the conditions of the present, which include many elements that contradict the neat teleology of Hanoi's master plan.

Timothy Karis is a socio-cultural anthropologist whose work focuses on political-economic change, labor migration, and the local consequences of urban development projects, particularly in post-socialist countries. His primary fieldsite is Hanoi, Vietnam, where he is currently examining land use policies and residential rights in the shadow of Hanoi's "elevated railway" project. He also works with Hanoi's growing communities of migrants from the countryside, exploring place-making practices, informal labor, and social networking along the outskirts of the city. He has published articles in *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology* and *Migration Studies*, and is currently working on a full-length book manuscript based on his ethnographic work in Hanoi. Karis earned his doctorate in socio-cultural anthropology in from the University of California, San Diego and is a visiting faculty member at Bennington College for the 2015-2016 academic year.

Security Roads, Civil Engineering, and Transport Infrastructure: The Thai National Highway System and the Role of Regional Contractors, 1947-1963

John P. DIMOIA

Department of History, National University of Singapore, and
Max Planck Institute for the History of Science, Department Three, 2014-2016
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Following World War II, during which Thailand was allied with the Japanese (1941-1945), the nation spent much of the succeeding period under military rule. Much has been written about this political narrative, as well as the Thailand's subsequent participation in the Vietnam War—see Richard Ruth's *In Buddha's Company: Thai Soldiers in the Vietnam War* (2010)—but less has been written about the ambitious infrastructural and development plans for the late 1950s and early 1960s. Even before its boom associated with Vietnam, Thailand started building under the leadership of Phibun (1948-1957), and later, Sarit (1957-1963), with a series of roads, bridges, and structures integrating much of the country (with Bangkok), including the well-known "Friendship Highway." Officially, this work was loosely tied to urbanization and modernization, although this version of events does not fully account for the role of Thailand's many external partners, especially as the Thais became a close Cold War ally of the United States. This paper looks at the infrastructure build-up, and specifically, the role of new sections of the national highway, in the context of security concerns in the northeast (Isan) and subsequently, deep south (Pattani). Under the rubric of programs such as MDU (Mobile Development Units) and ARD (Accelerated Rural Development), village areas encountered the state in the form of new infrastructure, and this factor, in combination with these highways, led to a much tighter degree of control over previously outlying areas. At the same time, a number of foreign partners were able to enter the market, gain experience, and earn lucrative contracts, as many of these road projects were funded by the IBRD (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development), or World Bank.

John P. Dimoia is Associate Professor, Department of History at the National University of Singapore. He works on EASTM, especially the diverse collection of practices falling under the descriptive label "Korean medicine" (c. 1945-present), encompassing both traditional (TKM / 한의학)) and biomedicine (서양의학) as practice; and also have a growing interest in doing comparative work with Singapore, Taiwan, North Korea, and Japan for the period, 1945-present. He is currently working on two new book projects : (1) "Energy, and Infrastructure" a book on the problems associated with power generation—coal / hydroelectric / nuclear—and related technical / infrastructural issues in and around the Korean Peninsula, Manchuria, NE Asia, covering the span from roughly the late 19th century to the present (1876-present). He is also working with Drs. Hiromi Mizuno (Associate Professor, University of Minnesota) and Aaron Moore (Assistant Professor, Arizona State University) on an edited volume project, (2) "Engineering Asia," looking at construction interests in SEA in the aftermath of Japanese empire.

Phnom Penh's Vertical Turn

Sylvia NAM

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Phnom Penh is littered with condominium towers. By 2018, the real estate consultancy CBRE estimates that the city's condominium supply will increase by over 500%. The proliferation of condos, I argue, reflect experimental market logics and the practices of mimesis evident in the serial reproduction of identical built projects. It is the condominium and the high-rise tower that have become exemplary of a new asset class and contemporary built form in Phnom Penh. If Asian urbanism is typified by vertical accumulation and compression, then Phnom Penh is at its frontier.

In this paper I look at the diffuse calculative practices and circuitries of investment that comprise Phnom Penh's real estate market. Specifically I look at the condominium not so much as a residential form of living but as an asset class. By examining the condo as a market strategy forged through experiments with market values, I look at the birth of the condominium in Phnom Penh. Although local real estate agents contend that these units are for an emerging middle class and an expatriate community willing to pay high rents, developers concede that a Cambodian middle class does not exist to purchase the units that are being built. Instead, what is being parcellized, packaged, and sold are investment assets for buyers from within the region seeking high returns. Accordingly, I look at how condominiums bring together material and market relations that make up Phnom Penh's speculative urbanism.

Sylvia Nam is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Anthropology at the University of California, Irvine. Her work brings together anthropological engagements with value alongside geographical theories on the production of space as the cutting edge of accumulation. Her research interests include cities, markets, and expertise. Her current book manuscript, *Phnom Penh, City of Speculation*, is an ethnographic examination of speculative practices of real estate in Cambodia's capital, the role of Asian investment in radically reshaping the city's landscape, and the regulatory regimes that enable speculation and investment. Previously, she was a University of California President's Postdoctoral Fellow in the Department of Anthropology at the University of California, Riverside. Her PhD is in City and Regional Planning with a designated emphasis in Global Metropolitan Studies from the University of California, Berkeley.

**Urban Politics in the Margins of Big Capital:
Small-Time Entrepreneurs, Residents and the
Production of “Middle Class” Space in Beirut**

Marten BOEKELO

University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands
M.Boekelo@uva.nl

This paper is an essay in ‘comparative urbanism’. It confronts ‘classical’ urban theory with a kind of real-estate production that has been absent from the case material upon which such theorization was built: petty urban entrepreneurialism. Small-time entrepreneurs (anywhere on the informal-formal spectrum) are numerically important players in many Asian urban contexts and have significant impact on urban form. The paper draws on one particularly dominant strand in urban studies – neo-Marxist geography and sociology – and asks how well it fares in understanding the modes of the production of space that characterize such small-time real-estate development. It does so by drawing on fieldwork in a working-class neighbourhood in Beirut. Most of new housing construction there gobbles up an older, unprofitable building stock; it is initiated by relatively inexperienced entrepreneurs (with a lack of expertise in either construction, entrepreneurship or both); has “middle class” quality and prices in municipal market dominated by “super deluxe” buildings; is fuelled by speculation in a booming economy; drives up housing costs in the neighbourhood; yet isn’t politicized by residents anxious to hold on to their spot in the city. These characteristics prove challenging to neo-Marxist analytical assumptions and conceptual categories. This paper explicates these challenges and asks how to conceptualize the production and politics of space in the case of amateur urbanism.

Marten Boekelo recently defended his doctoral thesis at the University of Amsterdam about political imagination in Beirut, Lebanon, and specifically about notions and practices of citizenship. In his examination of these things, he paid special attention to urban space, both as a politicized subject through which people elaborate their ideas about state and polity, and as material conditions of possibility for certain forms of public reflexivity to emerge. That second analytical dimension has also led him to engage with classical urban theory and particularly in the spirit of recent calls decenter urban theory from its western geography. His presentation for this conference follows from that engagement.

Mumbai's Apprentice: The Construction of Trump Tower Mumbai

Shekhar KRISHNAN

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Real estate developers dominate the political economy and public culture of contemporary Mumbai, and are portrayed in its media and politics as all-powerful sovereigns of the city skyline. However, purchasing land and obtaining permissions for construction is a murky, cumbersome and inevitably "corrupt" process, testing the resilience and risk-aversion of even the biggest builders and their investors. Land acquisition and assembly for commercial real estate development is a shadowy domain for speculators who can materialise uncertainty and risk into potential profits and futures. These "gamblers" often specialise in distressed, encumbered and disputed lands, with the power to displace or evict occupants and the longevity to wait out court battles or for changes in planning norms. My paper explores one such "master of the game", Haresh Mehta, and his company, now known as Rohan Lifescapes. Rohan Lifescapes was Donald Trump's partner in his first, failed "Trump Tower" in Mumbai, a luxury high-rise development proposed on the disputed plot of a former charitable housing estate for one of the founding communities of colonial Bombay, and zoned for a coastal highway that was never finally built. Based on municipal land records and ethnographic research with builders and city officials, I will explore how illegality and uncertainty are materialised in real estate development and the construction of urban futures in globalising Mumbai.

Shekhar Krishnan is a Postdoctoral Fellow in the Science, Technology, and Society Cluster at the Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore. Dr Krishnan is a historian and anthropologist of South Asia and the Indian Ocean. Prior to joining ARI, he was a Visiting Fellow with the Homi Bhabha Centre for Science Education, Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR), Mumbai (2015). He has also worked as a consultant for the Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai (MCGM), the Library of Congress, and the Maps Division of the New York Public Library (NYPL). He received his PhD in the Program in Science Technology & Society (STS) from MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology). His current research interest on the history of industrial technologies, civic institutions and the urban environment in Mumbai and Asian cities, is based on his forthcoming work "Empire's Metropolis: Money, Time and Space in Colonial Bombay, 1860-1920".

Bangladeshi Construction Workers and the Politics of (Im)Mobility in Singapore

Brenda S.A. YEOH

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While the most iconic image of the foreign construction worker in the popular imagination in Singapore is a figure perilously immobilised atop a half completed high-rise building with the help of safety harnesses, we argue that an understanding of the labour process involved in fashioning the worker is predicated on a more expansive understanding of the politics of (im)mobility. In other words, the labour process is not simply secured in the workplace (construction site) but is linked to the politics of mobility and immobility across different spaces in the host-nation-state and beyond. Mobility is a concept that ranges across different scales from micro-mobilities at specific sites, to mobilities across the spaces of the national geobody, and movements beyond the nation-state in the form of transnational labour migration. Mobility need not be aligned across scales: the transnationally mobile low-skilled worker may be subjected to conditions of intermittent or protracted mobility at the workplace, giving rise to what Yeoh and Huang (2010) calls the 'mobile-but-not-free' worker. Drawing on a study of Bangladeshi construction workers in Singapore (quantitative and qualitative data were gathered from questionnaires (n=205) and in-depth interviews (n=30)), we discuss three interrelated themes: (a) the governing of the worksite in terms of time discipline, skills matching and safety considerations to create productive workers; (b) spaces of enclavement, exception and enclosure and the politics of care and control in producing compliant workers; and (c) the time-structuring mechanisms of the migration regime and the migration industry in ensuring transient workers.

Brenda S.A. Yeoh is Professor (Provost's Chair), Department of Geography, and Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, National University of Singapore. She is also the Research Leader of the Asian Migration Cluster at the Asia Research Institute, NUS, and coordinates the Asian MetaCentre for Population and Sustainable Development Analysis. Her research interests include the politics of space in colonial and postcolonial cities, and she has considerable experience working on a wide range of migration research in Asia, including key themes such as cosmopolitanism and highly skilled talent migration; gender, social reproduction and care migration; migration, national identity and citizenship issues; globalising universities and international student mobilities; and cultural politics, family dynamics and international marriage migrants. She has published widely in these fields. Her latest book titles include *The Cultural Politics of Talent Migration in East Asia* (Routledge, 2012, with Shirlena Huang); and *Migration and Diversity in Asian Contexts* (ISEAS press, 2012, with Lai Ah Eng and Francis Collins); *Return: Nationalizing Transnational Mobility in Asia* (Duke University Press, 2013, with Xiang Biao and Mika Toyota); as well as a paperback reprint of her book *Contesting Space in Colonial Singapore: Power Relations and the Urban Built Environment* (originally published in 1996 by Oxford University Press; reprinted by NUS Press in 2003 and 2013).

Grace Baey is an independent researcher with a keen interest in social documentary photography. At the Asia Research Institute, she was Co-Investigator of the research project entitled “Migration and Precarious Work: Negotiating Debt, Employment and Livelihood Strategies amongst Bangladeshi Migrant Men working in Singapore’s Construction Industry”, funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) under the Migrating out of Poverty Research Programme Consortium. Her research interests include transnational labour migration in Southeast Asia, recruitment practices, gender and migration, and international political economy.

Maria Platt is currently a Research Fellow at the Asia Research Institute at the National University of Singapore. Prior to this she completed her PhD in anthropology at La Trobe University. Her research interests include: the politics of documentation and identity, domestic work, reproductive labour and the politics of intimacy, migration and mobilities, gender and related issues of agency. Recent publications have focused on the everyday politics of marriage and its dissolution, the politics of intimacy in the realm of domestic work and women’s agency in the transition to marriage in Indonesia. Her work has been published in journal such as *New Media & Society*, *Ethnos* and *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology*. Her monograph *Marriage, Gender and Islam in Indonesia: Women’s Negotiations of the Marital Continuum* is due for publication with Routledge later this year.

Kellynn Wee is a research assistant with the Migration Cluster at the Asia Research Institute. As part of the Migrating out of Poverty Research Consortium, she is currently working on a project focused on the migration industry in Singapore and Indonesia as well as the policy processes surrounding the formulation of the day-off policy for migrant domestic workers in Singapore. Her research interests include gender, labour migration, and how the Internet and other forms of new media are (re)shaping social relations.

Translating Plans, Transforming Production: Mediations of Paperwork on a Delhi Construction Site

Adam C. SARGENT

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While the effects of construction work figure centrally in narratives of India's development, the processes of production on its construction sites are often left opaque. In turning analytical attention to the processes of construction that are transforming urban India this paper challenges the representation of construction as the simple execution of self-evident designs. Instead it pays close ethnographic attention to the circulations and transformations of architectural plans on a self-described 'modern' construction site in Delhi. It is through these processes that the 'intense flows of material, capital, labor and knowledge' necessary for construction are organized and coordinated on the site itself. The paper focuses on the material practices (writing, speaking) as well as the semiotic technologies (lists, reports and orders) that coordinate and shape the construction process. I argue that these semiotic technologies translate the architectural plan into communicative forms that can catalyze acts of production. Yet they do so in ways that figure these productive actions in distinct ways. By tracing the ways in which various translations of the architectural plan are articulated across the division of labor on the site, I show how they produce particular relations of power and authority. This process is integral to 'modern' construction practice in India and has come to characterize the construction site as a space of production. Indeed, it is through these embodied practices of translation, and the ways they organize and figure productive action, that the image of construction as the simple execution of a pre-formed design is reproduced.

Adam C. Sargent is a doctoral candidate in Anthropology at the University of Chicago and is currently a Lichstern Dissertation Fellow. He is working on a dissertation titled *Building Capital: Transformations of Labor in the North Indian Construction Industry*. His research interests include semiotic and linguistic anthropology, materiality and infrastructure, labor, and capitalist forms of urbanization. His doctoral work focuses on the politics, value and meanings of labor on contemporary construction sites in the Delhi National Capital Region of India. The dissertation develops a semiotic and linguistic anthropological understanding of labor in order to trace the emergence, circulation and effects of the 'modern' construction site, a productive space where Delhi's aspirations toward becoming a world-class city can be realized.

Concrete and Corruption: On the Material Forms of Politics in Thailand

Eli ELINOFF

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In 2015, the Museum of Corruption opened in Bangkok. The museum was funded by reformers as a means of pushing Thais to remember past corruption scandals that had plagued the nation. One of the central sculptures was a politician eating posts of reinforced concrete. Referring to a scandal in which misappropriated funds had gone toward the building of 369 police headquarters throughout the country. This has not been the only recent political scandal to involve the material. From Suvarnaphumi International Airport's cracked runways to overbuilt seaside bike path proposed along the Chao Phraya River by the current military government, concrete looms large in public scandals. This paper asks what role concrete plays in politics? Why is the material so linked to scandal? What does this connection tell us about the relationship between politics and building? Can a better understanding of concrete's materiality offer a clearer sense of how the built environment comes together? By examining corruption through a material lens, I argue that the eruption of scandal in material form exposes the role that building plays in the production and legacies of uneven power structures. In doing so, this paper avoids the trap of pinning bad behavior on particular political actors in order to understand the dynamics of corruption that both link successive regimes and shape the city itself.

Eli Elinoff is currently a joint Postdoctoral Fellow in Asian Urbanisms in the National University of Singapore's Department of Sociology and the Asia Research Institute. He received his PhD in Anthropology from the University of California, San Diego. He is currently working on a book manuscript that explores questions of democracy, citizenship, and urban sustainability through an ethnographic examination of new forms of participatory planning and historical struggles over land rights in Khon Kaen, Thailand. He has publications in *South East Asia Research*, *Political and Legal Anthropology Review*, and *Contemporary Southeast Asia*. He has also begun new research on urban ecologies and concrete in contemporary Thailand.

**The Blue Urban:
Colours of Contestation in 21st Century Kolkata**

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As urban development in India focuses on rebuilding old cities and designing smart cities, color offers new ways of thinking about the aesthetics of political power. In eastern India, Kolkata's ruling political party has mobilized the color blue in a concerted effort to glamorize the urban fabric by referencing big urban ambitions, corporate capital and cheerfulness. Political opponents, however, assert that as a state imposed color, blue limits aesthetic freedom and makes the city un-alluring. This essay intends to transcend this binary. I argue that blue not only disrupts the city's red past under the previous Left front rule, but more importantly, gathers momentum as a political force in the 21st century Kolkata. State incorporation of blue cleverly blurs the margins of public planning and real estate investments, and undoes the city's chromatic histories through a close correspondence between state blues (colors of government offices, public infrastructures, urban barricades and lattices), corporate blues (promising affluent residential living) and the widespread use of blue as an everyday urban color (for shutters, cans, tarpaulin and corrugated boundary walls). Following blue's differing shades, patterns and textures in public spaces, heritage elite residences, construction sites, new housing blocks and slums, I show how landed families, resettled artisans and squatters embrace blue as a color of hope and inclusion, as well as situate it as an exclusionary force in a city whose new vistas keep out the urban poor.

Malini Sur holds a fellowship at the Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore. Prior to this, she has lectured at the University of Amsterdam and held a postdoctoral fellowship at the University of Toronto. Her research interests connect three broad areas—borders, mobility, and citizenship—with a focus on South Asia. Malini has published in journals including *HAU*, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, *Mobilities*, *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*, and the *Economic and Political Weekly*. She has co-edited a collection of ethnographic essays on transnational migration in Asia (2012) that is available on the Amsterdam University Press open-access platform. Her first ethnographic documentary "Life Cycle" which explores the place of the bicycle in the everyday lives of city dwellers in Kolkata, was screened at the Substation in April 2016. In June 2016, Malini takes up a faculty position at the Western Sydney University.

The Afterlives of Construction: Distributing Destruction in Urban Pakistan

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Construction projects of different scales have radically transformed Lahore's built environment over the past several years. A speculative market fuelled by land development and private housing societies has combined with a development paradigm that prioritizes large-scale infrastructure projects. Underpasses and flyovers crisscross expansive roads while a train system is in the process of being erected to supplement the recently built bus rapid transit system. One commentator has called this development paradigm and the construction associated with it "death-by-concrete." This description is not simply a metaphor for development taking place throughout urban Pakistan. In the summer of 2015 an estimated 2,000 people perished in a heatwave in Karachi because of the urban heat island effect in which concrete retains heat throughout the day, thereby ensuring that temperatures remain high in the evening. This paper draws on changes in Lahore's built environment brought about by these developments but from the perspective of the material produced in the aftermath of construction: waste. In what ways have these construction projects been framed as destructive by political society? What is the afterlife of construction materials as it is deemed to no longer have use or value and transitions into something called 'waste'? What are the networks of work through which construction waste is canalized to ensure that these environments remain inhabitable and continual sites of investment, both capital and affective? What challenges does this material pose, in particular, for a municipality that has recently privatized and reformed its waste management department? Considering these questions demands a dialectical approach to the material politics of the built environment, in which destruction, waste, and non-visible exist in an uncertain and awkward relation to the constructed, useful, and visible.

Waqas H. Butt is a PhD Candidate in the Department of Anthropology at University of California, San Diego. His dissertation examines the work and infrastructure of waste disposal in contemporary Lahore. It explores related processes of bureaucratization and marketization of waste material and how they bear upon waste work as a stigmatizing form of work. It examines the bureaucratization of waste disposal as a public service and good and the impact that privatization and governance reform have had on institutions and work. This bureaucratization occurs alongside the marketization of waste in which waste work outside of the bureaucracy reincorporate waste back in circuits of capitalist value production. Yet, despite the valuation of waste and work, those who come into direct contact with this material are stigmatized and speak about their lives as being marked by poverty. His broader research interests include bureaucracies, markets, labor/work, development, and the politics of value in South Asia.

The Materiality of Air

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In the development of Singapore, the role of air—its materiality and commodification—remains strangely untheorized. Air is still considered to be neutral or immaterial ether, exerting little force in the shaping of urban and architectural form. This paper will argue, to the contrary, that air has long exerted an effect on Singapore. It has done so against the backdrop a broad conceptual transformation, beginning in the late 19th century—being increasingly visualized and understood as “substance,” and calculated as a medium of economic externality. This process will be explored through three historical examples: Lee Kuan Yew’s belief in humidity as an obstacle to development; John Portman’s conceptualization, at Marina Square, of thermal place-making and “teaser air”; and the recent crises of trans-boundary haze. The outcome, it will be proposed, has reinforced a pre-existing tendency toward the consolidation of interiorized and privatized urban blocks, at the expense of other approaches to public space in the city.

Joshua Comaroff is a design consultant with Lekker. He was raised in Chicago, and studied literature, linguistics, and creative writing at Amherst College before joining the Master of Architecture and Master of Landscape Architecture programs at Harvard University Graduate School of Design. He has worked for and studied under Rem Koolhaas, Rafael Moneo, Rodolfo Machado and Jorge Silvetti, Scott Cohen, Luis Rojo, and David Adjaye. In 2009, Josh completed a PhD in cultural geography, writing on the subject of haunted landscapes and state power in Singapore. He has published writing in the fields of architecture, urbanism, and politics, with a focus in Asia. Josh is interested in the intersection of art and architecture, and in multi-disciplinary design practice.

***Hawa Khaana** in Vasai Virar:
The Commodification of *Air-space* in Mumbai's Periphery**

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This essay seeks to understand the technologies that undergird the commodification of built-space by studying a short-lived 'rental housing' scheme in Mumbai's notoriously speculative real estate market. I suggest that the legal and political processes that fuel Mumbai's housing sector produces, in its wake, *airspace* – a distinctive urban imaginary. This 'virtual', and invariably vertical built-space characterizes recent developments, especially in the rapidly developing peripheries of Asian cities. In this paper I submit that state policies framed around the rhetoric of 'affordable housing' combine with the private construction industry to transform globally deployed planning protocols into a specifically local narrative in Vasai Virar, a peri-urban region north of Mumbai.

In 2008 the Government of Maharashtra tasked the Mumbai Metropolitan Regional Development Authority (MMRDA) with the responsibility of producing half a million rental housing units for the urban poor in five years. A majority of these planned units were to be constructed as high-rise stacks in Vasai Virar. MMRDA, in turn, entered into partnerships with private builders, using 'transferable development rights' (TDR) – a policy instrument enabling property owners and 'developers' to trade their 'right to build' on a plot of land independent of its physical location – ostensibly to make this 'affordable housing' project financially attractive. The scheme was hastily abandoned in 2012 after it failed to produce a single house-for-rent, but not before it had generated an exceptional market for high-rise middle-class and luxury 'housing societies', spawned by the trade in TDR as speculative commodity. This study is a contribution towards outlining the features and consequences of the aspiration for a private dwelling and the corresponding vertical expansion of metropolitan peripheries.

(**Eating Air*, in Hindi)

George Jose is a Joint-PhD candidate in Anthropology and Contemporary India in National University of Singapore (NUS) and King's College, London (KCL), studying popular resistance to the city in the periphery of Mumbai. He was an International Fellow at Forum Transregionale Studien, Berlin for the 'Global Prayers - Redemption and Liberation in the City' project with Europa-Universität Viadrina, Frankfurt/Oder and Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin. He holds an MA from Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), New Delhi, taught Sociology for several years in Kishinchand Chellaram (KC) College, Mumbai, and was Visiting Faculty in a range of institutions including KRVIA, Mumbai, NID, Ahmedabad, IIM Bangalore, IIT Bombay, and St Xavier's College, Mumbai. George has also served as Programme Executive at the India Foundation for the Arts (IFA), Bangalore and was the first Programme Director of Asia Society India Centre.

**From Generic to Specific?:
The 'Dirty Realism' of Contemporary Asian Cities
in the Global Architectural Imaginary**

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The emergence of the interest in (non-Japanese) Asian cities within architectural high culture can be almost precisely dated to sometime between the years 1995 and 1997. It turns on a number of key triggering occurrences within the 'international' (principally European and North American) networks of architectural discourse and design aesthetics. For the next decade and more, the Asian city became a central figure within design discourse across the architectural disciplines, not just in architecture, but also in landscape architecture and urbanism. Throughout, Asian cities have been written about and imaged in a way that is distinctive to architectural culture. This paper considers how the 'Asian city' came to serve a particular function within broader transformations within the theory and practice of the architectural disciplines over this time. This, in turn, fed back into the way in which design projects in Asian cities were approached by international architects, also influencing dimensions of local practice, which itself was in the process of becoming more 'international'. The figurative and literal construction of Asian cities in areas touched by 'high' architectural culture has thus depended on a layering of avant-garde design discourses and real-world construction in a manner not seen since the dominant influence of modernism in post-war Europe and North America. It may yet be too early to evaluate fully what effects this particular form of architectural 'knowledge' has had on the cultural and built environments of Asian cities, but a close examination of the feedback circuit between 'the imaginary' of 'global' architectural discourse and 'the real' of the 'Asian city' assists in understanding their mutual 'constructions'.

Andrew Toland is an Assistant Professor in the Division of Landscape Architecture, Faculty of Architecture, at the University of Hong Kong. He holds degrees in architecture, law and economics. His current research concerns the turn to 'the (dirty) real' in contemporary spatial design culture. His most recent publication, in the critical landscape journal *Scapegoat*, considers the complex jurisprudential history surrounding the 'exorcism' of certain Alpine glaciers in 17th century Switzerland. His work has also appeared in *Cabinet*, *Architecture Australia*, and the *Cambridge Architecture Journal*. In June 2016 he will be taking up a new position in the recently established landscape architecture program at the University of Technology, Sydney.

Unreconstructed Japan: Generating Power, Regenerating Society

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It is a truism that disasters, and their aftermaths, are opportunities as much as they are crises. Historically, they have often precipitated socio-political transformation as well as shifts in civic epistemologies (Jasanoff 2005) and sociotechnical imaginaries (Jasanoff & Kim 2009), bringing peace (e.g., post-tsunami Aceh), ending truces (e.g., post-tsunami Sri Lanka), and contributing to regime change (e.g., post-Katrina USA). In Japan, the 1891 Nobi earthquake helped strengthen the epistemic authority of Japanese seismology while vindicating, in popular opinion, the efficacy of traditional Japanese architecture and construction over Western methods (Clancey 2006). After an earthquake severely damaged the city of Kobe in 1995, a new field of knowledge and practice arose among built-environment specialists seeking to integrate local and technical ways of knowing in participatory recovery planning (Vaughan 2014). Yet, it seems as if little of substance has changed in Japan since the March 11, 2011 tsunami and nuclear disaster. The government of this so-called “construction state” still pushes its standard policy of expanding public debt-financed (re-)construction, in spite of a stagnant economy and a population now declining so rapidly that the nation has already lost a million people since the disaster. And despite the experience of Fukushima, the Abe administration and the Liberal Democratic Party still advocate a return to nuclear power generation. In reconstructing Japan, multiple domains of public life are frozen in controversy and gridlock, as citizens and authorities clash over questions such as whether or not to build gargantuan seawalls, whether or not to restart nuclear reactors, and whether or not radiological risk in Fukushima is a significant concern. This paper explores and analyzes the opposing forces for and against change in recovering post-disaster Japan. It attempts to articulate the beginnings of a coherent explanation for the array of disarray across the archipelago. In doing so, it offers, perhaps, a glimpse at a post-growth future that potentially lies in wait for Japan’s Asian neighbors now in the ecstatic throes of frantic urbanization and expansion.

Tyson Vaughan is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow in the Asian Urbanisms and Science, Technology & Society clusters at the Asia Research Institute of the National University of Singapore. He studies public engagement with technoscience, the social construction of expertise, and democratic governance of “envirotechnical” risk and sociotechnical order. Much of his work is ethnographically grounded in the context of post-disaster recovery in Japan. He holds a PhD in Science & Technology Studies from Cornell University, USA.