In their book, *Cities: Reimagining the Urban* Ash Amin and Nigel Thrift (2002) offer what they characterize as a 'provisional diagram of how to understand the city'. They recognize, however, that this attempt is limited in several respects, but especially constrained by the specific geopolitics of inherited urban models. For models are precisely those forms that inform theory by positing normative conditions, either as representations that are extrapolated from extant reality or as propositions that might inform future developments.¹ Amin and Thrift usefully remind us of the role that models play in framing normative outcomes and desires in relation to cities. By concluding that their work is limited vis-à-vis 'gender, race and the environment' as well as constrained geographically only to account for transformations of the 'cities of the North', they invite us to think through what architect and urbanist Teddy Cruz (2005) has referred to as a 'political equator' – an imaginary line that divides the world into the 'functioning core' and the 'non-integrating gap' – using the Pentagon’s rhetoric to describe the post-9/11 world.

The mega-cities of the global South are most easily located in this 'non-integrating gap'. Their distinct, post-colonial relationship to the project of modernity invites a theorization of the kampungs, favelas, barrios and zhopadpattis of these cities as responses to modernity’s pressures to innovate and to capitalism’s creative destruction.² Yet their material and experiential forms raise inevitable questions about the norms of urban development, in particular questions about whether or not these forms might in fact provide the codes for rearticulating urban norms in a global age. These questions invite a reflection not only on the material aspects and processes involved in the production of what Mike Davis has provocatively called the 'Planet of Slums' (2007 [2006]) but also on the epistemological and ethical underpinnings of urban theory today. The focus on residence and rights, rather than on the scales and economies produced by globalizing forces, as well as ecologies of habitational and livelihood practices leads to a peculiar situation in which the idea of the slum has become a theoretical as well as empirical shorthand for understanding postcolonial
urbanisms and contemporary mega-cities. This chapter explores the emergence of such an approach and traces its limits in relation to both urban research and design practice.3

**URBAN MODELS AND THE MEGACITY: THEORIZING SLUMS AND SLUM AS THEORY**

As McGrath and Shane remind us (Chapter 36), there are at least two dominant models for imagining and representing contemporary urban conditions—the metropolis and the megalopolis. Although historically specific in terms of the conditions in which these models emerged, these models would coexist and overlap in any diagnosis of urban conditions around the globe in the contemporary moment. Further, they correctly point out that the megacity is a phenomenon that should be considered as existing in a shadowy relation to these dominant urban models.

On the one hand, megacity forms—specifically modelled by the urban forms of cities of the global South—can be seen as a sub-set of the megalopolis model. Their emergence and continued growth can be understood as a symptom of the systemic international division of labour and investment, insofar as they harbour the conditions of possibility and the support systems for the megalopolitan urban system of the global North. Thus, they can be viewed in relational terms, as the necessary and enabling conditions of possibility for the global capitalist political system, as nodes within that system.

On the other hand, these forms are also being seen, more recently, as representing a kind of vanguard in the study of cities of the global South. As the megacity model is increasingly held by numerous practising architects and theorists.4 For architectural practices based in the North, the realization that much of the built environment of the world today bypasses the architect altogether constitutes a poignantly relevant revelation about the relevance of expertise.

Yet, the megacity as it stands today—in concept and in material forms—also constitutes, for some, an invitation to rethink urbanism and architectural practice. It is the disorder that challenges normative thinking both in terms of expectations and outcomes. But this view reflects a universalist gaze that draws on the metropolis and the megalopolis as normative models. As McGrath and Shane point out, these models are themselves being challenged by the processes and crisis of globalization that have rendered it necessary to reconsider the usefulness of certain urban models.

In connecting the developed and developing world through a system of urbanisms where specific cities are nodes and patches of dynamic interconnection, they draw attention to the untenable relationship between a 'universally attractive, flatter social landscape and casual suburban style in the developed nations' and the development of megacity slums. They show how the transition from a system of distinct metropolitans, serviced by their regional and colonial peripheries to a linked and open-ended urban system anchored by megaforms and mega-structures, yielded the shadow world of the Southern megacity as a hybrid form, that visually represents the sprawling megalopolitan urban system of post-war Euro-America whilst ideologically reproducing a colonial metropolitan structure.5

In his essay 'The Aesthetics of Superfluity,' Achille Mbembe (2004) makes this transition visible and palpable through his history of Johannesburg's metropolitan character. On his reading, Johannesburg's ambiguous position as a node in the colonial metropolitan–periphery relationship haunts efforts like those of the Johannesburg Development Authority (JDA), a public–private partnership, to re-centre Johannesburg as a critical node in the contemporary flows of global capital. The ruptures and continuities revealed by such a haunting are specifically visible in the built landscape, as new developments reflect colonial, metropolitan fantasies within a proliferating landscape of informal development and absolute poverty in the surrounding sprawl of former apartheid townships, as labour continues to be superfluous, the currency whose reckless and lavish expenditure sustains urban growth and neo-colonial wealth. This analysis is significant both for its particular reading of Johannesburg as well as its general applicability to other postcolonial cities, and connects with McGrath and Shane's analyses of interlocking urban forms and models in the contemporary city.

Some of the vibrant debate surrounding the megacity precisely concerns its shadowy presence as a 'patch' between the strategies of the metropolitan architect and the tactics of architects, planners, policy-makers and ordinary urban residents in their attempts to subalternise the presence of the vast majorities of urban residents excluded from full citizenship.6 Specifically, the questions that the megacity raises, as form, are questions about social composition and inclusion, questions concerning the nature of 'majorities' and their political status in relation to forms of governance, power and the equitable distribution of resources and outcomes. Not only do these urban situations of distress and breakdown invite reflection on these larger normative and ethical questions, but the processes by which residents of these cities survive in these extreme situations are increasingly also being seen as models for the kind of flexible, just-in-time urbanism that processes of globalization are likely to impose universally in the very near future, transcending the developed–developing world divide. Modelling the megacity as a 'patch' between the global North and the global South thus raises the possibility that these debates can serve as platforms for a more universal and inclusive understanding of urban systems. But before we can proceed to do that, it is necessary to unpack the dynamics of the universal and the particular in postcolonial understandings of modernity and their impact on urban theory and practice.

**MODERNITY: GLOBAL, NATIONAL, URBAN**

Whereas the experience of secular modernity in the West is explicitly associated with the development of the modern city, in the postcolonial contexts of Asia, Africa and Latin America liberal modernity with its associated promises of freedom and equality was often associated with the political form of the nation (see Chapters 11 and 12). Even a cursory survey of the literature on cities of the global South shows how closely their representations are tied to various forms of anxieties about their 'incomplete' or 'messy' relation to the urban imaginaries of metropolitan modernity. In a recent article, the Mexican anthropologist Néstor García Canclini (2008) writes about a 'tension between cultural and urban planning imaginaries' that has rendered Mexico City a 'more disorderly than baroque' place, in which different imaginaries are nevertheless shared. This tension arises from the implicit differences between cultural or particular imaginaries and the more universal posturing of urban planning imaginations. In regard to South Asia, numerous recent articles have pointed to a void in research about urban conditions and attribute this void specifically to the ideological relationship between nation-building and the promotion of village society as its ideal developmental space (see Khilnani 1998; Prakash 2002) The best-known proponents of rural development as the site of national progress are, of course, Gandhi and Mao.

In the postcolonial nationalist imaginary, therefore, there was an inevitable contest between a more positive apprehension of the city as an engine of modernity, modernization and development, and a more negative one connecting urban growth merely to the failures and exigencies of rural development, rather than having its own organic growth dynamic as a centre of trade, commerce and industry. By and large, the dominant historicist narrative of postcolonial ideologues described the unfolding of modern
development within a nationalist and rural frame, rejecting the specificity of urban formations as modern social and political spaces. For example, in his book *The Politics of the Governed*, Partha Chatterjee (2006) suggests that there was never an 'organic' imagination of the desired, modern Indian city of the future. He interprets India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru's invitation to Le Corbusier to design and build the city of the future as a sign of desperation and exhaustion on the part of the nationalist imagination as far as modernism/modernity in the city form was concerned. We must address this problem of imagining the city as a vehicle for modern culture because it plays a critical role in the material investments that have been made into urban development in many parts of the global South. A straightforward materialist account of corruption, developmental lags and bad governance fails to explain the conditions that prevail in many of the cities of the global South today. The problem of the disorderly and the dystopic metropolis is both a matter of thematics as well as of brute material facts.

These 'failures' must also be situated against normative models of urban form and the ethico-political difficulties of postcolonial imaginaries with these universalizing visions. These are not failures of postcolonial national imaginaries, rather they are ethico-political dilemmas faced by those nations in shaping their futures to be different from those of their colonizers while at the same time being recognizably modern. The literature on this subject is vast, especially in anthropology and history. However, twentieth-century processes of globalization on the one hand, and specifically the urban or, more broadly, the spatial turn in social sciences on the other hand, have done a great deal to question and problematize this division of regions and concepts of multiple and distinct modernities in seeking to produce normative and generative models for historical speculation.

As evidence for this claim, we point to the intensification of a particular kind of interest in these postcolonial cities after globalization. While scholars, activists and theorists have considerable interest in foregrounding the location of these cities as being part of a new geopolitical and spatial formation - the global South - characterized by extreme conditions of inequality, poverty and breakdown, there is also a growing literature that seeks to understand these cities as aspiring 'global cities' or at least as gateway cities or nodes in the global circulation of finance and manufacturing capital. These two sets of nominations - cities of the global South and 'global cities of the South' - are closely related but also distinct in terms of their political implications. I have argued elsewhere that the literature on the 'global cities of the South' can be read as shorthand for theoretical formulations that the South as their point of departure en route to a theory of globalization (Rao 2006). In other words, for these works, the megalopolis rather than the megalopolis - to use McGrath and Shane's history (Chapter 36) - forms the frame for generating a new urban model capable of addressing globalization, thereby reversing the customary 'West to the Rest' framing, or generating new framings, for producing normative models.

GLOBALIZATION AND URBANIZATION: MEGACITY AS META-MODEL

In their introductory text (Chapter 36), McGrath and Shane point to an older, institutional interest in these urban conditions by drawing on the history of the UN-Habitation conferences and other international and multilateral institutions, including the World Bank, as they began to register alarm over patterns of urban growth in the South. Mike Davis's provocative book *Planet of Slums* also takes up this particular history as a point of departure for an influential analysis of contemporary megacities (2007 [2006]). The book follows on from a path-breaking and provocative essay of the same name, published in *The New Left Review*, which is an extended reading of UN Habitat's 2003 report, *The Challenge of Slums: Global Report on Human Settlements 2003*. This report argued that slums constitute a crucial impediment to the recent explosion of urbanization across the planet, but especially in the global South. Davis' own reading focuses on the emergence of a 'surplus humanity', consisting of the people cut out of the formal world economy and driven into urban slums due to the decoupling of urbanization and capital from industrialization and development per se, as dictated by more than a decade of IMF-led structural adjustment programmes. These cities of the South, rather than being engines of growth, are instead dumping grounds for this 'surplus humanity'.

According to Davis, the slum represents the only 'true' or 'most natural' solution to the problem of warehousing the twenty-first century's surplus humanity' (Davis 2004, 28). In this view, globalization has rendered cities of the South into 'gigantic concentrations of poverty' whose formal manifestation is the slum. For Davis, the slum is both a territorial and a demographic form, for it is the physical evidence of the world-system's emergence of an informal proletariat from a decade of structural adjustments. However, the slum is not, of course, only a passive manifestation of the existence of a 'surplus humanity' but also a sign of things to come, historically speaking. Both the article and the book end by positioning the 'slum poor' as critical actors in the future of the 'War on Terror' which is envisaged to be turning into a war between the American empire and the slum poor. As historical subjects, Davis predicts that the 'slum poor' will inevitably tap into cultural and historical traditions of resistance. Thus, for example, he writes, '[e]verywhere the Modern slums constitute seemingly inexhaustable reservoirs of highly disciplined desperation'. But, he emphasizes that 'in the last instance - and this is our principal claim - this is not a war of civilizations but an oblique clash between the American imperium and the labor-power it has expelled from the formal world economy' (Davis 2004, 14).

This passage from slum as population and terrain, to slum as theory or ground for defining the global South, which privileges the historical process and the future of mankind, happens within a particular, historicist narrative that centralizes empire as the subject and object, and within which the 'global' appears as an analytic category. But this is a history that rests upon the Southern megacity as its proxy subject. For Davis, a new understanding of the global emerges by situating the spaces of these cities at the epicentre of the catastrophic appetite of global capital flows and turning these spaces into a new territorial principle of rule.

A different theorization of the future of modernity is found in Rem Koolhaas' work on non-Western cities, which privileges them as 'incubators of the future prospect of the global city' (Enwezor 2003, 113). Koolhaas' published work on non-Western cities has focused on the new cities of China and on Lagos. Focusing on Lagos, Koolhaas works out a theory of dysfunction as an incubator for the future. Instead of the impossibility of the putting-off to the future, we are offered a route to the future and thereby redeeming the history of modernity in its terminal stages through urban design strategies. Davis' position, also redemptive, suggests that cultural or civilizational depth rather than aesthetic and topographic arrangements will enable the cultivation of modernity's future. Koolhaas refers to Lagos as an 'Icon of West African urbanity...[that] inverts every essential characteristic of the so-called modern city' (quoted in Enwezor 2003, 113). Yet, because Lagos seems to 'work', Koolhaas suggests that studying the city from the point of view of traditional urban systems is likely to lead only to 'anguish over its shortcomings'. Instead, he sees that the reasons for the
continued functionality of Lagos and other megacities of the South should form the cause for revising our existing theories and models of urbanization.

Koolhaas suggests that rather than viewing the conditions of dysfunctionality as African ways of becoming modern, it is possible to argue that ‘Lagos represents a developed, extreme paradigmatic case-study of a city at the forefront of globalizing modernity. This is to say that Lagos is not catching up with us. Rather we may be catching up with Lagos’. This hyperbolic gesture, as Okwui Enwezor points out, might be, and indeed has been, interpreted as a ‘celebration of the pathological ... the unstable and the culture of the make-do’ (Enwezor 2003, 116). But Koolhaas goes further by situating these pathologies and excesses as evidence for the ‘exorbitant values of modernity and modernization’ in its globalizing moment, but always within a larger project interested in the dialectic between ‘decline and return’, between the ‘phantasmic and the destructive’, which runs through modernity. All locations are caught up to varying degrees and are joined together as evidence for this dialectic, with the ‘radiological landscapes’ of the African city functioning as a counterpoint to the advanced development of the ‘culture of congestion’ as represented by the emergent Asian city. In other words, these global cities exist as particular sites as part of a larger narrative of modernity.

Both these accounts, though based on the material realities of particular cities, strive to persuade readers of their generalized accounts of modern history and its ends. While empire is the subject of David’s history, design is similarly Koolhaas’ subject or protagonist. The Southern megacity becomes, in each account, a subject by proxy for a particular history of modernity and its terminal conditions, its excesses and its redemptive possibilities. However, as Matthew Gandy has pointed out in his essay on ‘Lagos’, Lagos is part of a larger urban form the end result of a particular historical trajectory rather than a signifier of the steady, or terminal state indicative of the end of modernity. For, as he puts it:

if Koolhaas and his colleagues, soaring over the city, can claim that the sight of the traders crammed beneath the Oshodi flyover is ‘proof and evidence’ that Lagos urbanism is ‘one that works,’ the conclusion is inescapable: in their perspective, it is the city’s ability to sustain a market that is the sole signifier of its health. (Gandy 2005, 59)

In ‘The Megacity: Decoding the Chaos of Lagos’, the journalist George Packard also poses a useful counterpoint to Koolhaas’ claim that Lagos is not: ‘a kind of backward situation’ but, rather, ‘an announcement of the future’. Packard writes: ‘As a picture of the urban future, Lagos is fascinating only if you’re able to leave it. After just a few days in the city’s slums, it is hard to maintain Koolhaas’ intellectual excitement. What he calls “self-organization” is simply collective adaptation to extreme hardship’ (Packard 2006). Packard’s account, like that of many scholars writing broadly within a policy framework, steers firmly away from historical generalizations and instead examines urban conditions inductively, attempting to move towards new understandings of politics.

Others have turned to examining these conditions for different reasons. For Teddy Cruz (2005), for example, the most “congested and critical thresholds of the current global socio-political geographies” can inform these efforts. But here we will return to conceptualizations of the ‘global cities of the South’ and to the ‘southern turn’ in theorizing the contemporary city, which we alluded to at the beginning of this section in order to foreground the role of globalization in theorizing the contemporary city and in seeking ideas for its future.

**URBAN INFORMALITY: OFFICIAL POLICIES**

As should be clear from the preceding review, the material and experiential conditions of the Southern megacity have provided an enormously fertile ground for contemporary theorizations of space, capital and modernity. I stress the theoretical aspects of the debates that these conditions have engendered specifically to highlight the ethical implications of urban research. The idea of the slum, as much as the slum as a physical spatial manifestation of certain social, economic and cultural conditions, has generated questions about citizenship, rights and belonging, as well as theories of history and predictions about modernity. As David Satterthwaite summarizes them, the policy and political options with regard to low-income populations living in such situations are limited to just four types of policies, which have been used sequentially or simultaneously in numerous cities across the globe: the South. These options are ‘removing them (i.e. bulldozing), upgrading them, preventing or ignoring them (Satterthwaite 2008).’

Satterthwaite writes ‘in reality, most city governments implement a mixture of these — although few have policies with the fourfold type of solutions to prevent them’ (emphasis added). In addition, one might observe the recursive relationship between the policies and the populations that they call forth, often labeled the ‘urban poor’, which disregards the enormous heterogeneity, both in terms of class and in terms of strategies through which these citizens substantiate their presence in the city.

As Satterthwaite further points out, in every city there is a mismatch between the demand for affordable housing of fair quality and its supply. ‘But,’ he writes, ‘the proportions of the city’s population that has this problem varies from less than 1 percent to over 50 percent’. Similarly, he also points out that historically, ‘in large part, “slums” came to exist and to be measured because governments introduced official standards against which to judge buildings or particular groups of buildings or neighbourhoods’. Much of the housing stock in cities prior to the industrial revolutions, he writes, ‘would have been designated “slums” if these same
official standards had been applied then. These standards include both qualitative markers, such as building maintenance, provision of infrastructure and services, density and building quality, as well as legal markers, such as contraventions of designated land use or building regulations. Thus 'urban informality' is bound to cover a range of situations in which building stock, design, layout and aspects of occupation contravene aspects of regulation.

Yet, these contraventions are both enabling and generative, especially in economic terms, serving to create territories that provide locationally competitive access to income-generating opportunities. These insights about demand and supply of housing stock, its quality and strategies of access, are of course important indicators of the history of urbanization and the explosive growth of urban economies across the world in the post-World-War-II period. As McGrath and Shane show (Chapter 36), the megalopolitan model emerges in this period, particularly in the United States. Across the Atlantic, European post-war modernism was being supported by a variety of initiatives including the Marshall Plan. Simultaneously, similar forms of urban expansion, albeit less acknowledged, were occurring across the postcolonial, post-imperial: world in the wake of the collapse of European colonial empires. The linkages between these historical moments of urban expansion provides the meta-context for the twinning of the megalopolitan urban model with the reality of the megalopolis.

While analyses of urban policy reveal various problems with approaches of mitigation, a question remains about the homogenizing assumptions of policy-makers whose practices produce equivalences between a wide variety of forms of urban settlement and economy. Throughout this chapter, we have stressed the emergence of the slum as the paradigmatic conceptual and material form through which such equivalence is effected. In this section, we will consider two sets of literature around these questions in specific relation to the Indian megacity in the era of global finance capital. In both these literatures, the slum and, by extension, urban informality is mobilized as the theoretical grounding for arguments about politics. This literature emerges, as it were, from the perspective of the 'cities of the global South' rather than from the externalized perspective of global history or global design.

The first set of arguments is exemplified by the recent work of anthropologist Arjun Appadurai and historian Partith Chatterjee, which takes the slum - as demographic, legal and territorial construct - as a central point of departure. In this work, the relation between dysfunction and the future of modernity under conditions of globalization is treated specifically in relation to the practices of democracy. Despite the obvious differences in the conceptualizations of their respective projects, Appadurai and Chatterjee’s work can be read together through the lens of governmentality. Each author seeks to chart the emergence of geographies of governance within which groups of marginalized citizens seek to make claims upon the state. The slum is at the epicentre of each account, both as material and conceptual construct signaling disenfranchisement.

For Chatterjee (2006), these claims of the marginalized are fundamentally different from the claims of full citizens or those whose "political fraternity" is theoretically affirmed as one and indivisible through the
mediation of the nation. According to him, the claims of the marginalized are advanced through their participation in patently illegal activities, violating the rules upon which civil society is founded, including the transgression of property laws and so on. Illegality and informality thus tug at the normative roots of the state, leading to an arena charged with the violence of and toward the governed. These forms of violence are staged around the paternalistic welfare policies of the state designed to placate and manage populations whose civic, political and social rights are patently out of sync. Chatterjee understands the new landscapes of violence and conflict as emerging from what he calls the 'embourgeoisement' of the Indian city in the era of global capital, with a return of civil society groups to the active arena of politics, making claims as fully enfranchised citizens upon the public spaces of the city. Thus the city is a battleground where the battle is now a three-way fight for control, involving the state, bourgeois civil society groups and disenchanted groups who fall outside the sphere of the bourgeois civil society of fully empowered citizens.

Appadurai's recent work, published in a series of essays in the journal Public Culture (2000; 2002) takes the rhetoric and practices of a Mumbai-based but globally linked urban activist movement of slum dwellers and their supporters as its point of departure. The movement comprises an alliance of three distinct activist groups, including the National Slum Dwellers Federation (a powerful, grassroots organization), a women's collective called Mahula Milan, and a non-profit support and resource group called SPARC. This alliance is principally concerned with 'gaining secure tenure of land, adequate and durable housing, and access to elements of urban infrastructure, notably to electricity, transport, sanitation and allied services' (Appadurai 2002, 23). On Appadurai's reading, the claims made by this group of organizations are their ability to turn their life experiences and strategies of survival - which are viewed as 'illegal' from the point of view of the state and elite, empowered groups - into legitimate knowledge about surviving poverty. Furthermore, they are also interested in marketing that knowledge to the state and other agencies concerned with the amelioration of their situation as precedents in the elimination of poverty.

It is important to note that Appadurai's analysis is centred on the strategies of such groups to turn illegal and illegitimate occupations into legitimate grounds for making claims of citizenship. This is analytically distinct from the arguments of theorists like John Turner who base their recommendations to states about slum upgrading on the economic value of the slum as urban territories. Like Chatterjee, Appadurai is concerned with the slum as a space from which new strategies of governance and self-governance are emerging for disempowered citizens all over the world, rather than as a space to be managed by the state through the gradual provision of incentives. Specifically, Appadurai's analysis is based on three theoretical assumptions - first, concerning the emergence of 'new forms of globally organized power and expertise with the "skin" or "casing" of existing nation-states'; second, concerning a 'crisis of redundancy' afflicting the nation-state, as different dimensions of governance are disengaged from each other; and third, concerning the 'explosive growth of non-governmental organizations of all scales and varieties'. Appadurai carefully charts the empirical landscape of Mumbai in the 1990s (when liberalization policies were officially adopted by the Indian government). Within this landscape, the crisis of housing holds a very special place since it is precisely the point around which much of Mumbai's psychic life is organized (Appadurai 2000).

Taken together, these theoretical points of entry push Appadurai to read the actions of such globally linked urban activist groups as an extension of 'deep democracy'. Both Chatterjee and Appadurai are concerned with the political participation of the urban poor, who stand as the demographic and territorial sign of the Indian city. Extrapolating from this example, we might say that preoccupation with the tension between the city and nation as antagonistic sites of modernity in the global South has given way to attempts at understanding the new states of social and spatial emergency as a result of the crisis of governance in the era of globalization. Both authors chart the emergence of new mechanisms of political participation in self-governance, but they do so assuming the inevitability of urban transformation driven specifically by the interests of global capital.

However, as Ananya Roy shows in a recent essay, the concern with inclusion and participation does not fundamentally challenge the grounds upon which such urban renewal or transformation projects - in most cases driven by public-private partnerships - are based (Roy 2009). This landscape is what Solomon Benjamin refers to as the landscape of the 'mega' - the megaproject or megacity if one likes (Benjamin 2002; 2007). 'Mega', then, is the meta-sign of the contemporary city of the global South and a political-landscape that is engulfing most megacities of the global South as they attempt to compete for global capital investments. Roy and Benjamin's work pushes the conceptual boundaries of the consideration of urban informality by questioning the very bases on which projects of participation and inclusion are formulated.

Much of the recent work of the Alliance that Appadurai writes about is concerned with fair and just resettlement of the communities being displaced by the construction of these megaprojects, rather than with questioning the codes upon which transformation is based. Thus the politics of participation is primarily a politics that is concerned with adequate representation and restitution for the poor in the processes of urban transformation, without questioning the design and parameters of such transformation. Accounts like those of Appadurai and Chatterjee, in other words, are less concerned with how the urban territories that are being transformed, specifically informal urban territories, are constituted in the first place, and more with the fairness of the costs and sacrifices to be borne by their occupants in the process of urban renewal.

CONCLUSION: MEGACITY AS URBAN MODEL

From the viewpoint of design research, the historical question of how informal urban territories are constituted, as well as how they are imagined, is of particular interest, for it might yield new codes for renewal and justice at the urban scale, beyond and outside the ambit of the hegemonic policy and project landscapes of today - whether these are projects of mega-developers or megaprojects of the state, including welfare projects. Here too, the particular understanding of slum as theory or as imaginary, rather than as empirical objects of political power, locating the 'meta' character of the megacity, or for positioning the megacity of the global South as a 'patch' that can yield inclusive insights about contemporary global urbanism. Solomon Benjamin's ethnographic work on urban economies and territories and AbdouMaliq Simone's recent work on what he calls 'majority' districts in Jakarta raise crucial questions about the constitution of informality, and its implications for the design of the future city and its relation to planning (Benjamin 2007; 2008; Simone 2009). Both Benjamin and Simone, as well as scholars like Pieterse, stress in different ways, that the problem with much contemporary urban theory lies in its inevitable framing from the point of view of planning. By enshrining the plan as normative, they argue, urbanists miss out the range of everyday practices of place-making, and the different scales of economic activity that substantiate the posts of different groups and communities in the city.

With the exception of places like Mumbai, where the majority does reside in officially
deemed slums, in most cities of the global South, the numerical majority and their heterogenous forms of urban occupation become invisible as they come to be absorbed into the aggrandizing logics of urban space by large-scale property developments. They also become invisible as the imaginary of the slum takes over the horizon of planning and policy. These majority districts exhibit patterns of what Solomon Benjamin calls 'occupancy urbanism', or practices of settle- ment in which the intersection of diverse income groups, built environments, histories and local economies allow these territories to constitute production systems in and of themselves. Benjamin’s project on ‘occupancy urbanism’ is concerned with ethnographically charting the transformative potential of material views of ‘localism’ and locality, and the development of localities as economic terrains through the creative play with regulatory structures and authorities. It is not accidental that Benjamin’s chosen method is ethnography or close ground observation at the bottom-up level. Benjamin asserts that ‘occupancy urbanism shows how incrementally developing land around diverse tenures forms the basis for a substantive economy’ (2007, 549, emphasis added).

By carefully studying the methods by which these informal and illicit forms of urban occupancy gain substance rather than simply legitimacy, Benjamin’s work challenges the forms of urban futures that are imagined by projects at the ‘mega’ scale. Megacity planning – with its particular scales of property and infrastructure development – is contrasted with ‘occupancy urbanism’, which imagines the city as an interlocking set of scalar economic and territorial forms rather than as a singular, ‘mega’ entity, anchored by mega-structures, including the vertical mega-blocks that are imagined to be the solution to the crisis of informal settlements in various cities of the global South.

These new urban ethnographies rearticulate the questions of politics, participation and expertise in ways that are somewhat distinct from the preceding work reviewed in this chapter. Focusing on the substantive dimensions of occupation and the formation of urban terrains that generate scalar differences in plugging into larger urban economic networks, these more recent works open up new spaces of interest to both social scientists and designers. In so doing, they attempt to overcome a critical divide between the social science and design professions. This divide, we suggest, has implications for how we view different actors in the process of rethinking what constitutes urban community.

Whereas an earlier generation of urban ethnography leveraged the imaginary of the slum to generate insights about politics and participation, there was little attention to the design dimension of the rearticulated city. Design and questions of planning are treated as tools of intervention after the fact of securing adequate representation and rights to the city through a strategic politics of inclusion. More recent calls for ‘participatory design’ also follow the lineage of urban thought that focuses political organizers and activists, because they are focused either on the maintenance and upgrading of the existing heritage or the development of more just and inclusive forms of urban residency. What these approaches miss is a critical understanding of the relationship between theories of the urban and their framing from the point of view of planning. These approaches implicitly view planning as a tool for intervention, which itself is deemed necessary and inevitable. Design actions, whether invoking ‘participatory approaches’ or not, are undertaken by assuming the normative outcome, a priori. At the theoretic level, the focus on abstract philosophical terms connected to rights to the city and participation itself as the overarching political and policy goal has succeeded in giving a certain currency to the megacity as a model of urbanism. For participation itself, in the ways it has been extracted from struggles within the cities of the global South by scholars like Appadurai and Chatterjee, has become the normative condition with, aspiring toward.

The imaginary of the slum thus produces a model or a representation of self-conscious building extrapolated from existing conditions and posits this representation as a proposition that might inform future developments. Yet, as we revealed, a new generation of urban theory and modelling is beginning to realize the critical necessity of addressing the problem of participation outside of the normative horizons of planning. These works begin by questioning the assumptions of norms and horizons a priori, and instead begin investigations from the perspective of substantive forms on the ground. Thus, research itself begins from designs for living on the ground rather than viewed from the air, as does Koollhass in his work on Lagos, or viewed as precedent setting forms of suffering and vulnerability in Appadurai’s interpretation of the work of the Alliance. Theories of ‘occupancy urbanism’ for example eschew this a priori understanding of normativity. Instead, these thinkers seem to stress a different approach to normativity, which, following the French philosopher Georges Canguilhem, stresses the continual generation of new forms and states of normativity through the constant debate between life and its milieux.

Since design actions depend fundamentally upon such a continual articulation of life and its milieux, and therefore on the generation and development of worlds and states of normativity, these new theoretical endeavors might formally begin to address the relationship between the social sciences and the design professions. In particular, the emphasis that this new generation of urban theory places on the role of the imaginary, the focus on abstract philosophical terms connected to the imaginary and regulatory complexity rejects the operating classificatory schemes that insist on dividing urban landscapes into formal and informal, and legal and illegal. Indeed it casts new light on the vocabulary of rights and claims, as it becomes clearer that ‘urban residents are ... concerned about what kinds of games, instruments, languages, sight lines, constructions and objects can be put into play in order to anticipate new alignments of social initiatives and resources and thus capture city’.

Within the social sciences, the peculiarity of the urban as research context lies in the constant blurring of lines between research and design, or between the production of knowledge and its translation into acts of renovation and repair. Research itself, in other words, becomes a part of the circuit of breakdown, repair and renovation that characterizes the city. 'Megacity research in particular has become particularly entwined with policy-making, and therefore the boundaries between observation and participation, between critical distance and ethical expertise, are constantly breaking down. In such a context, scholarship that thinks through the relationship between participation and expertise is critical, particularly because the imaginary of participation is a key component in the emergence of the megacity as a valid, ethical model, or even a prototype of urban futures.

The problem with this understanding of the megacity, however, is that the theoretical landscape of the slum has rendered invisible other forms of participation in the urban economy and community. Correspondingly, the role of design has been reduced to a tool of intervention rather than one of innovation – even of disruptive innovation – drawing on the premise to be diagnostic and speculative. Both within academic and policy frameworks, the urban context of the global South has been largely thought through particular, normative hypotheses about what cities should generate – the good life, conviviality, friendship, citizenship and political economy. As a result, through developmentalism with its ideologies of a productive citizenry. Increasingly, even progressive academia and activism accept the inevitability of the marriage of these goals with global economic integration. The trial of development, productive citizenship and urban design and planning within the ambit of global capitalism seems to lock urban collectivities into particular visions
of urban futures, ones that are resolutely modernist. But there is a different understanding of knowledge production, one that reverses the relationship between research and design, breaking down the existing link between research and design by positioning design itself as research method, as a method for probing the provisional, and for discerning, as well as producing emergent states and forms of normativity from the careful ethnographic study of the contestation between life and its milieu that characterizes the contemporary urban world. In this regard, forms of representational thinking—such as those exemplified by surveys and statistical methods—must be supplemented by representational thinking, for which techniques for visualizing data become critical. Such visualization exercises, like ethnography, are necessarily partial, open-ended and speculative.

Teddy Cruz’s practice, with which we opened this chapter is but one example of this kind of critical work, moreover one that involves learning and interchange across the ‘political equator’ of the global North and the global South. Solomon Benjamin’s studies of localities through the rubric of ‘occupancy urbanism’ is another example. Numerous student research projects have begun to build tools for ‘remote ethnography’ using the design capabilities of new media technologies to build new arguments for intervention, rather than constituting interventions in and of themselves. These examples are an invitation to think the megacity beyond the ‘slum problem’. For to remain within the theoretical paradigms of the ‘planet of slums’ is to remain within the realm of design as a universal solvent in the modernist sense, and therefore to reproduce the problems of modernist urban planning. New methods for understanding the city increasingly position the city as an interactive diagram which has the potential to be acted on by multiple actors simultaneously. This means that we must pay attention to the speculative, innovative and productive potentialities of emergent collectivities, rather than assuming what such collectivities desire as outcomes.

NOTES

1. I use the term normative to signal the moral underpinnings of much of urban planning theory and practice. The idea of normativity as a basis for social order, as well as for knowledge about it, has been investigated in depth by the French theorist, George Canguilhem in his book, The Normal and Pathological (1991). Canguilhem shows how questions of the normative underlie not only the empirical conditions studied by social scientists but also how they inform the production of knowledge in the social sciences. Normative conditions and outcomes are also, of course, assumed by planners and architects whose practice involves the invocation of ideal-conditions and ethical constraints that inform their practice (see, for example, Shane, 2005). Throughout this text I therefore use the term normative as a term that crosses over, and is meaningful both to architects and social scientists.

2. See Berman (1982) for an elaboration of this understanding of modernity as a mainstay of destruction in the pursuit of innovation and ‘progress’. Berman also shows how this seemingly universal understanding of modernity as innovative pressure plays out differently in diverse urban contexts with particular political histories, such as New York, Paris and St. Petersburg.

3. Throughout this essay I use ‘design’, ‘design actions’ and ‘design practice’ by broadening both the urban scale as well as the professional expert. I am concerned with practices of making, building and inhabiting urban spaces as works of design.

4. In addition to Teddy Cruz’s work reflecting on the relation between research on informal urban conditions and architectural practice, Koolhaas’ Project on the City series (2002) is also significant and has drawn both praise and criticism for its reach in connecting research and design questions.

5. The third model that they propose, that of the metacity, is an elaboration of the emergent urban region; most easily visible in the apparently messy confluence of agriculture, industry and digital networks in global cities region around the world, including both developing and developed countries.

6. This distinction between strategies and tactics as forms of actions available from different positions viz-à-viz institutions of power is famously made by Michel de Certeau (1984) in the essays collected in The Practice of Everyday Life.

7. Historian Gyan Prakash (2002) has described the political and analytic consequences of this position in relation to the idea of the ‘Urban Turn’.


9. On the urban turn in the social sciences, see specifically Soja (1989) following on a revival of interest in the Marxist philosopher Henri Lefebvre’s writings on the production of space. Arjun Appadurai (1990) and Achille Mbembe (2001), have challenged notions of modernity in very different ways. Appadurai, for example posits that modernity is ‘at large’, a project that is shaped differently in different historical, local and cultural circumstances, while Mbembe posits the spatio-temporal concept of the ‘post-colony’ as a complex space in which colonial relations of domination remain, emergent rather than transcended in space and time, implying a degree of continuity between colonial and de-colonized societies in regard to forms of governance and sociality. In doing so, he questions a division between colonizer and colonized over power and its abuse, thus theorizing modernity through the lens of the historical singularity of colonialism rather than respect and cultural difference. See also Chapters 1 and 3.


11. Of course this view of the slum as evidence solely for the existence of an ‘informal proletariat’ has been contested both by well-meaning critics and activists who point to the enormity diversity among slum-dwellers across the world with regard to occupation and marks of identity, as well as by others who are concerned with the problem of consciousness in the building of these communities, and who raise questions about the logic of design. I would suggest that the slum might be the outcome, not simply of spon­taneous and make-shift arrangements for living, but in fact an outcome of design processes that are more or less deliberate.

12. Although this is not the occasion for it, it would be interesting to position the Marxian, libera­tionist teleology of modernity that Davis articulates in In Xanadu (1988) in the context of the understanding of modernity that Koolhaas operates with. Best articulated in his Delusional New York (1978), Koolhaas’ understanding of modernity does not offer a modernist understanding of historical redemption, but rather foregrounds the oscillation between states of coherence and states of delirium as an ongoing process without any definitive finale.

13. The section editors wish to thank David Satterthwaite for the development of several interlocking, scale-sensitive and cumulative policies—both ‘hard’ (e.g. transport, sanitation and water infrastructures) and ‘soft’ (e.g. right of occupation and de facto security) policies, extracting value from these urban territories (Turner 1997).


15. Normative planning is usually a large-scale, top-down operation by the state, large landowners, corporations or community. Modernist planning presumed the total control and design of all urban and industrial systems by either the state or by large landowners. This view has been proved impossible on a global scale or even on a scale of the metropolis or megalopolis, leading to the proliferation of economies at different scales and forms of occupation that are not considered legitimate because they are seen to be fulfilling a crucial need.

16. Benjamin defines occupancy urbanism in the following way: "It proposes the concept of Occupancy Urbanism as a way to read the everyday city and its spaces of politics. The city is understood as an intense dynamic that is being built incrementally via multiple contestations of land and location. This concept poses the urban “frontier” as an oppositional site rather than accepting it as a definitive edge to Capital. This site, built around land, economy and politics, is shaped by multi-dimensional histories embedded in daily practice.”

17. See, for example ‘participatory design’ works such as the workshop (http://www.urbanityphono.com) and related cells
for participatory design cells to support 'user-generated cities'.

21 Among others, Grahame Shane has argued that the difference between urban planning and urban design can be characterized as scalar. According to Shane, urban design emerges after World War II in response to the failure of top-down planning that sought to control all urban systems through centralization. Urban design provides a method for planning large fragments rather than controlling the entire system (see Shane 2005).

22 As mentioned earlier, I am using the term 'design actions' in a loose way, distinct from urban design as a professional practice, to include building and other actions related to infrastructure use, ecology and urban habitation in general. This is to acknowledge the role of non-expert actors in the production as well as inhabitation of the built environment.