A list of numbers flashes up above the entrance to the DP World container terminal on Simblast Rd, Port Botany, signalling to the truck drivers parked along the edge of the road when they can enter the terminal to pick up or drop off a container.

Each of these numbers refers to a ‘vehicle booking slot’, an agreed period within which a truck must enter the port and be serviced by the stevedore. Booked online days in advance, each of these slots refers to both an entry window into the terminal and a container to be picked up for import or dropped off for export.

As the truck enters the port in compliance with their slot, RFID chips on their chassis trigger a variety of digital interactions – both automated and manual – that are designed to ensure that the right container is loaded onto the right truck in the shortest period of time with the least crane movements necessary.

Truck entry to Patrick’s Port Botany has been governed through the release of vehicle booking slots since 1999. In 2011, the VBS became the site of intervention by the ports authority into the operations of its leaseholders, DP World and Patrick Stevedores; the slot became the means of reorganising the operator’s relationships with various terminal users. In accordance with state government legislation set out in the Port Botany Landside Improvement Strategy, each of these slots now carries with it a series of requirements that specify how late or how early a truck can arrive without being fined. It specifies, furthermore, the amount of time that can be taken to go from gate-in to gate-out without similar fines being levied at the stevedore. Thus truck movements through the space of the port are governed by the temporalities that the slot is made to carry; their position in the terminal is imagined relative to the window legislated for that slot, with a redirection in landside processes - changing the order of trucks serviced from a sequence that more efficiently moves multiple containers onto multiple trucks to one that ensures that a particular truck leaves the port on time – triggered by the impending end of the window, so as to avoid government determined fines being levelled at the stevedore.

In other words, the vehicle booking slot works to calibrate the switching in scale and mode of commodity flows; it is a point in time in the transition between maritime and land-based flows, as containers previously moved from ships to the wharf and then to the yard, are loaded onto trucks for urban distribution. The transition from sea to land or land to sea is not immediate; the movement from quayside to landside can take a few hours or days, depending on multiple processes and decisions enacted relative to each container. The container may be slowed or halted through the border’s extension in space and time in the dispersed operations of quarantine and customs; carriers may decide to exploit the wharf as free storage prior to distribution, maximising the time containers are left in the terminal before fines are levied by the operator; alternatively, containers may remain on the wharf due to the mismatch between the times of operation of the port and the operating hours of individual warehouses.
The slowing or halting of the container is a glitch in the city or port understood as an integrated logistics system. Each glitch, furthermore, introduces other frictions into the system, further testing its resilience and fault tolerance. The glitch of mismatched times becomes visible in the extra booking slots that are made available on a Monday and Tuesday, and in the trucks that queue at the gate to service these slots, causing congestion in the streets surrounding the port. These trucks arrive to pick up containers that had built up on the wharf over the weekend, delivering them to warehouses that remain closed while ships are unloaded 24/7. Other frictions become visible in the queues of trucks that clog up Parramatta Rd, the main arterial link between the Port Botany and the western suburbs where the majority of distribution centres and warehouses are located.

These frictions and glitches emerge as the organisation of the city as logistics system encounters the latencies and limits of the infrastructure and urban configurations of the industrial city. The ideal model of the city as logistics system is embedded in the urban plans and the branding for urban configurations such as Dubai Logistics World. This is the city as ‘enclave’ or ‘zone of exemption’, where – as Easterling argues - local jurisdictions are erased, replaced by the rules of the special economic zone. Built from scratch as a logistics city, Dubai Logistics World echoes the functions of the industrial city: manufacture and production. It is instead dedicated to the facilitation and synchronisation commodity flows, enabling the increasing fragmentation and extension of supply chains that start and end elsewhere.

Cowen argues that models and representations of space are ‘vital to the production of lived space’, the way that space is imagined affects its management and regulation. And so, government and industry intervention into the operation of Port Botany and the surrounding city – to make its spaces more efficient, more productive, and limits of the infrastructure and urban configurations of the industrial city. The ideal model of the city as logistics system is embedded in the urban plans and the branding for urban configurations such as Dubai Logistics World. This is the city as ‘enclave’ or ‘zone of exemption’, where – as Easterling argues - local jurisdictions are erased, replaced by the rules of the special economic zone. Built from scratch as a logistics city, Dubai Logistics World echoes the functions of the industrial city: manufacture and production. It is instead dedicated to the facilitation and synchronisation commodity flows, enabling the increasing fragmentation and extension of supply chains that start and end elsewhere.

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as a global phenomenon seems to be constitutive of Chinese artists’ success. In this way, ‘contemporary Chinese art’ has come to epitomize the attractiveness of Others for a Western audience, thus providing a new frontier for the art market. One of the ensuing effects of this process is the constitution of a new object of knowledge within the Western academy, where ‘Chinese contemporary art’ tends to be considered as a social and cultural phenomenon to be investigated as a complex entity carrying within itself a number of contradictions, positions and discourses.

2. What also struck me during the Transit Labour workshops was the ways in which the presentations were mostly based on empirical research and fieldwork, so that the analysis was always predicated on first hand experiences. But at the same time – and this has to do with my own interest in art – there was no discussion about how the transformations discussed during the Transit Labour project were articulated within artistic production itself. This brings me to my second point, which has to do with a set of methods, practices, and tactics that are crucial to the more critical positions that have recently emerged in the art field. Some parallels can be drawn between those positions and the kind of experimental fieldwork that was proposed in the Transit Labour project, which include ethnographic methods, interviews, the researcher’s own mobility, collaborations and dialogues with native researchers or activists.

A similar approach to the issues that form the core of the Transit Labour project can be found in art: spaces, borders, mobility, and labour within the flux of global capital are crucial questions for art today. In particular, the development of experimental forms of documentary languages within the art world has played an important role in finding out new ways to address these political issues visually, be it in the form of the installation, the visual essay, or the archival reconstruction. It seems to me that the politics and poetics expressed in these various positions often intersect with the inquiry methods we have experienced in the platform.

For example, Bouchra Khalili’s recent video installation – The Seaman, 2012 – shares aspects of this experimental method since, in order to produce this work, the artist had to carry on a series of inquiries, encounters, trips, researches and fieldwork. The video reflects upon one of the key aspects discussed during the Sydney platform: the materiality of the container economy and the labour conditions it produces. The Seaman confronts a night view of the port in Hamburg with the voice of a young Filipino seafarer recounting his own experience of constantly being in transit. The image of the mechanical loading and unloading of containers, in a landscape deprived of any form of human life, is challenged by the young man’s voice-over in which he acutely analyses the economic structures that determine his oppression. One could argue that the core of this work lies somewhere between the man’s powerful presence and subjectivity, and the objectifying conditions of labour in transit.

3. The Forgotten Space is a visual essay by artist Allan Sekula and film director Noel Burch, released in 2010. The film describes the tension that is constitutive of the container economy: the invisibility of the maritime space and its crucial role in contemporary capitalism. The forgotten space of the title is the maritime space, mostly ‘out of sight, out of mind’, as the voice over says at the beginning of the film, reminding us that this space is nevertheless what binds the world together: 90% of the world commerce travels by sea. However this tends to be forgotten because financial capitalism has produced a powerful representation of economic exchange as something immaterial, which then gives the impression that the maritime economy is becoming obsolete. The Forgotten Space is a film about containers, barges, trains and trucks, as well as workers, engineers, planners, and politicians and those marginalized by the global transport system. In a journey among displaced villagers and farmers on the Belgian and Dutch coast, underpaid truck drivers in Los Angeles, seafarers between Asia and Europe, and factory workers in China, the film uses a range of materials as documentary, interviews, archive stills and footage, clips from old movies.

No wonder then that the film’s central protagonist is, in fact, the container, the standardized and static vehicle for trade that is also and foremost a box, permanently in transit through ships, trains, and trucks. Who cares what’s inside? The specific form of the box produces a representation of trade as something anonymous, secret, and abstract. The container has thus come to signify a specific vision of the world economy as a connective, immaterial space of exchange. As the film argues, the circulation of containers effects different and heterogeneous forms of labour, and its consequences are far from being immaterial for a number of workers including truck drivers in California, Filipino domestic workers in Hong Kong, seafarers in South-East Asia, or factory workers in southern China. Container economics and logistics also sweep aside everything they encounter in their journeys across the global space: entire villages are submerged in Holland and Belgium in order to expand the local ports.
and culture play a predominant role in imagining the
and the emergence of a new urban landscape where art
between the crisis of the European industrial economy
link might seem, the film shows the interconnections
migrant labour, and the museum. As surprising as this
upon the intersections between container logistics,
regarding the role played by art institutions
Sydney and more generally with what I discussed above
Particular sections of the film draw specific connections
with some of our field trips in Shanghai, Kolkata, and
In this respect, the so-called ‘Bilbao effect’ is
paradigmatic. In this city, in which the port once
played a significant role, the industrial economy has
been replaced by the most spectacular of all world
containers; the Guggenheim museum. The Guggenheim
museum in Bilbao has become a symbol of the
contemporary narrative that presents the maritime
economy as obsolete. This museum significantly
reproduces the form of a steel ship, a permanently
shining lighthouse. As if time had collapsed, the
container parks in Khidderpore, the port area of
Kolkata, the area bustled with the clattering sound of
hammers and sparks coming out of welding machines as
workers repaired containers. In fact, there our visit was
initiated by few workers taking tea break in a tea stall
adjacent to the container park who led us to the office
of the container park:
Back in Sydney, the MCS container park ran under
technological surveillance, wireless devices navigating
ways to ensure smooth turn-around time.
With technological intervention the turnaround
time has been reduced from 2 hours to 20 min in this
container park. The ways in which containers find their
way into container parks, ports, and become subject of
labouring subjects; it also requires our engagement as
platform: a representation that is predicated on the erasure
of the material conditions of its existence.
As we entered the Maritime Container Services Park
(MCSP), Sydney on 6 July 2012, one could see lines of
containers of various shapes lined up in neat columns
and huge trucks with containers negotiating their way
to find a space for containers. The manager said, ‘We
export air’. As he showed us around, navigating our
bus through the empty pavements amidst thousands of
containers stacked up in neat rows, there were several
trucks with containers which came to unload the
containers. What struck me and one of my other
Indian colleagues was the absence of a work-force.
Miles away in 2011, when we had visited one of the
container parks in Khidderpore, the port area of
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living laboratory spaces, also reveal to us the ways in
which the maritime economy constitutes an important
part of the transnational economy and the ways in
which the labouring subject comes under the gaze of
surveillance, as newer technologies are introduced to
increase productivity.
These two distinct sites of logistical operations
were encountered as part of the Sydney and Kolkata
platforms; they formed part of the collaborative
exercise of using ‘platform’ as a methodological
tool to interrogate the formation of transit labour.
Methodologically, organizing the platform has been
challenging and as I look back at my experience of
Sydney and Kolkata platforms I feel that in this project
we have taken on some of the issues concerning
‘ethnography’ as a method. With a mixed group of
political scientists, media practitioners, architects,
humanists, urban planners, web designers and
anthropologists, Transit Labour as a ‘platform’
engaged with the field as a site and how it transforms
and mediates across spaces. While the workings of
the platform were steeped in ideas of ‘multi-sited
ethnography’, in the way that Shanghai, Kolkata and
Sydney were studied by individual researchers, in my
eyes the platform evolved the idea of field as sites
of encounter.
The discussion with scientists at NICTA, Sydney,
and activists from As齐gath Jam-e-Bahia Committee,
Kolkata (which were initiated by local collaborating
organisations), open up the ‘field’ as a site so that it
is no longer simply a sacrosanct site to be represented
in our texts, reports and short essays. The ‘field’ is
no longer limited to the spatial locations of Rajarhat,
Container Parks of Sydney and our interactions with
labouring subjects; it also requires our engagement as
labouring subjects (as participants of the project) in the
transient forms of labouring spaces we inhabit, engage
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One of the reflections on Sydney platform was the
‘absence’ of transit labour or labour forms in the study
on Port Botany. While the invisibilisation of the labour
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representatives reflect a different picture. The mobility
of labour forms and the reasons for their invisibility,
well known to us, was represented to us vividly in the
Living Laboratory project where the main objective of
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time of logistics as the key to ensuring the availability
of goods and services. One of the interesting presentations
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In this interesting slide, there was no representation
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FIELD/S AS SITES OF ENCOUNTER

ISHITA DEY

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slide again impels us to reflect on the ways in which we
have trained our eyes as ethnographers to locate and
identify our subjects. Trained in the art of ‘observation’ and ‘participant observation’, my experience with these field sites represent an exemplary experiment to re-engage with ‘ethnography’ as a method where we engaged with field sites, performed our roles as actor/s and participants in Kolkata and Sydney.

Through the re-creation of ‘field objects’, the ‘living laboratory’ turns its gaze on to itself. In this case, the wine supply network - from the vineyards to the shelves of the stores - was recreated in the laboratory space. In this recreated field site of the wine supply network, the logistical network of the supply chain is represented by huge LCD screens. Here, the scientist participates in the wine-supplier’s network through the recreation of the field site and also acts with a degree of surveillance. The scientist and laboratory become collaborators in the logistical network through such ‘encounters’.

The field expands into the world of the laboratory as a space where the actors (i.e., scientists) not only act as agents of surveillance but also try to create and inhabit ‘sites of encounter’. While this may seem a superficial way of imposing on the labouring space, the ways in which we as actors of the field and products of the field engage with subjects has been remodelled; in this particular case, the relationship between subjects and actors is being performed, inhabited and is a lived reality in the resolution of logistical problems in the living laboratory project.

By contrast, the lived reality of the villages, field sites of production in the logistical city of Rajarhat indicate certain interesting possibilities of the way networks of architects, urban planners, IT farmers, dispossessed farmers, domestic workers participate in the production of the logistical city. The production and (re)production of logistical networks in Rajarhat and Sydney not only represent two distinct forms of accumulation and labouring forms but their interface as production sites encompasses ways in which we need to re-formulate our engagement with production networks of late industrialism. Our engagement with production networks of late industrial sites are transformative and collaborative in nature. To understand the nodal points of interface between transnational networks of production and capital it is important to represent these fields as sites of encounter. The field/s speak to themselves not only as points of comparison but also in the way we as researcher/s, actors represent these fields. For instance, to me Rajarhat now represents an extension of the living laboratory project of logistical management. This is not to add another heuristic tool to understand the field but to broaden the scope and interaction of

Almost 25 years have gone by since the publication of Writing Culture - the seminal work that called for a linguistic turn in anthropology. George Marcus, in an article to celebrate 25 years of Writing Culture, says that the work ‘was an ambitious and much needed critique of anthropology by means of literary therapy applied to its primary genre form’. In this article, Marcus discusses six conditions that the research studies in Centre for Ethnography, University of California, Irvine have moved towards. First and foremost, the ‘impulse to collaborate’. Second, ‘double agency’ where the anthropologists are indulging in a game of double-ness, producing work according to the needs of different registers. Third, the public response or what he calls ‘reception and granular publics within the frames of fieldwork’. Fourth, ‘incompleteness and scale’. Fifth, ‘the temporality of emergence’, and finally, design projects in association with field projects.

In ‘Ethnography in Late Industrialism’, Fortun argues that ethnographies ‘can be designed to bring forth a future anterior that is not calculable from what we now know, a future that surprises. Ethnography thus becomes creative, producing something that didn’t exist before. Something beyond codified expert formulas’. She indicates the ways in which temporality guides our research designs and the significance of research designs in collaborations and ways in which the field moves back and forth beyond the gaze of the ethnographer. She further identifies two gaps (discursive gaps and risks) that ethnographers studying late industrial capitalism have to deal with, as well as the problem of design. To understand and grapple with discursive gaps and risks, ethnographies need to ‘create space for deliberation’.

The creative space/s of deliberation of the Transit Labour platform was particularly productive in rethinking the ways in which the scope and possibilities of ‘field’ has widened beyond the ethnographer’s purview.
ZONES AND CORRIDORS: ACCUMULATION IN POST-COLONIAL CAPITALISM

RANABIR SAMADDAR

The following is an excerpt of a longer paper written for the Knowing Asia Conference, University of Western Sydney 2012. It was written as a companion piece to the essay Wall as an Apparatus.

There is another way to think of the practice of zoning basidies as one of exception in space management. Of course a crucial question is to be faced at the outset: Is the question of exception a matter of looking into the production of norm and then looking at the dynamics of exception, or is exception finally a matter of difference? Here I would like to leave the matter to the reader’s or the listener’s philosophical disposition; it will not harm much whichever way the judgement goes, so long as we know what is at stake.

To think in terms of difference means to irrevocably discard an ideal type, to take each case as singular, and to undertake the task of generalisation on the basis of singularities. It also implies for one then to take upon oneself the task of rigorously analysing the case at hand – in this case, the way a zone is created – and see how the “law” operates, the law of zones and spaces in this case, the law of a capitalism which is built on a combination of the most modern forms of finance capital and forms of primitive accumulation, also a combination of western capitalism and post-colonial capitalism. In this way, differences will come up before our eyes as to how management of space requires zoning and how the zone thus created requires particular way of space management in order to be appropriate to the dynamics of that particular zone.

In the Rajarhat-New Town study we conducted in 2010-11, we had to do that. We did not look so much into whether it was an exercise in exception in the history of space management by capital, but we adopted an analytical strategy of treating the details of space management in the Rajarhat-New Town case by looking at the differences cropping up in the context of an old town called Kolkata. In this way we could locate the continuities and discontinuities in the history of space management, the anomalous forms of labour in the New Town, the real-historical ways in which peasant labour responded to the new ways of zoning, and most importantly, how this response influenced forms of accumulation. Thus it is not enough to say with the experience of hindsight that this was the form of accumulation under conditions of passive revolution and democracy, but it becomes necessary to find out what is the form that inheres within it the double of the primitive and the modern, the virtual and the real, the mobile and the sedentary, and zoning and spacing.

This leads us to another crucial point beyond the controversy over the idea of the exception. One can note the infinite ways in which the reality of difference and repetition (let us recall Gilles Deleuze’s famous book by this name) indicates the profound relations between different forms of space, namely, zones, corridors, and last but not least the circuits (the theme of our platform) that internally join not only these regions, but make them parts of the same template. Of course such a networking exercise cannot be a seamless one. Contradictions between spaces of accumulation and dispossession remain an ineluctable feature of the process of capital circulation. The differences in the organisational forms of capital speak of varying relations between capital, citizenship, sovereignty, and territory. They also speak of various spatial and social forms of organisation of capital. Rajarhat-New Town can be seen therefore equally as a paradigmatic site for the operation of the principle of difference and repetition.

This may be therefore a more fruitful line of inquiry as to how various parts of India are emerging as particular zones: the Northeast projected to be linked by the corridor, called the Asian Highway, and to be opened up as a zone with the help of the “Look East” policy, whose first steps we are now witnessing in the form of normalisation of relations with Burma; likewise the emphasis on relations with Central Asia, the Shanghai Club, again to be linked through a revived corridor named as the new Silk Route and the oil pipeline from Iran through Afghanistan and Pakistan to India. Corridors are however not only geopolitical. The life of a commodity that begins its journey in Kolkata, traverses to say China through other regions, and then returns to Kolkata congealing within it the labour of three countries also speaks of a corridor. Rajarhat-New Town’s information and financial hub is thus a zone (partly in form of a free trade zone, partly not) linked through virtual and real transits – the whole process waiting to be galvanised through achieving transit rights of Indian capital through Bangladesh in the east (as through Pakistan in the west, if we think of the big picture).

In these times of post-colonial capitalism that combines the primitive and the virtual modes of accumulation, we have to take note of the ways zones are created: the trans-national modes of the assembly of a product, the transit forms in which labour appears in the commodity chain, the way money becomes a commodity, as well as the way money begets more money without passing through the commodity chain, and all of these determining the ways in which zones will be linked with corridors. These corridors can be certain forms of labour linking the zones, certain forms of transmission of information and finance, or even certain forms of circulation and processing of commodities like roads, pipelines, optical fibres, information highways, or special freight corridors run by the railways. While analysts often concentrate on the social life of a commodity (which is indeed one of the entry points in understanding the emergence of zones, thus plantation zones, tea zones, life of tea as a commodity, etc.), the need now is to look into the life of labour in its transit forms to make sense of what makes a zone and what links one zone with another. Clearly we are looking here beyond the factory form and trying to understand the newer forms of assembly and chain. This is also the way to make sense of the bio-political organisation of capital.

How will these emerging zones be spaced? It is not only that the citizen-worker may become unfit to populate such a zone, and we can see that clearly in the case of Rajarhat-New Town, but more importantly, whole populations may have to be trained to become the denizens of such an anomalous universe. Dispossessed peasants, construction workers from Maida, tea shop owners and other street vendors from nearby districts, snooty IT workers – all become parts of a scenario of heterogeneous labour. They will all demand rights, some couched in the language of citizenship, some more or less couched in gross economic terms of flexibility and money. We cannot say immediately how the new subjectivity of this new zone will develop and if it will allow an untrammelled life to the lords of capital. But it is very much a possibility that labour in this heterogeneous form may not want to behave like the massed or garrisoned foot soldiers of a disciplined imperial army stationed in a zone waiting for the final battle. We must be ready for a messy picture.

Zoning is thus a precarious exercise. It is more so when zoning brings in its wake primitive models of accumulation, because the reappearance of primitive accumulation with its impact on the way in which a zone is to be spaced may defeat at times the purpose of zoning in terms of a near framework of modern governmental reasoning. This reappearance of primitive accumulation may be unintended and unexpected; hence its reproduction within the modern forms of zoning carries greater significance. Indeed, because of the precarious nature of the zoning exercise today, the more capital becomes virtual, the more zoning exercise will become subject to us as well as the nature of fluctuations of capital and thus will be self-defeating. Within capital there is this immanent contradiction – zoning and flow. Finance capital requires both governmental strategies – zoning and flow - functioning
at their utmost efficiency, and thus its insoluble paradox and dilemma, namely, how to return to a balance of the two, how to sanctify and protect the corridor that links the zones and makes flows possible.

Yet the question would be, given the fragility of Asia’s neo-liberal construction of economy and society, will not the strategy of creating zones, corridors, and circuits have something that will make the neo-liberal programme of capital fluidity resilient against shocks? One of the lessons of Marx’s analysis of capital is its attention to circulation, which as we know becomes an ordering principle of life under neo-liberal economy. The becoming becomes more important than being under the uncertain conditions of life, when circulation movements (think of the circuits) are meant to be more and more the agency of ordering and protecting movements between segments of life – protecting the circuit against disruption. Becoming happens to be the ontology, and the sovereign power functions as a regulator of circulation movements. In this way bio-politics becomes, as the Rajarhat-New Town programme showed, the management of the uncertain. Peasants have to manage the risk and the disastrous outcome, government has to manage the unhappy subjects, capital has to manage its risky future, and the neo-liberal economy appears as one desperately trying to produce security of the economic subject – the consumer individual, the share holder, the executive, with the rest to be managed as disposable material of society. In this scenario, there is no exception, only the reckoning with contingency – thus contingency of rebellion of the dispossessed, of the flight of capital, of market crash, of the wastelands of capital suddenly appearing in the backyard as in Rajarhat.

What happens when corridors meant to ensure the circulation of commodities and capital, particularly in their final form, money, fail in their tasks? Simply put, the purpose of zoning fails. In capitalist production while zoning is resorted to as part of the division of labour, the productive nature of zoning depends on a successful strategy of maintaining corridors. Corridors guarantee circulation, whether of commodities like jute, textile products, or engineering goods (I am referring here to the sunset industries of Bengal that marked a great industrial zone around Kalkata), or commodity like labour power, or money. But again we have to remember that corridors do not auto-guarantee or auto-determine their nature. The quality of commodity including its organic composition determines the nature of a corridor in question. Of course we can notice to an unprecedented degree the fact, namely that labour engaged in circulation and in production are getting intermeshed more than ever, so that the hidden process of producing surplus value is becoming more mysterious. Labour is assuming again more than ever transit forms due to this reason, and in this situation money begetting more money is determining the fate of corridors, including financial corridors. This factor sealed the fate of Rajarhat New Town; this has determined the transformation of a city like Shanghai or Mumbai from one of producing textiles involving thousands of workers to one of producing money and credit involving the ruins of many lives (at least in India).

In short the question I am asking is - if true to the military origin of the strategy of zones, corridors, and circuits - will not the dimension of security finally upset the efficiency and maximisation calculus? What will happen to the liberal subject of security whose rights and property had been till now guarded by laws, property system in the country, a proper labour regime, and a secure foreign policy coupled with a large insurance infrastructure against sudden losses of all kinds? What will secure the zones against volatile capital flows and the sudden emergence of wastelands, breakdown of circuits due to conflicts, competition, and war, and the neo-liberal way of organising the economy, which is precisely the way of combining the virtual mode and the primitive mode of accumulation? Transit labour emerges in this context.
PORT BOTANY:
Sydney Ports increased their Statutory Port Charges on the 1st July 2010. In addition to CPI adjustments, Sydney Ports introduced an additional $10.00/TEU charge to fund the implementation of PBLIS. In August 2010 a record number of containers are moved through the port. In August 2010 Patrick increases the charge of moving containers by rail from $15 to $25. In response to this, the NSW state government announces that they will regulate rail pricing at Port Botany through PBLIS.

AUSTRALIA:
The government announces changes to the Maritime Transport and Offshore Facilities Security Regulations 2003. This includes changes to the eligibility rules for Maritime Security Identification Card (MSIC), which come into force on the 1st July.

PORT BOTANY: DP World receives two new post-panamax cranes in April 2010. It takes some months to fully install these cranes, with some temporary restrictions on berths while this occurs. In June 2010, shipping lines claim that they are facing major delays at Port Botany as a result of the implementation of recommendations set down by the IPART review, and a subsequent shift in focus from wharfside to landside productivity.

AUSTRALIA: T.S. announces that it will launch a new China-Australia Express ‘CAX’ services. The service will link Sydney to Shanghai in 14 days and Shekou to Sydney in 10 days.

MITHILESH KUMAR

THREE PROPOSITIONS ON ZONES: A CASE STUDY OF DELHI

This paper makes three propositions on special economic zones as a site for production of new laboring subjects and the simultaneous spatial, social and cognitive reorganization that takes place. It is a contested phenomenon where both the state and the subject reconstitute and redefine themselves. While the state and the corporations want to have an ‘ideal’ laboring subject forged on the basis of their agenda, the subject is not an unquestioning agent. The state constantly strives to perfect its expertise on governing the new subject while the subject tries to preserve its autonomy and challenge the boundaries of the physical zone. In this piece, I build on the arguments made by Timothy Mitchell in Rule of Experts, where he analyzes how experts continue to reproduce the colonial discourse. I take the position that the laboring subject also accumulates knowledge and expertise by challenging the discourse of the experts.

Before ‘Zone’, the word that was in vogue ‘belt’. In India’s national imaginary it was common to hear descriptions like ‘the tribal belt’, ‘the coal belt’ or ‘the naxalite belt’. These spaces were discrete and spread across the country and the word ‘belt’ testified to their uniqueness. The shift from belt to zone is not a quibble over vocabulary. In fact, the shift in words involves a leap in how spaces are conceptualized and governed. ‘Belt’ was a description of a static space, and implied a centre that acted on these spaces. Zones, on the other hand, are spaces of constant mobility of capital and labour. They imply homogeneity and standardization and, at the same time, spaces that are inherently transitory. In this piece, I make three propositions about zones: first, zones as a topological space; second, zones as a site of conflict and accumulation of knowledge through workers’ struggle; and third, the unplanned, un gov erned and ungovernable production of zones.

In ‘Between Inclusion and Exclusion: On the Topology of Global Space and Borders’, Mezzadra and Neilson offer a critique of the topological approach in the study of borders. The first proposition is derived from their work. The textbook definition of topology is: ‘a major area of mathematics concerned with properties that are preserved under continuous deformations of objects, such as deformations that involve stretching, but no tearing or gluing’. This definition is an apt description of how special economic zones can be conceived as unbounded space. This property of the zone can be seen in the way production is carried out. Maruti Suzuki’s website tells us that a car is rolled out every 23 seconds from their production line and the total process time from Blanking to Rolling out of a vehicle is 12.5 hours. However, it is what these figures hide that is more fascinating. They do not say that rubber hoses for carburetors are made in Mujesar, a village in Faridabad. Or that inside the huts of this village people work on 1970s machines of German origin. This space is made invisible by the zone and what is more disturbing is that the workforce in this space is made invisible too. The move to consider special economic zones as a topological space, a space that can be stretched to include the site which is not ostensibly a part of SEZ changes its property and the way we conceptualize production, labour and creation of surplus value in new working conditions. As mentioned above, the SEZ is also transitory. Honda SIEL Power Products Ltd. had a factory in Rudrapur in Uttarakhand. According PUDR, the company tried to move the core machinery from the factory to Greater NOIDA in 2002 and created a new production site in Pondsicherry to avail tax breaks. This shows that SEZs are not treated as a permanent site of production but an expedient and contingent arrangement open to abandonment and thus a simply transitory arrangement.

The second proposition relates to the production of subjectivity in the SEZ. I would like to give two instances of how workers adapt themselves to new methods of production and how they sabotage it when they take the path of militant struggle. In Maruti Suzuki’s Manesar plant, the workers are allowed two tea breaks of 7 minutes during a shift. In this period they have to take tea, go to the toilet and come back to their production line 1 minute in advance. Being late means a pay cut. The workers devised a way to follow the timeline by using the toilet and having tea at the same time. This is one aspect. In 2005, a militant struggle by workers of Honda was brutally crushed by the police. The workers went around the SEZ on July 25 asking for support from workers of different factories. They were tricked by the district administration, disarmed and surrounded in a public park and the police let loose on them. In 2011, during the struggle at Maruti Suzuki workers had learned their lesson. They knew that in the SEZ, where emphasis is on mobility and speed, it is much better to stop the flow. Try as they might, Maruti Suzuki’s management could not remove the workers from the factory. According to the Gurgaon Workers News, the workers knew that moving from the factory meant the breaking of the strike, as in the Honda struggle. While HR experts were still using the old tactic of making the workers sign the good conduct bond, the workers had sharpened their skills by sabotaging the fundamental philosophy behind the zone.

Finally, as the Communist Manifesto teaches us, the bourgeoisie produces its own gravediggers; the same can be said about zones as well. In 2004, there was a large-scale demolition of slums in Delhi. The displaced were settled in the fringes of the city, in the areas of Bawana and Narula. There are several other areas in Delhi that are irregular colonies. These are spaces that are almost continuously encircled the city, forming a zone by themselves despite the best efforts of the state. These zones are unplanned, minimally governed and almost ungovernable. These spaces are also a site for petty production that is directly linked to big capital. One such instance was the almond workers strike in 2009 in Karawal Nagar. This was the biggest strike of unorganized workers in Delhi since the seven-day strike in 1988. There is an extensive almond processing industry in the Karawal Nagar area, where 60 almond processing godowns are in operation. Nearly 20 thousand workers are employed in this industry. The almonds processed there come from USA, Australia, etc. The unprocessed almonds are imported by the importers of Khari Baoli, the largest dry fruits market in Asia. These importers give the almonds to contractors in Karawal Nagar for processing. The strike affected the big importers and the contractors in Karawal Nagar, as 80 percent of the almond supply stopped. As a consequence, the rates of almond in the markets shot up by 30 to 40 percent. This militant struggle proved that global capital and its ‘free markets’ can be disrupted and brought to a halt and forced to negotiate with the workers of the ungoverned zones like Karawal Nagar. To use the Leninist term, these ungoverned spaces are now emerging as one of the ‘weak links’ of global capital.
CONFLICTING EXPERTISE IN THE SHANGHAI FINANCIAL MARKET AS A ZONE

GIULIA DAL MASO

The Pudong zoning pattern provides a privileged perspective from which to consider how the Chinese state articulates its territory. The Shanghai financial center in Pudong and its development as a zone also allows for an exploration of the conflicts between diverse understandings of ‘expertise’ held by different actors investing in the stock exchange. This analysis also focuses attention on the emergence of a contested space, in which labor subjects negotiate their expertise, and allows for an examination of if and how this expertise clashes with the type of expertise required by the state.

The Shanghai financial center is represented by the skyline of Pudong, an island located directly in front of the Bund on the east side of the Huangpu river. During the colonial period Shanghai’s banks and financial institutions, including the first Chinese stock exchange, were located in the Bund. Pudong was previously a little-developed agricultural site, however in the last 20 years, it has become the symbol of the country in the global economy. The contrast between the two sides of the river reveals the new physical and symbolic rise of the Pudong area as a Special Economic Zone. This new urban development serves as the infrastructure for the creation of a hub that unites technological, logistical, and social functions. Thus the physical transition of the zone into a broad multi-service complex was intended to attract capital investment and the recruitment of new, specialized, expertise in the high tertiary sector.

In this analysis I will problematize the role of the Chinese financial experts, arguing that they occupy a position that is in tension: on one hand the state needs established places of the market and to recreate a new role for foreign investors and foreign investments. In addition, the division of international and domestic stockshares creates systems of differential administration. The international system is arranged for foreign investors and foreign investments. Initial investigations reveal that its rationale is precisely to be a laboratory to catch up with the financial market. The second system is exclusively for domestic investors. These individual, dispersed players - known in Chinese as sanhu - invest through different channels. In recent years, the process of digitalization and increasing use of the Internet has allowed these small players to escape direct control of and surpass the physical, established places of the market and to recreate a new organizations. The sanhu are known to embrace stock fever. Stock fever needs to be understood as a massive social phenomenon that, because of its size, disturbs the market because it acts “irrationally”, but which is also necessary to maintain the movement and circulation of stocks.

To conclude, the scenario sketched out above illustrates the constant attempt of the state to separate and confine different kinds of knowledge, which are in tension and which overlap, and establish bounded zones of expertise. These conflicts and tensions over the concept of expertise can be seen at different levels. The first is at the level of the institutions: state financial institutions desperately demand highly qualified financial players to be able to play on a transnational scale but at the same time they ask for ‘ethnically Chinese people, loyal to the Party’.

In the financial market as a zone, a border is continually drawn between multifarious tensions: the claim for independence and autonomy through the practice of their expertise by the returnees; access to the Internet and the use of low-end information as informal expertise by the sanhu, which provides an escape from the direct control of state financial institutions; and a constant intertwining of the influences of formal and informal expertise against the trends of the market.

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The following has been taken from a submission prepared by the Transport Workers Union to the Road Safety Renumeration Tribunal. The report identified a link between poor remuneration and unsafe work practices in the industry, and argued for a targeting of supply chain partners in the retail industry, in order to improve driver conditions. The full report, Improving Safety and Fairness for Road Transport and Distribution Workers, can be downloaded from the TWU website: http://www.twu.com.au. Representatives of the TWU, Tony Sheldon (President) and Jemma Mcloud, participated in a roundtable on labour in the Australian logistics industry, held as part of the Sydney Transit Labour Platform.

The dispatcher says that every load you get is urgent and gives you a time it has to be delivered which leaves no fit in your driving time and you feel under the pump the whole week that you’re out driving. The job is exhausting enough without the added stress of wondering if you should stop, even though you’re starting to wander around the road a bit more while driving your truck. Management say that if you’re tired you stop, but the reality is that if you do stop you’ve dragged over the costs for a late load. In my supposed rest times (if any) often refuelling, doing paperwork or keeping the truck clean. This is all done at lightening pace so that you’re back out there on time or else you’re questioned as to why. You see the other drivers on the road shooting past you and although you know it’s unsafe, you know they’re just trying to buy some time to get to their final destination and actually have some real down-time. (It’s) testament to the drivers out there and their skill that more people are not killed.

Retail Driver, New South Wales

I am doing 24 hours in unpaid waiting times a week. With trailers being pre-loaded by (CLIENT NAME SUPPRESSED), I cannot afford to wait another hour or so unpaid while they unload and reload a set of trailers to get the legal weight. I carry overweight regularly and I don’t have a choice.

Driver, New South Wales

The reality of the road transport industry is that it is major industry clients that effectively set the rates of driver remuneration for both owner drivers and employee drivers. The cause of the safety crisis has been attributed to economic factors within the industry. Most significantly, it has been established beyond doubt that the root cause of unsafe remuneration systems and many of the unsafe practices on our roads is the power imbalance between transport clients and transport operators. The financial power and influence of clients in the transport industry makes their role in delivering safe outcomes essential.

Clients, particularly major retailers, exert control over not just prices paid for services, but also the way in which goods are delivered. While it has been established that unsafe rates and unsafe payment methods are the key contributors to the safety crisis, unpaid or underpaid waiting-time pressures for drivers and penalties for transport companies that do not meet strict scheduling requirements also have a heavy impact on safety.

Further, it is the high level of control exercised by clients over timing, destination and route that cause operators to bear costs that, ordinarily, are borne by customers. Economically powerful industry clients, like major retailers, have the commercial influence to determine the price of transport services and, in many circumstances, key conditions relating to the performance of transport work. Successive instances of contracting out, combined with unpaid wait-time at client premises, further exacerbate the harm caused by their excessive control of the transport market. […]

Transport operators compete for a limited amount of work, and price is the main determining factor in deciding whether they win or lose contracts, or subcontract out unprofitable work. Competition for work in the transport industry is so strong that there is an “acceptance of non-viable rates, excessive and illegal working hours, and stressed and chronically fatigued drivers”. Transport operators all face the same bundle of costs; costs such as vehicle maintenance, real estate, fuel, and wages. To be successful, companies competing for work from major clients cut their profit margins and then, when those margins become too thin, find other ways to reduce their costs. […]

When operators are denied a proper return, let alone a margin that exceeds the cost of capital, operators undercut each other, bid the price of transport down, and attempt to recoup the losses caused by clients from drivers by not paying for all work performed, and by paying them through incentive rates. As a consequence of employment too often being conditional on strict compliance with an operator’s direction and client deadlines, drivers are prone to drive while fatigued, speed, take drugs and skimp on maintenance.

Thus it is this high level of influence and control that is exercised by clients in the industry – rather than operators and drivers – that means that any attempt to remedy the safety crisis must have at its heart a focus on major clients. Previous attempts to improve industry safety have not addressed the role and influence of clients, the root cause of the safety crisis, and have meant that the systemic issues that exist have gone without remedy. For maximum impact and effect, it is necessary therefore to take a vertical approach – focusing on clients, subcontracting and specific supply chains – rather than a horizontal, issue-based approach. The TWU believes that an issues based approach which does not address the causes of unsafe practices and unfair work arrangements is likely to fail to deliver solutions which effectively address problems in the industry.
After conducting research in Shanghai and Kolkata it seems almost capricious to complain about Sydney traffic. Yet in this wealthy city of backyards and bays, waiting in road traffic bottlenecks has become a constitutive part of urban experience. The problem is not only that Sydney, like the cities of the American west, grew up around the internal combustion engine. Nor is it simply that population growth has exceeded the capacity of public and private agencies to provide transport infrastructure. Rather, the reluctance to invest in such infrastructure is a symptom of wider economic and social tendencies that have unfolded against the background of a general depoliticization of life. Rising debt, longer working hours, growing precarity and stress have all contributed to the rampant individualism and aggression that displays itself at Sydney’s clogged intersections and gridlocked motorways. Little wonder then that logistics and traffic infrastructure have become major issues in this far-from-laid-back metropolis.

The Transit Labour research platform in Sydney sought to address the interface of labour and logistics in one of the tightest knots of the city’s transport network: the Port Botany container and port facilities and the intermodal terminals (inland ports or freight hubs) that stretch into its hinterland. Nestled on the northern shore of Botany Bay, the southern water body that is ugly sister to the city’s iconic harbour, Port Botany is currently undergoing a massive expansion and privatization exercise with the view to increasing its annual throughput from just 2 million Twenty Foot Equivalent Units (TEUs) in 2011 to 13.6 million in 2040. Logistical technologies and management practices are seen as key to extracting maximum efficiencies from transport and supply chain infrastructure that will be placed under considerably more pressure, even assuming the completion of current and future development plans. These practices are understood as crucial to Australia’s economic future in the context of Asian economic expansion. A recent Australian
technologies that seek to redefine the relation of life in transport infrastructure is coupled with managerial increase in productivity realised through investment getting container trucks off the roads. The anticipated is at its capacity, with rail seen as part of the solution to and the belated recognition that Sydney's road network terminals on the city's edges: the need to accommodate and transport problems for the smooth operation of goods, primarily from East Asia. Its main export is containerized commodity export group at 11% of throughput. Empty container parks stretch across the largest containerized commodity export group at 11% – an increase of about 5%, accounting for about 28% of total throughput in Sydney. This compares to chemicals which represented the much larger containerized commodity export group at 11% of throughput. Empty container parks stretch across Sydney, from the near vicinity of the port to various intermodal terminals located on the peripheries of the city. The paradox of emptiness is that it must occupy space. This economy of emptiness results in storage and transport problems for the smooth operation of supply chains. Substantial tracts of land parcelled up for development as intermodal terminals are taken up by those tasked with delivering the benefits of very substantial infrastructural investment from both state and private sectors. Faced with local community opposition, governments and port authorities cite two primary motivations for developing intermodal terminals on the city’s edges: the need to accommodate a massive increase in TEU throughput in coming years, and the belated recognition that Sydney’s road network is at its capacity, with rail seen as part of the solution to getting container trucks off the roads. The anticipated increase in productivity realised through investment in transport infrastructure is coupled with managerial technologies that seek to redefine the relation of life to time.

just-in-time and 24/7 are the temporal mantras of the logistical world. The technologist’s vision of universal interoperability, real-time routing and enhanced productivity is accompanied by a discourse of complete supply chain optimization from raw materials to consumer. Its main export is empty containers, travelling north to be refilled and shunted further on their itinerant tours of the world’s trading networks. Port Botany was also a key site in Australia’s most notorious industrial dispute of the past two decades: the 1998 waterfront conflict (during which stevedoring companies attempted to break union power by recruiting former and current members of the Australian Defense Forces and training them in Dubai). The violent crescendo came in the first week of April when Patrick’s stevedores sacked its entire workforce and deployed snarling dogs and balalaika-wearing security guards to clear workers from the site. But aside from Port Botany’s industrial and political prominence, symbolized by its towering orange cranes and twinkling evening lights, its landside infrastructure feeds into the city’s traffic grid. In so doing, it joins the congestion of this grid to wider global trade corridors through material conduits of software, labour and infrastructure.

Much logistical work in Sydney is about the management, transport and storage of empty containers. In 2010-2011 total movements through Port Botany amounted to $60,930 TEUs – an increase of about 5%, accounting for about 28% of total throughput in Sydney. This compares to chemicals which represented the largest containerized commodity export group at 11% of throughput. Empty container parks stretch across Sydney, from the near vicinity of the port to various intermodal terminals located on the peripheries of the city. The paradox of emptiness is that it must occupy space. This economy of emptiness results in storage and transport problems for the smooth operation of supply chains. Substantial tracts of land parcelled up for development as intermodal terminals are taken up by those tasked with delivering the benefits of very substantial infrastructural investment from both state and private sectors. Faced with local community opposition, governments and port authorities cite two primary motivations for developing intermodal terminals on the city’s edges: the need to accommodate a massive increase in TEU throughput in coming years, and the belated recognition that Sydney’s road network is at its capacity, with rail seen as part of the solution to getting container trucks off the roads. The anticipated increase in productivity realised through investment in transport infrastructure is coupled with managerial technologies that seek to redefine the relation of life to time.

The Future Logistics Living Lab, by contrast, presents itself as a collective brain for solving the city’s logistical nightmares. An initiative of National ICT Australia, Fraunhofer Institute and German software company SAP, the Living Lab provides a forum for researchers to interface with logistics industry experts. Apart from visiting this Lab as part of the Sydney platform, Transit Labour researchers regularly participate in its workshops. One of the Living Lab’s current projects is called Total Port Logistics. The aim is to troubleshoot the congestion that surrounds Port Botany by seeking to introduce mathematical models and instruments that can efficiently coordinate shipping, road and rail supply chains in an integrated manner. The ‘living’ in Living Lab refers to a quality of collective intelligence that is open to problem-solving and confident of its capacity to smooth out the chinks and blockages that impede the passage of freight through the port and slow the movement of traffic around the city.

Missing from these accounts of unimpeded integration of code with organizational cultures and material conditions is the time of living labour. Here we find another register of the ‘living’ that underscores the biopolitical conditions that make logistics possible. From voice picking technology in warehousing to the increasing automation of ports, logistical labour in Sydney is defined by a high degree of control and oversight by machine operations. The real-time measurement of labour performance and its immediate integration back into systems of fault tolerance aims to minimize the disruption that might arise from workplace organization, go-slows or sabotage. It is as if labour was contracted under the fantasy of technological interventions eliminating the gap between living labour and its abstract measure. One consequence of such forms of ‘protocological power’ (Galloway) is a decrease in the time of the daily work that might otherwise be expended on labour organization. There is a potential erosion of the more social dimensions of work that can manifest as enduring forms of worker solidarity.

The scene of infrastructure is frequently underscored by substantial disjuncture and operational conflict. What could be loosely grouped as a coalition of interest on the part of technologists, government policy makers and industry managers is often at odds with the experience of workers on the frontline of ‘supply-chain capitalism’ (Tsing). At a practical level, the tacit knowledge of, say, truck drivers who know that chatting with reception staff while delivering a consignment works well to lubricate ongoing business relations is something that defies easy coding into the parameters of GPS devices and container triangulation techniques that route transport according to efficiencies made in delivery, pick-up and driving times. Some technologists are aware of this social aspect of economic life, but find it difficult to translate as a parameter within an algorithmic system. At a certain point, for now at least, life refuses absorption into code.

Without holding any nostalgia for organizational forms unable or unwilling to adapt to socially transformed circumstances, we note that political bodies such as the National Workers Union (NWU) in Sydney have to engage a membership with a high rate of national and cultural variation. There remains a strong masculine predisposition within many unions, particularly those associated with transport logistics. In a meeting with members of the Transport Workers Union (TWU), Transit Labour researchers were given an insight into the gendered and racial composition of transport workers in Sydney. Compared with the NWU claim that 79% of their members work in the Woolworths warehouse at Yennora, only 3.5% of TWU membership is made up of female workers, with the large majority of members comprising of Anglo-Celtic males. We start to get some idea here about how labour forces in different sectors of logistical operations are distinguished along gendered, ethnic and racial lines.

This fragmentation of labour along the logistical chain is another obstacle for political organization. Logistics integrates, but there is a division of labour. Take for example the traditional fall-out between dock workers and truckers. The former are strongly unionized and tend to see the latter, many of whom are owner-operators, as not real workers. What would it mean for workers to develop forms of organization and solidarity that work along the supply chain? Such a prospect requires the garnering of logistical knowledge among working populations.

Workers’ collective understanding of the logistical networks in which they work can become a key piece of political knowledge. Such forms of protocological power multiply this sort of protocological conflict from local to transnational scales with different computational and systemic ways. The production of such knowledge involves not only the building of strategic links between workers along the supply chain but also the reckoning with divisions that separate the computational from the physical domains of logistics. The heavily masculine domains of dock work and trucking, for instance, must build alliances with the feminized logistical labour of data entry, freight forwarding and procurement. The problem is even more pronounced when one considers that these tasks are often carried out in different national jurisdictions.

While the international division of labour cuts across national borders, an additional obstacle to workers’ integrated knowledge across global supply chains consists of protocological barriers at the level of code. No doubt many will recall the days when a MS-DOS floppy disk could not be run without a lot of messing about on a Mac system. Today, the logistical world of software management and planning systems multiplexes this sort of protocological conflict from local to transnational scales with different computational systems unable to interface, resulting in a return to pieces of paper to authorize transactions along supply chains and transport routes. These are the sort of protocological impediments to supply chain integration.
that technologists seek to address. Certainly they
also impact on the capacity for logistical workers
to communicate across platforms and territories.
But the primary objective, at least for technologists
and managers, is to improve efficiencies in transport
and communication. The production of comprehensive
knowledge of conditions and operations on the part
of workforces is quite a different proposition. It can
enable political thought and build a practical capacity
to organize labour across multiple and shifting lines of
division and fragmentation.

A more substantive affect of code on the capacity of
logistical workers to build networks across and along
supply chains arises from the power of computational
systems. In many logistical settings — warehouses,
ports, transport networks, offices — management and
distribution software individualizes the worker as an
isolated unit assigned to algorithmically determined
tasks performed against real-time indicators of
efficiency. If workers are to use technological
interoperability to facilitate the production of logistical
knowledge in ways that further their political aims,
they might also have to build alliances with software
ingeniers and designers. Indeed, there may be a need
to invent alternative technological systems that at once
help build relations across political, technical
and organizational barriers and remain outside the
data-capturing algorithms of supply chain software
and workplace management systems.

Already available social media networking software
such as Facebook or Twitter might be one option here.
But these systems are designed primarily for chatting,
even if we have seen them put to use in the mobilization
of political populations, as was the case with the Arab
Spring and the Occupy movement. The more informal
sectors of logistics industries rely on such software to
manage their own supply chain operations. But they
face a protocological barrier when informal supply
chains meet the computational architecture of the
world's dominant logistical software developers: SAP,
Oracle, Infor, MS Dynamics AX, Descartes Systems
Group, to name some of the leading players.

Either way, the capacity to remodel parameters of
proprietary logistics software packages is out of the
question and existing social media software will lock
workers into silos of Friends and Groups. Both are
insufficient for workers seeking a comprehensive
overview of logistical operations. The materiality of
communication and transport provides one key site
from which to begin assembling a political
knowledge of logistics organized in part through
algorithmic architectures.

Beneath the abstract and physical architectures
of logistics lies the restless body and mind of labour.
Too often seen as a unit to be managed by techniques
of monitoring and control, the labouring subject can
be both an enabler of supply chains and the agent of
their demise. The all-too-human prediction of shifting
castes, patterns of consumption, waning interest and
refusal to function as a machine can bring supply chains
to a grinding halt. But logistical systems are indifferent
to whether such blockages result from the political
machiinations of labour or circumstances such as
extreme weather events. They seek to develop modes
of resilience or robustness that are insensitive to the
distinction human/nonhuman around which so much
theoretical bluster currently blows. It is salutary to
remember this when contemplating the gridlock that
afflicts Sydney’s streets. Creaky infrastructure and the
logistical organization of labour are the twin parameters
that mark Transit Labour’s analysis of changing relations
of production, trade, bordering and technology in
this particular urban space. The tension between
computational systems and their capacity to govern
through the rule of code and the various contingencies
special to living labour will serve as a more general
analytical architecture in our ongoing study of global
supply chains.

HTTP://TRANSITLABOUR.ASIA/BLOGS/
CREAKYINFRASTRUCTURE
SHANGHAI, KOLKATA, SYDNEY: THESE CITIES ARE SITES FOR MAPPING NEW PATTERNS OF LABOUR AND MOBILITY IN THE WHIRLWIND OF ASIAN CAPITALIST TRANSFORMATION.

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