Beijing Underground

by

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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

MY ROOM

Abstract

Fig. 0.1 Sketch plan of an underground migrant hostel in Beijing.
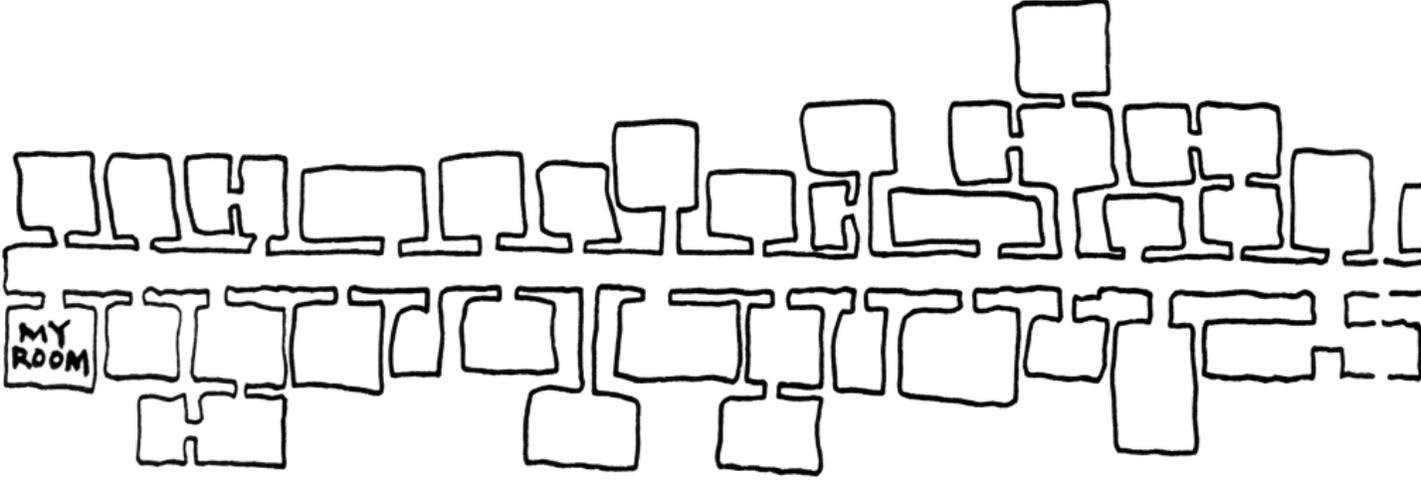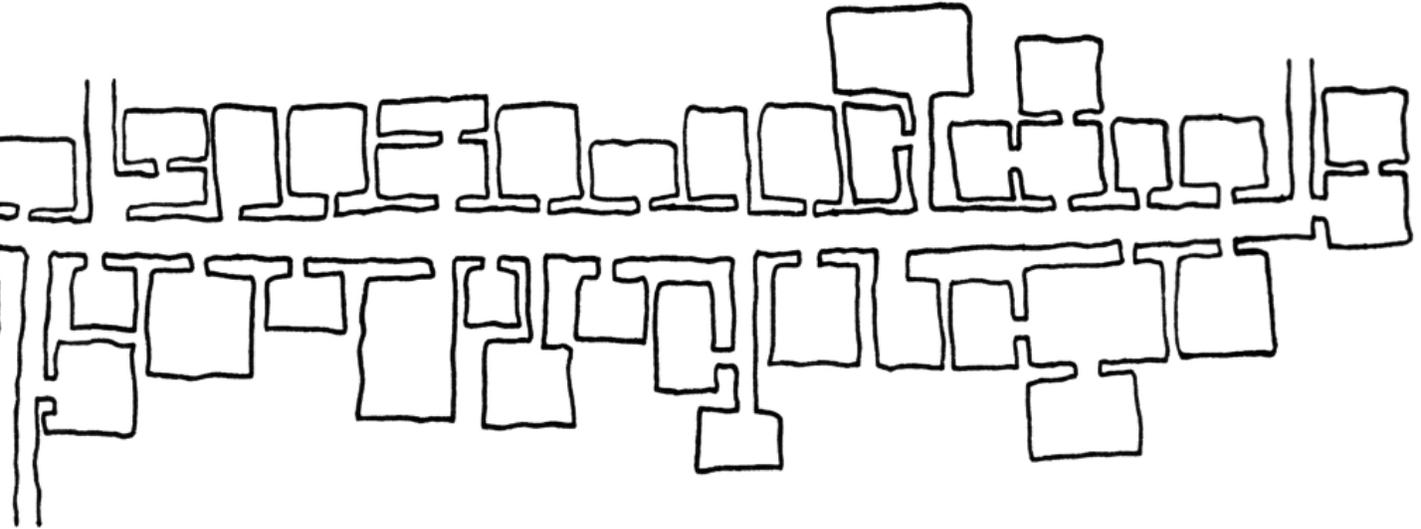
This thesis investigates a unique type of migrant housing in Beijing: underground hostels retrofitted from civil air defence basements. The core of this study consists of field research conducted from 2005-2006. Personal narratives, photographs, maps, and illustrations drawn from first-person experience construct an account of a neglected layer of the city.

Political and economic reforms since the late 1970s initiated the formation of a new subaltern class in contemporary Chinese cities known as the *floating population*. Millions of migrants have flowed through China's uneven economic landscape in pursuit of the Chinese Dream. There is an estimated 4 million migrants actively contributing to the construction of new Beijing, yet the subalterns are excluded from official State representations that focus on the monumental. Without proper household registration (*hukou*) status, rural migrants have little to no access to social welfare including subsidized housing. Migrants have, of necessity, developed unconventional habitats in the capital city. In the absence of officially sanctioned space, migrants seek shelter within cracks and fissures of the formal system.

Just as the city is being shaped by the flow of capital, the inflow of the floating population shapes an alternative urban geography that remains largely invisible. Sanctioned yet unofficial, the migrants' creative appropriation of space contributes to the development of an emergent urban vernacular. Portraits from below reveal furtive portions of Beijing: marginal, banal, and hidden stages upon which life unfolds.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my family.

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All photographs, drawings, diagrams, sketches, and maps by author unless otherwise indicated.

PRELUDE
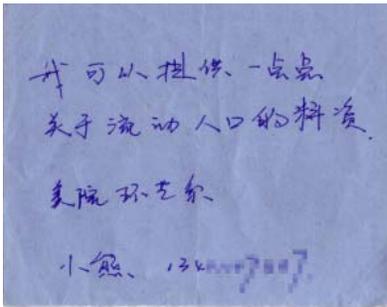
FIG. 0.2 Note from Xiao Xiong.

Xiao Xiong* and I met by chance. She was not a student at the university, but her eagerness to learn had brought her to Lecture Room 203 during my 15-minute interim presentation on the housing conditions of Beijing's floating population. I presented in Mandarin for the first time – my professor had encouraged me – so it would be easier for the other students to understand. If I had spoken in English, perhaps Xiao Xiong and I would not have connected.

I made a plea to my classmates to share any information they might have about underground migrant hostels at the end of my presentation. There were news reports about the lawsuits homeowners were filing against property management companies for leasing underground space for conversion into migrant hostels. Often their stories fell under the genre of misinformed urban legends – stories of criminals and illicit outsiders infiltrating local neighbourhoods, endangering social order and safety. Well-intentioned colleagues warned me against visiting these places alone. Everyone had heard about this phenomenon, but no one seemed to be able to offer any details.

> 我可以提供一點點關於流動人口的資料。小熊
> I can provide a little bit of information regarding the floating population. Xiao Xiong

The small blue sticky note I found on my notebook marked a critical moment in my investigation. Xiao Xiong is one of the millions of people who migrated to major coastal cities in pursuit of the Chinese Dream. Her journey as a 北漂 *beipiao* (literal translation is 'north drifter,' referring specifically to migrants in Beijing, the northern capital) began seven months ago, when she decided to leave her hometown in Qingdao province to pursue a career in environmental design.

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* Respecting the principles reflected in the University of Waterloo's Statement on Human Research, all names have been changed to protect the privacy of individuals.

1

North 5th Ring Road

A

B

North 4th Ring Road

North 3rd Ring Road

CHAOYANG
DISTRICT

C

D

E

Changan Avenue

South 3rd Ring Road

South 4th Ring Road

South 5th Ring Road
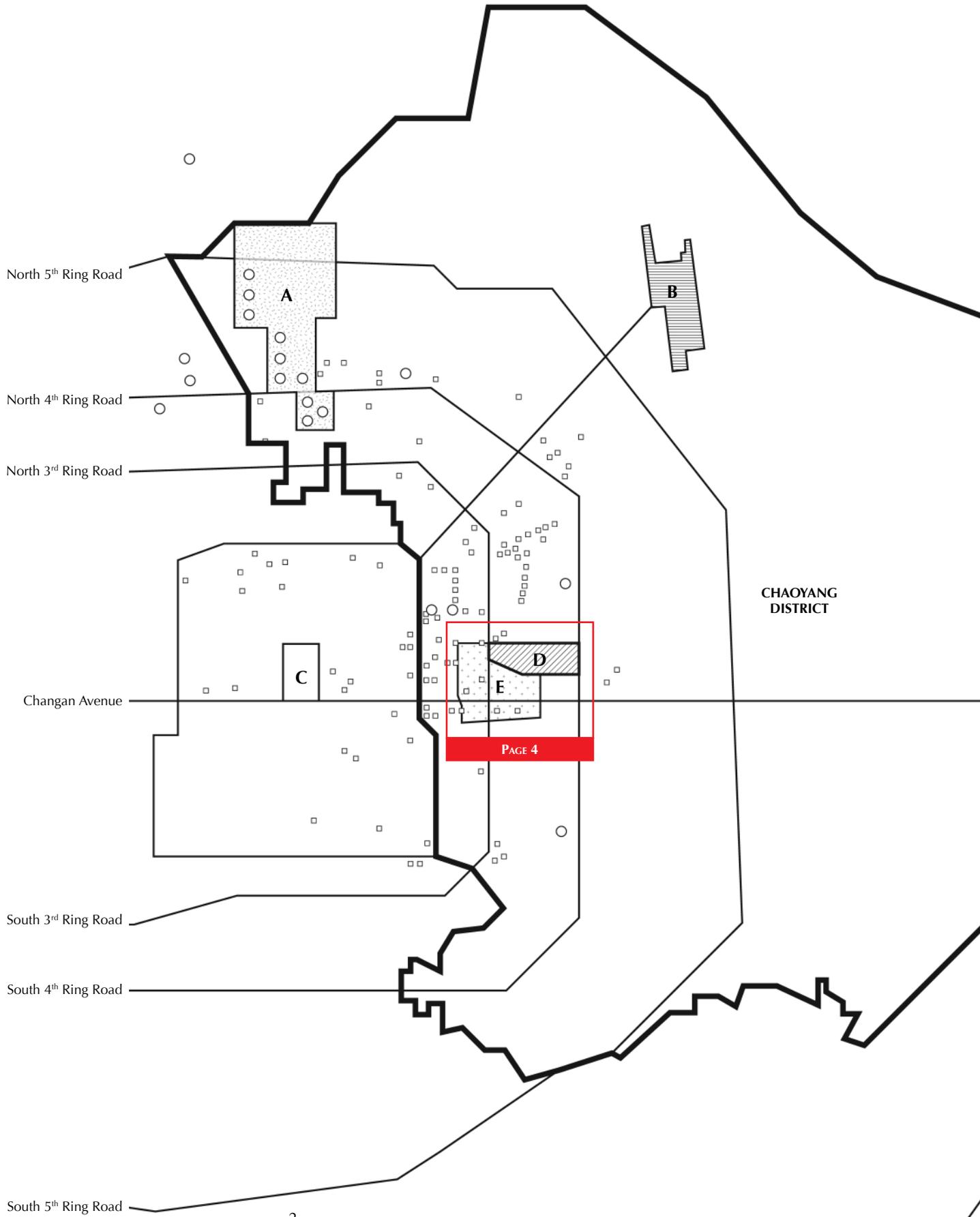
1 INTRODUCTION

The restructuring of China's political and economic framework has had profound impacts on contemporary Chinese society. A gradual relaxation of State control mechanisms from the Maoist era resulted in a dramatic increase of flow of capital, information, and people. But the transition is an incomplete process in which certain institutional devices remain in place. The lingering effects of the household registration (戶口, *hukou*) system, coupled with an unevenly developed economic landscape, cultivated the emergence of a new subaltern class in Chinese cities: the floating population (流動人口, *liudong renkou*). The floating population refers to rural-to-urban migrants whose labour is accepted and required by the economy but whose rights as citizens are denied under the *hukou* system. Despite discriminatory socio-political conditions, millions of migrants have moved to the more affluent coastal cities in pursuit of the Chinese Dream. Rural migrants lacking urban *hukou* status have little to no access to social welfare, including healthcare, education, and subsidized housing. This study started with a simple question: where do migrants live in the city?

This thesis explores a unique type of migrant housing found in Beijing: underground hostels retrofitted from air defence basements. The core of the investigation consists of field research conducted between 2005 and 2006 in a study area adjacent to the new Central Business District (CBD). As part of my fieldwork, I lived in a basement hostel (JTL Hostel) and gained first-hand experience of the living conditions in a migrant community.

The architecture of Beijing's subaltern groups follows a rich tradition of informal building practices by non-architects. Critical of an approach to architectural history that involved only a few select cultures, Bernard Rudofsky led us into the "unfamiliar world of non-pedigreed architecture" by organizing an exhibition entitled *Architecture Without Architects* in 1964. His exhibition and book, which included an impressive array of indigenous architecture from the aquatic communities of Shanghai's Suzhou Creek to the grass structures of New Guinea, broadened our perspective on the art of building to include oeuvres by anonymous builders that are highly responsive to local socio-political, economic, cultural, and ecological climates. The wisdom and creativity of vernacular practices are also promoted as untapped sources of inspiration for subsequent generations of architects.
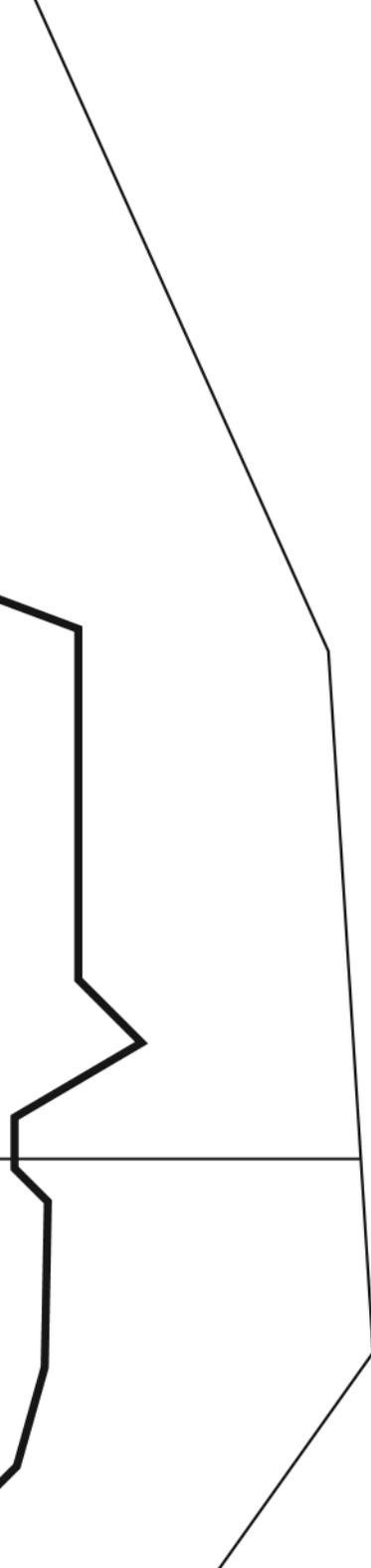
FIG. 1.1 Plan of Chaoyang District.

A   Olympic green
B   Capital International Airport
C   Forbidden City
D   Study Area
E   Central Business District (CBD)
○   Olympic venues
□   Gated residential communities

0   2.1   4.2   6.3m

3

East 3rd Ring Road

Jintai West Road

Jintai Road

East 4th Ring Road

Jianwai SOHO   CCTV   SOHO New Town
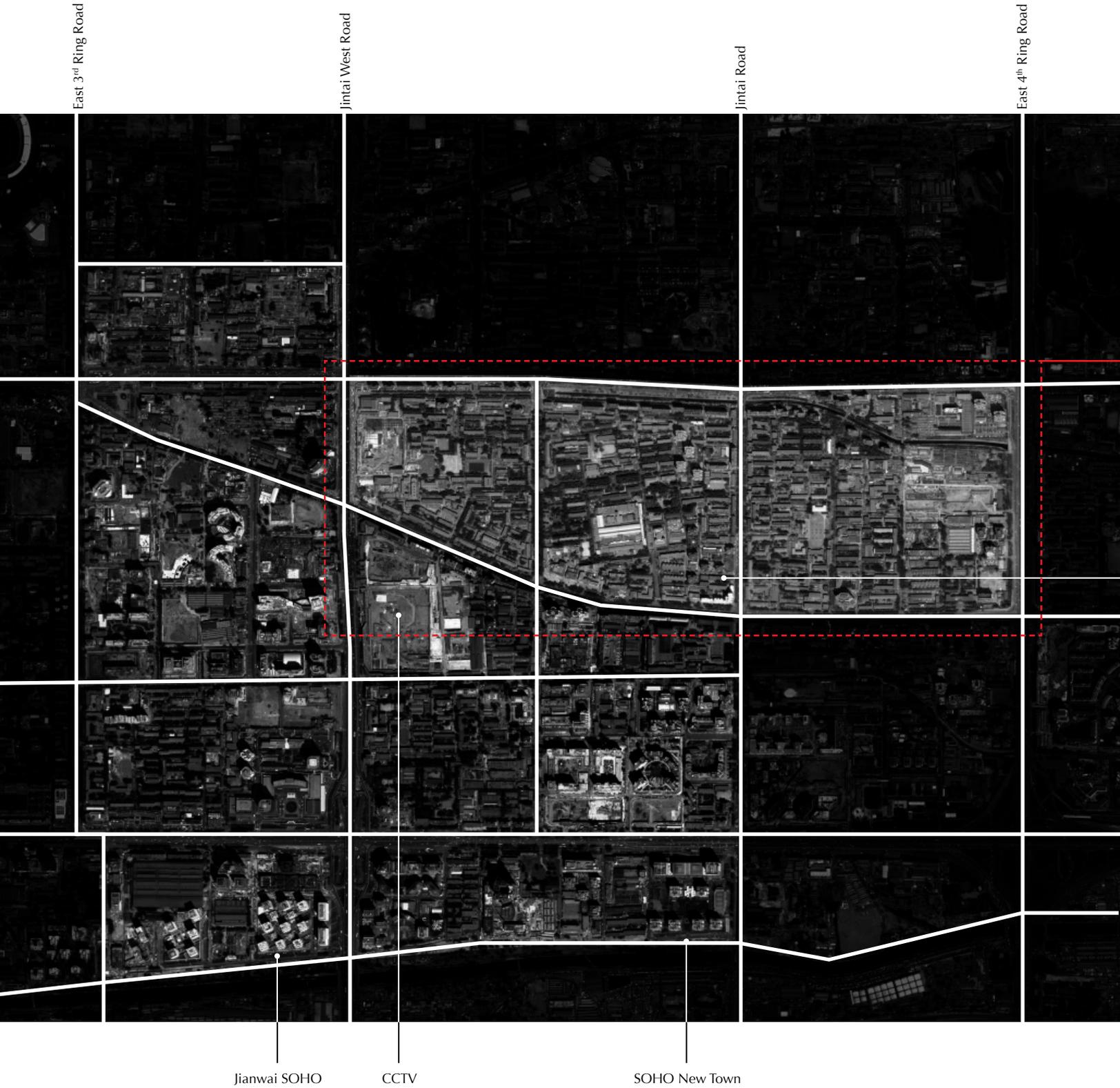
Fig. 1.2 Aerial photography of Chaoyang district centre showing the CBD and study area.

Study Area

Chaoyang North Road

Jintaili (JTL) Hostel

Chaoyang Road

Jianguomen Avenue (Changan Avenue)

Zhuanchang South Road

> [T]his situation came about through the diligence of the historian. By invariably emphasizing the parts played by architects and their patrons he has obscured the talents and achievement of the anonymous builders, men whose concepts sometimes verge on the utopian, whose aesthetics approach the sublime.
> Bernard Rudofsky[1]

Beijing is undergoing massive urban transformations as the hosting city for the 2008 Olympics. A dominant discourse on the development of the new capital focuses on grand schemes and monumental architectural expressions. State-sanctioned spectacles tell a singular narrative of Beijing as the new, progressive, and modern capital of a global leader. Beyond the official representations of space lie the marginalized dimensions of subaltern groups. There are approximately 4 million migrants actively engaged in the construction of new Beijing.[2] Yet they remain as unrecognized, silent producers. Disempowered by status and purchasing power, members of the floating population creatively appropriate interstitial spaces in the city to make their own architecture.

The following is a brief outline of the structure and components of the thesis:

Chapter two, Groundwork, prepares the reader for an exploration into the lives Beijing's migrant hostel residents by articulating the four pertinent themes of the thesis: migration, subalternity, State power and migrant communities found in the city. It also encompasses a review of relevant literature based on the four areas of research.

Chapter three, Underground, delves into the architecture of an underground hostel. This chapter is an assemblage of visual and textual materials, including photographs, descriptions, quotations, personal narratives, sketches, diagrams, notes from eavesdropped conversations, newspaper clippings, and journal entries collected during my stay at the JTL. An affordable monthly rent provides access to the basic spatial unit in basement hostels – the *bedhold*.[3] The lack of space encourages basement residents to creatively appropriate the bed frame to serve a multitude of functions. Each bed, an evolving entity moulded to suit the needs of an individual, is a direct reflection of its occupant. The spatial limitation characteristic of basement hostels leads to the development of a migrant's bedhold into a mutable entity extending into the urban realm.

Chapter four, Everyday Life, explores five sites of bedhold extensions through the everyday experiences of four JTL residents – Mei, Qing, and Mr. and Mrs. Ai. This second series of illustrations aims to illuminate the residents' ephemeral and creative occupations of urban space as contributions to the richness and complexity of Beijing's urban experience.

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1   Rudofsky, *Architecture Without Architects*, 5.
2   Estimate of Beijing's floating population from the China Population & Development Research Center, http://www.cpirc.org.cn/news/rkxw_gn_detail.asp?id=5554 (accessed July 10, 2007).
3   The term bedhold is borrowed from Mamphela Ramphele's 1993 publication on the politics of space in migrant labour hostels in Cape Town, South Africa.

Chapter five investigates an emergent spatiality that arises from a shift of focus from the centre to the margins. A shift in perspective allows for clandestine networks of Beijing's subalterns to come forth. Field research reveals the JTL as one of more than eighty hostels found within the study area. Three other examples outside of the study area are presented to demonstrate how basement migrant hostels form an invisible network covering the expanse of the city. The bedholds constructed by the occupants can be understood as basic components of an emergent urban vernacular. The traces of each individual weave together to form an alternative urban geography.

The final chapter is a reflection on the material covered within the body of the thesis and concludes with speculations about further implications for contemporary design of cities.

The Beijing case is contextualized in a collection of nine case studies of urban informal housing in the appendix of this thesis. A star diagram is employed as an analytical device to facilitate comparative studies between Beijing's underground, its large-scale migrant enclaves (浙江村, *Zhejiangcun*), Pearl River Delta's villages-in-the-city (城中村, *chengzhongcun*), Cairo's rooftop shanties, Rio de Janeiro's *favelas*, Toronto's Tent City, Istanbul's *gecekondu* communities, Caracas' *barrios*, Hamburg's *bauwagens*, and Algiers' *bidonvilles*. The graphic profile generated for each case serves as a common ground from which patterns, differences, and similarities emerge.

FIG. 1.3 Location of Study Area (white area) behind the towers of Beijing's new CBD.
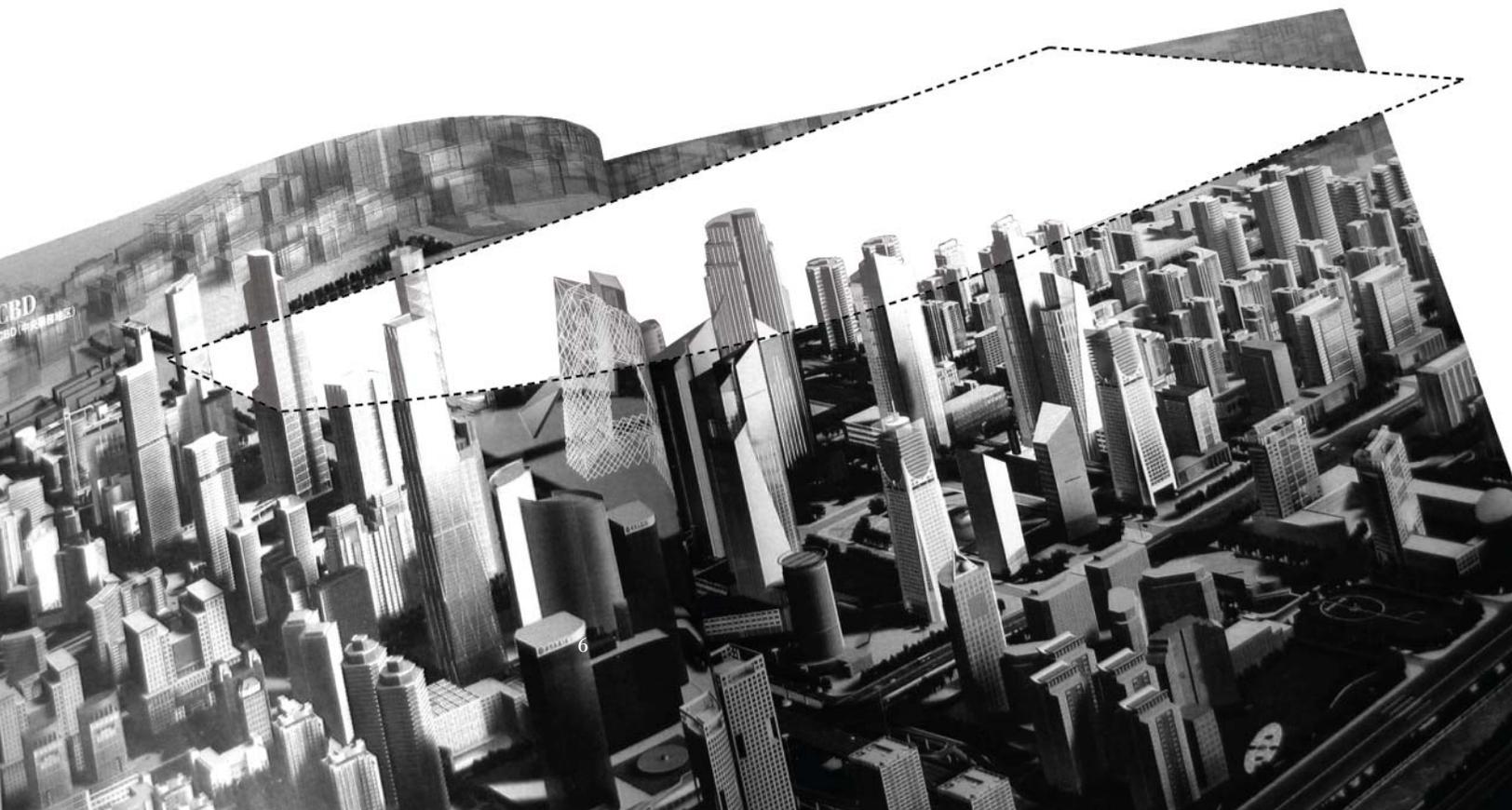
Study Area

The study area is located in Beijing's Chaoyang district where many of the capital's celebrated architectural projects can be found. Touted as the capital's 'window to the world,' Chaoyang district presents an impressive view for the visitor. It is the home to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, three embassy areas with 146 embassies, and a majority of the prominent Olympic venues. Beijing's new CBD is also located at the heart of Chaoyang district. The CBD hosts approximately 3,000 domestic and international companies. This area also has the highest concentration of foreign corporation headquarters and five-star hotels in the country.

The study area of this thesis consists of residential neighbourhoods located directly north of the CBD. I demonstrate access to urban space by using a cartographic technique developed by Giambattista Nolli. The 1748 Nolli map of Rome, a historical and cartographic masterpiece, illustrates the relationship between Roman buildings and public space based on tangible experience. Nolli's cartographic technique uses blank areas to denote public space, accessible by all, while hatched areas represent private or inaccessible space. Mapping the study area based on public accessibility reveals that large portions of existing open spaces (green park space, running tracks, etc.) are removed from the public realm. "What is left over" becomes the everyday space for underprivileged groups.

I have altered the figure-ground graphic method found in the Nolli maps in order to aptly represent the city of Beijing, where walled enclosures are integral to the idea of a city. The significance of the wall in Chinese urban planning and architecture can be seen in Chinese language; city and wall share the same character, 城, *cheng*.[4] The use of a walled enclosure was not limited to a walled city, its use permeated into all Chinese traditional building types. For example, the Imperial Palace is a complex series of walled enclosures. A temple, a library, a tomb, even a house would be defined by a walled enclosure. The work unit compounds (單位, *danwei*) of Maoist China, which operated as miniature cities, were also defined by walled enclosures. Some *danweis* can still be found in contemporary Beijing. An example is the People's Daily Newspaper Agency occupies a large portion of the study area's central block. The most recent evolution of the walled enclosure of Chinese architecture is found in the form of high-end, gated residential complexes.

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4   Boyd, *Chinese Architecture and Town Planning*, 49-74. There are four principles central to the planning and design of Chinese cities: (1) walled enclosure, (2) axiality, (3) north-south orientation, and (4) the courtyard.

Fig. 1.4 Detailed plan of study area.

Central Business District
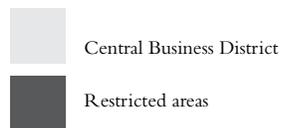
Restricted areas

Areas of restricted access:

1   Construction site
2   Hujialou No.1 Primary School
3   Construction site
4   Construction site
5   Hujialou Central Highschool
6   Hujialou Telecommunications
7   Hujialou Highschool
8   Jinzhilu Primary School
9   People's Daily Newspaper Agency
10   Dongfang Decai No.5 School
11   Dongfang Decai No.1 School
12   Chaoyang District Inspection Centre
13   Huabao Commercial Complex
14   Beijing Union University School of
        Mechanical Engineering
15   Beijing Union University School of
        Commerce
16   Tingjingli Residential Complex
17   Construction site
18   Kaitai Residential Complex

A Note on Units

Distance is measured based on the average pedestrian walking speed at 4.8km per hour. Example: It takes approximately 30 minutes to walk the length of the study area. A 30-minute walk equals to approximately a distance of 2.4km.

Jintai Road

Tingjing Road

East 4th Ring Road

Chaoyang North Road

14

16

15

10

9

12

PAGE 76

17

11

PAGE 74

18

13

PAGE 72

Chaoyang Road

10 minutes

30 minutes

Evolution of Walled Enclosures in Beijing

Walled enclosure is an architectural device for spatial definition. It operates at all scales, from international borders to the enclosure of a domestic home. A wall gives identity to what is within and without by demarcating a clear boundary between inside/outside, public/private, and rural/urban. The old city walls of Beijing have long been rendered obsolete, but the use of walled enclosures continues to play a significant role in the shaping of the urban experience. The walls of contemporary Beijing create exclusionary bubbles in the urban fabric penetrable only by an elite few.

Imperial Beijing: Walled Cities

As one of the four core principles of traditional Chinese city planning, walled enclosure was essential to the identity of civilized society. Appeared as early as the Bronze Age period, city walls were used for multiple purposes: military defense, protection of granaries, and flood control. Beijing is exemplar of Chinese planning principles. During the Ming and Qing dynasties, Beijing had four main walled enclosures: the Outer City to the south, the Inner City to the north, the Imperial City within the Inner City, and within that the Forbidden City.

Maoist Beijing: Danwei

The spatial organization of a socialist work unit (單位, *danwei*) reflects the way a *danwei* functioned as a tightly knit social, economic, and political unit. *Danweis* carried on the ancient tradition of demarcating habitat with walled enclosures. The first step of construction of a *danwei* involves the building of a wall. The spatial integration of workplace, residence, and social life led to a general understanding of *danweis* as socially and physically introverted and isolating entities, but also characterized by a strong sense of camaraderie.

Contemporary Beijing: Gated Residential Communities

Under the influences of economic globalization and local institutional reforms, a proliferation of upscale, gated residential communities have appeared in Chaoyang district of Beijing. There are two types of gated communities: high-rise apartment complexes, and low-rise villa compounds. Both are characterized by secured gates, a wall surrounding the whole complex, 24-hour closed-circuit television surveillance, and security guards patrol. The photo below is an entrance gate - permeable only to the privileged.

Fig. 1.5 City walls of Beijing
——— 明清北京城 *Ming-Qing Beijing Cheng*
------ 元大都城 *Yuan Da Du Cheng*
············ 金中都城 *Jin Zhong Du Cheng*
-------- 遼南京城 *Liao Nan Jing Cheng*

Fig. 1.6 Aerial photograph highlights green open space within the approximate boundary of People's Daily Newspaper *danwei*. The newspaper agency occupies a large portion in the study area.

Fig. 1.7 Guarded entrance gate and walled enclosure to Park Apartments in Chaoyang district.

★ **The Blind Men and the Elephant**
盲人摸象

A group of blind men once gathered around an elephant, trying to find out what the creature looked like. One of them happened to touch one of the elephant's tusks, and said, "An elephant is just like a turnip." Another touched one of the elephant's ears, and said, "It is like a big fan." One put his arms around one of the elephant's legs, and said, "It is like a tree trunk." One who happened to place his hands on the body of the elephant said, "It is like a wall." But the one who got hold of the elephant's tail said, "It is like a snake." The group then fell into an endless argument. None of the men was completely wrong. All of them were partially right.

We are all blind to a certain extent. "We see things incompletely," wrote Henri Lefebvre in *The Urban Revolution*. "Our centre of vision doesn't see and doesn't know it is blind." He then extends our universal–partial blindness to thought, to awareness and to knowledge in his discussion on what he calls *blind fields*. For Lefebvre, specialized knowledge creates blind fields that result in segregation and separation, reducing our ability to understand and perceive urban complexity. ★

A Note on Method

> What interferes with the general tendencies of those involved with planning is understanding only what they can translate in terms of graphic operations: seeing, feeling at the end of a pencil, drawing.
> Henri Lefebvre[5]

The visual documents of this thesis are derived from bodily experiences in the city. The geographical knowledge conveyed is different from those found in maps created and used by urban planners and tourists. The drawings do not hold the predictive quality of a traveller's map or a municipal master plan. Instead, this material presents a reportage of past experiences with no guarantee of the existence of the phenomena they document. They capture a moment in the constantly evolving organism known as the city. The elusive and the ephemeral are the very qualities that make this city a terrain of endless exploration and discovery.

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5   Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities*, 83.

北漂 **North Drift**

陳星 2006　Chen Xing 2006

北風嘯　North wind blowing
吹得滿天黃沙飄　Yellow dust filling the sky
吹得落葉在飄搖　Leaves wavering in the wind
吹得四方游子往北漂　Wanderers from afar drifting towards the North

我在漂　I am drifting
離開我的學校　Left my school
感覺像顆小草　Feeling like a small blade of grass
我在他鄉無依無靠　I am rootless in a foreign place

雪花飄　Snow drifting
飄了一遍又一朝　Drifting again and again
飄得人心也疲勞　One's heart tires too from drifting
漂泊的人渴望歇歇腳　The drifter craves to rest his legs

我在漂　I am drifting
找到我的阿嬌　Found my lover
生活漸漸變好　Life gradually getting better
我也有了自己的家鄉　I too have my own home

誰的一顆心在風中漂啊漂啊漂　Whose heart is drifting in the wind?
誰的一顆心在夜裡搖啊搖啊搖　Whose heart is wavering in the night?
有了家的感覺盡管是越來越好　Though it is gradually better with the feeling of a home
為何我的一顆心總在漂啊漂啊漂　Why is my heart still drifting?

北風嘯 我在漂 雪花飄 我在漂　North wind blowing, I am drifting, snow drifting, I am drifting
北風嘯 我在漂 雪花飄 我在漂　North wind blowing, I am drifting, snow drifting, I am drifting

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2 GROUNDWORK

Groundwork prepares for the journey into Beijing's underground by covering four research areas pertinent to the development of this thesis. A macro historical analysis of **internal migration** in China demonstrates how political and economic policies directly influenced population mobility. Recent reforms ushered the formation of a new **subaltern** social class in contemporary Chinese cities known as the floating population. A full articulation of the subaltern comes with a discussion of its counterpart – **State power**. The relationship between architecture and power is discussed as a way to understand a current discourse on the building of new Beijing as an expression of political power. The dominant voice of the State marginalizes inharmonious sounds of the subaltern. Members of the floating population occupy a peculiar situation – their labour is accepted and required by the economy but they are denied politically their rights to the city. Beijing's underground is one of the various types of **migrant communities** emerged as Beijing's migrants negotiate space for themselves in the capital.

Migration is a 'new' phenomenon in China after three decades of suppressed population mobility. It would have been impossible for migrants like Xiao Xiong to embark on her Beijing journey in pre-reform China. Internal migration in China had been brought to a standstill with the implementation of a political, social, and economical construct known as the *hukou* system in the 1950s.

> During the famine after the Great Leap Forward the first people who starved to death were put in thin coffins, then bodies were put in a couple of vats joined rim to rim. Later on, when everyone was so weak with hunger they couldn't move, whole families died and were just left where they lay. That's when I stopped being a cadre: I really wanted out. I wanted to go down in a big pit near here as a miner. I wasn't bothered about getting killed in a cave-in as long as I could get the money for off-ration grain, and that cost plenty. But they wouldn't take me. They wouldn't let anyone with a rural registration become a worker. I was a farmer so I was stuck scraping a living out of the soil.
> VOICE OF A PEASANT[6]

FIG. 2.1 Migration patterns.

Figure 2.1 is a diagram illustrating the three types of migration patterns witnessed in China today: *primary*, *return*, and *onward migration*. Stage 1 involves the initial decision to leave home or not. Once migrants have chosen to enter cities in Stage 2, they face three possible choices: to say, to return, or to move onward. Thus the three possible migration routes are: A-B-A (return migration), A-B-B (stay in city), or A-B-C (onward migration to other cities). Studies have shown that the propensity for the majority of migrants is to adopt onward migration. Based on 1997 population statistics, 57.9 percent of migrants stayed in a destination for a period of one month to one year, 26.22 percent for over a year, and only 15.88 percent for less than a month. The temporal characteristic of the migrant population is largely a result of state policies and institutional constraints that treat migrants as second-class outsiders, but migrants also change jobs frequently as a wage negotiation tactic.

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6   Davin, *Internal Migration in Contemporary China*, 4.

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Fig. 2.2 *Top*: Chinese character, *jia*.
Fig. 2.3 *Below*: Etymology of *jia*.

★ **Jia** 家

The Chinese character for family is *jia*. The same character is also used for "house" and "home." The ideogram for *jia*, 家, depicts a pig underneath a roof structure. As described in Ronald G. Knapp's *House Home Family*, this character offers important clues into the traditional aspects of Chinese households. Architecturally, the roof symbolizes an enclosure that defines and protects the domestic space within which everyday life unfolds. Since the domestic realm is exclusive to the members of the household, the enclosure also delineates a clear demarcation between public and private domains. It is typically understood that the essential feature of a Chinese household consists of a group of related people who "eat out of one pot." This phrase can be literally interpreted as members of the household sharing a daily meal, or figuratively in terms of a family sharing income (earnings made by raising pigs). Thus, the family operates as an economic unit for production (pig-making) and consumption (pig-eating). In China, the pig's symbolic significance is associated with fertility and virility. In the context of the character *jia*, the domesticated pig also points to the agrarian roots of traditional Chinese society. The idea of the home intrinsically rooted in landscape is reflective of the cultural values of a traditional agrarian society. The traditional definition of *jia*, one that speaks of a lifestyle characterized by security, stability, and rootedness in one's homeland, seems archaic in light of the recent transformations in Chinese society. ★

China's adoption of a 'pro-rural' attitude under Mao Zedong's leadership gave rise to a series of 'anti-urban' consumption and 'anti-urbanization' policies.[7] Minimal urban growth and restriction of rural-urban mobility were central to the Maoist 'pro-rural' development model. The *hukou* system was a fundamental institutional device used in the previous era. However, it continues to contribute to the restrictions and difficulties faced by migrants today.

Kam-Wing Chan, Professor of Geography at the University of Washington, presents a similar idea in his book, *Cities with Invisible Walls*. He argues even though the physical city walls of Imperial China were demolished, Mao's People's Republic of China erected more powerful 'invisible walls.' Administrative devices like the *hukou* system, strictly enforced during the Maoist era, bisected Chinese society into 'agricultural' and 'non-agricultural' groups, and prevented rural people from migrating into the cities. Chan describes how the "system has continued in the post-Mao era to discriminate against rural householders, even though the geographical divide is now mostly broken down." The result is the emergence of a large urban underclass without official status in contemporary Chinese cities.

The *hukou* system effectively created a dichotomous social structure in China since its full implementation in 1958. The 'non-agricultural population,' or urbanites, enjoyed greater State welfare and benefits. Conversely, the 'agricultural population' in rural areas was expected to subsist with little State support.[8] The intention was for people to live and work only in the place defined by their *hukou*.[9] The impact of the system permeated all aspects of life. Employment was directly associated with one's *hukou* status. The elimination of urban labour markets through nationalization and collectivization meant it was next to impossible for anyone to secure employment outside of the State's control. The *hukou* system was also tied to the allocation of food rations, consumer goods, and social services. A system that initially began as a monitoring device developed into a controlling mechanism for the fate of the entire population.

The reform period (1978-present) transformed the traditional definition of home (家, *jia*) that spoke of a lifestyle characterized by security, stability, and rooted-ness in one's homeland. 1984 marked the birth of the individual in Chinese society with the official adoption of the Citizen Identification Card (CIC) policy. Members of a *jia* shared one *hukou* book in the pre-reform period. The collective nature of the *hukou* book made it extremely difficult for individuals to travel. While authorities still retain the power to restrict freedom of movement, the issuance of CICs to every citizen signified the liberation of the individual from the traditional confines of *jia*. The erosion of the *hukou* system is like the gradual collapse of an invisible dam − allowing waves of migrants to move eastward in

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7   Chan, *Cities with Invisible Walls*, 52.
8   Shen, Jianfa, and Yefang Huang. "The Working and Living Space of the 'floating Population' in China." *Asia Pacific Viewpoint* 44, no. 1 (2003): 53.
9   For a detailed study of the history and political-social implications of the *hukou* system, see Solinger, *Contesting Citizenship in Urban China*, 35-55.

pursuit of the Chinese Dream.

Estimated at 140 million and growing, migrants 'float' along the economic waves across the country.[10] China can be geographically described as a three-step terrain, with the Tibetan Plateaus on the western edge stepping down towards the coastal region in the east. The economic landscape follows a similar three-tiered structure: coastal regions are generally more modernized and prosperous, in contrast to central and western provinces, where the majority of Chinese people live in a constant state of poverty. Deng Xiaoping's strategy for economic reforms hinged on the latent energy of uneven development. Deng announced his "Getting Rich First" (致富光榮, *zhifu guangrong*) theory on October 23rd 1985. Deng deliberately set aside the rigid egalitarianism so central to the previous era's Maoist ideology by allowing and encouraging some people and areas to get rich first. The intention behind "Getting Rich First" was to instigate a critical first wave of economic progress. The initial surge of tidal energy aimed to bring about successive, and potentially bigger, waves in the remaining provinces. The continuation of such a development model means members of the floating population will continue to be a dynamic and rootless force flowing through different cities, living in a culture of relocation without destination.

The term *floating population* refers to persons who have left their places of household registration without changing their official *hukou* status. Even though the floating population encompasses a wide range of people, it tends to be described as an undifferentiated, generic flow of migrant labourers. Contemporary Chinese cities have evolved beyond the Maoist binary social structure of a State-enforced rural-urban divide. There are seven generally accepted categories of internal migrants:

1. Unemployed / 'off-post' workers (下崗工人, *xiagang gongren*) – lowest of the social ladder within the migrant population, the unemployed are the most vulnerable to maltreatment by local officials, employers, and landlords. They are popularly referred to as 'three-no's-people' (三無人員, *sanwu renyuan*), which translates to *no job*, *no residency*, and *no home*.

2. Workers (打工的, *dagongde*) – workers in the service sector.

3. Students (學生, *xuesheng*) – Beijing's abundant post-secondary institutions attract an enormous number of students each year to live in the city temporarily to prepare for their entrance examinations.

4. Construction workers (民工, *mingong*) – most construction workers live in dormitories provided by the employers. These temporary structures can be found near any construction sites in the city.

5. Nannies (保母, *baomu*) – full-time nannies typically live with their employers. They are often subjected to strict house rules and

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10 Estimate of China's floating population from the National Bureau of Statistics of China, http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjgb/rkpcgb/qgrkpcgb /t20060316_402310923.htm (accessed July 10, 2006).

work schedules. Some caretakers live in hospital rooms to provide around-the-clock service for their recovering employers.

6. Petty entrepreneurs

7. Business owners – members of the last two categories can generally afford to rent or purchase housing within the city due to higher income levels.

A migrant's decision to move away from home is shaped by factors – poverty, lack of employment opportunities, and land shortage – alternately pushing and pulling between different locations. Depressed living standards in the less developed parts of China push people towards the big cities that offer prosperity, employment, and higher living standards.[11] Pronounced differences in regional development imply that internal migration will continue to have profound impact on Chinese society despite the current Chinese leaders' vow to promote a harmonious society.[12]

A substantial discourse focusing on the relationship between migration and the subsequent re-structuring of social space in both sending and receiving locations exists among Chinese and international scholars. Key studies are presented to provide context for Beijing's migrant housing.

John Knight and Lina Song seek to describe, compare, and explain the relationship between rural and urban China from an economic perspective in *The Rural-Urban Divide*. They argue:

> [the] land shortage and labour surplus inherited by the Communist government, the institutions which it established, and its objective of rapid capital accumulation and industrialization made possible, logical, and acceptable the subordination of the peasants to State interests.

Knight and Song conclude that, even with the implementation of rural economic reforms and the marketization of the economy, the deep-seated bias against the rural population remains.

> The *hukou* system, regulations of the 1950s, placed boundaries around the peasantry as a whole, remaking its members, in the eyes of urbanites, as 'other,' subaltern. The peasant of China thereby became a member of a separate, inferior class or status group, and the generic peasant was now specifically enjoined against migrating. Legal migration thus took on a totally state-determined and 'class'-based dimension that it had not possessed in China before.
> Dorothy Solinger[13]

Dorothy Solinger, a China scholar and a professor at the University of California, offers a comprehensive study of migration in China during the

Fig. 2.4 An agricultural *hukou* book.

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11 Chai, Joseph C. H., and Karin B. Chai. "China's Floating Population and its Implications." *International Journal of Social Economics* 24, no. 7/8/9 (1997): 1038-39.

12 The construction of a harmonious society is the current and dominant socio-economic ideology of the Communist Party of China. It was first introduced during the 2005 National People's Congress under the Hu-Wen administration to shift the country's focus from economic growth to societal balance and equality.

13 Solinger, *Contesting Citizenship in Urban China*, 36.

16

country's transitional phase into market economy in *Contesting Citizenship in Urban China: Peasant Migrants, the State, and the Logic of the Market*. She argues both the Communist state and the emerging market prevent migrants from acquiring full citizenship. The *hukou* system "absolutely determined not just where a person could live but along with that the person's entire life chances – his or her social rank, wage, food rations, and housing." The system continues to have profound impact on the lives of rural migrants to this day by legitimatizing the marginalization of the migrant population in urban areas.

The persistent effects of the *hukou* system despite nation-wide economic and political reforms contribute to the formation of a new subaltern class of rural migrants in contemporary Chinese cities. The concept of 'subalternity' originates from the writings of Italian political theorist Antonio Gramsci. Gramsci's *Prison Notebook 25*, written during his imprisonment by Mussolini's Fascist regime, entitled *On the Margins of History (The History of Subaltern Social Groups)*, is devoted exclusively to his inquiry into the subaltern.[14] The Gramscian model of the subaltern is an important frame of reference for the understanding of the floating population's subordinate position in contemporary Chinese society. *Subaltern* is a military term used figuratively to describe subordinate classes or social groups that lack political representation. The subaltern, subjected to the repression and marginalization of dominant powers, is typically excluded from the State's formal history. Critical of the partiality of the elitist historical process, Gramsci argues for the production of a subaltern historiography as an indispensable part of an *integral history* that embraces the totality and complexity of society.[15] This thesis finds fundamental agreement with Gramsci with regards to a general dissatisfaction with a narrow concept of urban historiography that robs the richness and complexity of what the urban experience is about, and a belief in subaltern groups as the germinations of positive social change towards the betterment of society.

Theorists like Walter Benjamin, Michel de Certeau, Margaret Crawford, and Iain Borden share Gramsci's belief in the production of a more holistic and comprehensive history and reject a "reductionist" reading of the city. They acknowledge varied and pluralities of urban life and present urban history from the 'bottom' up. These authors point to a way of studying the city that avoids simplifying generalizations.

German sociological and cultural critic Walter Benjamin produced a collective history of early twentieth century Paris in his final, unfinished volume of writings known as *The Arcades Project*. Instead of formulating a grand narrative of Paris, Benjamin used multiple voices to produce an unruly, fascinating composite. He wrote:

Method of this project: literary montage. I needn't say anything.

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14 Green, Marcus. "Gramsci Cannot Speak: Presentations and Interpretations of Gramsci's Concept of the Subaltern." *Rethinking Marxism* 14, no. 3 (2002): 2.
15 Ibid., 9.

★ **Spring Festival**

春運開始了
像往年一樣
我象無頭蒼蠅一樣到處找人買票

春節回家看看
一件多麼溫馨的事
但什麼原因把這樣一件溫馨的事變得
　　那麼麻煩

我們在異鄉生活、工作、交稅、戀愛、
生病、老死...
但這個國家並不認可我們的价值
我們是"流動人口"
像我這樣的全中國不知道有多少萬

快到春節了
我們都在路上
從別人的地方,回自己的家鄉

The Spring Festival move has begun
Like the years before
I run around like a head-less fly in search
　　for tickets

To go home for Spring Festival
Such a heart-warming event
But for what reason this has turned into
　　such a burden

We live, work, pay taxes, fall in love, fall ill,
　　die in a foreign place...
But this country does not recognize our
　　value
We are the "floating population"
Don't know how many tens of thousands
　　of people are like me in China

Spring Festival is almost here
We are all on the road
Returning to our homes
from foreign land ★

> Merely show. I shall purloin no valuables, appropriate no ingenious formulations. But the rags, the refuse – these I will not inventory but allow, in the only way possible, to come into their own: by making use of them.[16]

His montage of over a thousand pages of notes and quotations presents the Parisian arcades as a kind of phantasmagoria of modern life. The assemblage of bits and pieces captures the spirit of the city as an irreducible whole. Benjamin's fragmented approach to the totality of Parisian life offers a compelling precedent for this study.

French cultural historian Michel de Certeau shifted the balance and focus of cultural studies from society's producers to the consumers in *The Practice of Everyday Life*. He emphasized on the human-centred aspects of urban life and concentrated his analysis on consumers' ability to re-appropriate the rituals and representations that the State seeks to impose upon them. De Certeau demonstrated ways people deflect and subvert imposed power in their constant struggle against the authorities. His interest in the "resilient tactics" operating within an established superstructure of state power led him to formulate a vocabulary of questions, and perspectives to illuminate everyday tactical activities hidden behind the mask of conformity. His mission to uncover clandestine geographies destabilizes the power of the strategy by articulating the unconscious acts of the tactics that appropriate and "poach" the imposed rules and structures. In the influential chapter "Walking in the City," de Certeau attempted to make legible the urban "text" written by the walkers "down below."

> The practitioners make use of spaces that cannot be seen; their knowledge of them is as blind as that of lovers in each other's arms. The paths that correspond in this intertwining, unrecognized poems in which each body is an element signed by many others, elude legibility. It is as though the practices organizing a bustling city were characterized by their blindness.[17]

De Certeau's assertion of alternative spatial practices operating within the established framework of the city serves as a theoretical anchor for my investigation on the everyday spaces of Beijing's migrant population. The sojourners' movement through the capital composes an alternative geography that escapes the totalizing gaze from the top of the CCTV's 13-storey high cantilever.

De Certeau's line of inquiry continues to the present through the works of theorists like Crawford and Borden. Crawford demonstrates the creative capability of the subaltern to transform and appropriate urban spaces in her research on everyday urbanism at the Harvard Graduate School of Design. She documents site-specific and temporal spatial practices that point to an open, inclusive approach to urbanism that engages everyday users. Borden, the current director of Bartlett School of Architecture,

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16 Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, N1a, 8.
17 De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 93.

studies architecture and the city through a multiplicity of perspectives by forming cross-disciplinary associations with academics, journalists, designers, and urbanists in *Strangely Familiar: Narratives of Architecture in the City*. The members of *Strangely Familiar* work to unveil histories that would normally be considered insignificant in their opposition against an "architectural centralism" where monumental and canonical qualities tend to take centre stage.

While thinkers like de Certeau saw the consumers' artistic potential as a means for emancipation from the tyranny of dominating powers, a number of architectural writers from the 1960s and 1970s such as Christopher Alexander and John Habraken consider the end-users' creative powers to be an important agent for direct participation in institutional development. They understood architecture as a continual work-in-progress in which the occupants play a critical role, rather than as completed artefacts. As proponents of participatory design, they relinquished some of the design power bestowed upon the architect in recognition of the influence that consumers of architecture have on their built environment. Their practices and theoretical propositions promote their argument for a re-positioning of the architect's role in order to transform architectural design into an inclusive and empowering process that fosters individual expression.

Dutch architect and theorist John Habraken introduced the concept of *support and infill* in the early 1960s in reaction against the mass-produced post-war housing of the time. He argued for inhabitants' capability to take responsibility for their homes. His methodology entails the designing of supports that serve as armatures, open for infill by their inhabitants. Christopher Alexander, in his belief that users know more about the buildings they inhabit than an architect ever could, attempted to distil the complexity of the city into a *Pattern Language* to empower any person to design and build at any scale. Architects associated with the Dutch structuralist movement of the 1960s, with Aldo van Eyck and Herman Hertzberger as its prime representatives, proposed the architect's role was not to provide a conclusive design solution but to provide a spatial framework open to multiple transfigurations by the users. This kind of inclusive design method unleashes innate creativity by liberating users from their usual subordinate positions as passive consumers. The architectural process becomes a dynamic practice that embraces the potential for new trajectories.

This thesis transcends the oppressed nature of the subaltern in favour of constructive optimism. The study of the subaltern's ability to create a viable form of life without conforming to State authority offers hope for a more inclusive and just society. The power of subaltern groups lies not only in their potential to overthrow an oppressive State apparatus, but also in their invitation to question our own conceptions of the world around us, implying alternative and potentially revolutionary ways of living in the city. But the voice of the subaltern reduces to a dismissible murmur in the omnipresence of the State.

Glossary

Anhuicun 安徽村	Anhui village
beipiao 北漂	north drifters, Beijing migrants
chai 拆	to tear down, to demolish
changzhu renkou 常住人口	permanent resident
chengzhongcun 城中村	village-in-the-city
dagongde 打工的	migrant wage workers
dayuan 大院	big yard, migrant housing compound
danwei 單位	work unit
Henancun 河南村	Henan village
hexie shehui 和諧社會	harmonious society
huji 戶籍	household registration status
hukou 戶口	household registration system
jia 家	house, home, family
liudong renkou 流動人口	floating population
liudong renkou jujudian 流動人口聚居點	congregating zones of the floating population
meng 夢	dreams, to dream
mingong 民工	peasant worker
pingfang 平房	a one-story home
qingli zhengdun 清理整頓	to clean up; to straighten; to reorder
renminbi 人民幣	the Chinese unit of money, yuan
sanwu renyuan 三無人員	"three-no's-people" – no job, no residency, and no home
siheyuan 四合院	traditional Chinese courtyard housing
xiagang 下崗	to step down from one's post; to become unemployed
xin 新	new, fresh, beginning
Xinjiangcun 新疆村	Xinjiang village
zang luan cha 髒亂差	dirty; chaotic; miserable
zaoshi 早市	early-morning marketplace
Zhejiangcun 浙江村	Zhejiang village

One World, One Dream
Official slogan for the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing

The slogan for the 2008 Olympic Games embodies the voice of the State: singular, imposing, absolute. State power refers to authoritative forces that dominate and permeate into every aspect of our lives. The relationship between architecture and State power is a well-explored one. China's contemporary architecture is considered by some to be a manifestation of the nation's eagerness to establish its position as the 'rising star' on the global stage. Around-the-clock construction and demolition are evidence of an ambition for a new, glorious chapter in Beijing's history.

> The 'dominance' whose acme we are thus fast approaching has very deep roots in history and in the historical sphere, for its origins coincide with those of political power itself. Military architecture, fortifications and ramparts, dams and irrigation systems – all offer many fine examples of dominated space. Such spaces are works of construction rather than 'works' in the sense in which we have been using the term, and they are not yet 'products' in its narrow, modern and industrial meaning; dominant space is invariably the realization of a master's project.
> HENRI LEFEBVRE[18]

French Marxist sociologist Henri Lefebvre saw the city and its architecture as integrally contributing to power relations. He argued the (social) production of space is not just a means of production, but also a means for the dominating elites to reproduce and perpetuate its dominance, control, and status in *The Production of Space*. In Lefebvre's view, social existence is inextricably tied to spatial existence – society exists as long as it finds spatial expression. Applying Lefebvre's spatial theory to the case of Beijing, the construction of the new capital is exemplar of how the city and its buildings embody and perpetuate the State's vision and ideology. The denial of the migrants' rights to urban space could then be interpreted as an act of exclusion from society itself.

A canonical study of architecture and power is Michel Foucault's analysis of the Panopticon, an architectural system for controlling prisoners designed by Jeremy Bentham. Foucault demonstrated how architecture functions as a device for surveillance and control – an expression of the dominating will of the authority in *Discipline and Punish*. Bentham's Panopticon is, for Foucault, an exemplar of modern State power. By drawing a comparison between modern society and the Panopticon, Foucault contends that the principles of the Panopticon can be applied not only to prisons but to any system of disciplinary power - a factory, a hospital, a school, or Beijing's circumscribing network of military procession routes.

More recently, Israeli architects Eyal Weizman and Rafi Segal offer an unsettling example of the power held by architecture and city design in the expression of political will in their groundbreaking analysis of West Bank

FIG. 2.5 *Chai*...not. Chinese character for 'demolish' (拆, *chai*), sprayed on the side of a building, with the character for 'no' or 'not' (不, *bu*) added as a form of silent protest.

★ **Chai** 拆

Beijing's Dashanzi International Art Festival (DIAF) is an annual spotlight event at the site of the old Unit 798. DIAF 2006 featured an architectural art and contemporary art exhibition entitled China/Chai-na. Curator Huang Rui's witty pun, China/Chai-na, plays on the frequently seen Chinese character, *chai* 拆, that signifies impending demolition of buildings and neighborhoods in cities across the country. The significance of *chai* is three-fold. When seen on the sides of what the West would consider to be buildings of historical value, *chai* brings about nostalgia for the lost past. *Chai* is a distinct characteristic of the development of disposable architecture. Guided by myopic market analyses and enabled by the limitless flow of cheap labor working around the clock, buildings rise and fall at a speed approaching that of fashion trends.

This simple eight-stroke character also embodies the cries of injustice from disadvantaged social groups, since displacement is a condition inextricably tied to the act of demolition. As migrant workers flood into urban areas to participate in the destruction/reconstruction processes, local residents are displaced to less desirable parts of the city. ★

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18 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 164.

Beijing Index

300,000 :	Estimated number of people displaced in preparation for the 2008 Olympic Games[i]
306,800,000,000 :	Amount for upgrading public transport system
15,810,000 :	Total population in 2006[ii]
3,830,000 :	Floating population[iii]
24.3 :	Percentage of total population without *hukou* status[iv]
16,808,000,000 :	Area[v]
720,000 :	Area of Forbidden City
10,000,000 :	Area of Central Business District
6 :	Number of existing ring roads
332 :	Estimated number of 'urban corners'
171 :	Number of 'urban corners' to be removed before 2008
4,500 :	Amount per square meter of compensation for displaced residents in CBD
15,000 :	Price per square meter for a new condominium in CBD
32 :	Price for a Starbucks grande caramel latte
300 :	Average price per month for a basement hostel bed
1,665 :	Average monthly income for urban residents
718 :	Average monthly income for rural residents
1 :	Price per use of shower in basement hostels

A note on units:
Area – square meter
Monetary amount – Chinese Yuan Renminbi (¥)
1 Canadian Dollar = 7.05661 Chinese Yuan Renminbi (May 20, 2007)

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i   "Forced Evictions Worldwide", *Environment and Urbanization*, April 2005.
ii   National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2006.
iii Ibid.
iv   Ibid.
v   http://www.wikipedia.com

habitat patterns entitled *A Civilian Occupation: the Politics of Israeli Architecture*. Weizman states, "There is an architecture to politics in as much as there is a politics to architecture." Their retrospective analysis and detailed mappings reveal Israeli hilltop communities as military-driven, "purpose-built settlements" designed to achieve surveillance-based security against the Palestinian communities found within the valleys. Weizman and Segal argue that Israeli architects are engaged in "negative planning," an approach that establishes "architecture, just like the tank, the gun and the bulldozer, as a weapon with which human rights could be and are violated. The mundane elements of planning and architecture are placed there in order to disturb and dominate."

Likewise, a political agenda in China is evident in contemporary Chinese architecture. State power is expressed in the sheer scale, speed, and boldness of new constructions. *Great Leap Forward*, a publication by Dutch architect and theorist Rem Koolhaas, is dedicated to the relative 'perversities and absurdities' of rapid urbanization witnessed in the Pearl River Delta in southern China. Peter G. Rowe considers China's embrace of experimental architectural designs by foreign architects to be an expression of the forward-looking, progressive, and optimistic spirit of the rising nation in his comparative study of contemporary Asian cities entitled *East Asia Modern*.[19] A survey through recent design journals reveals the dominance of State power within a prevailing discourse on contemporary Chinese architecture. New Beijing's prestigious line of architecture features mega-projects like Rem Koolhaas' CCTV headquarters, Paul Andreu's Grand National Theatre, Herzog & de Meuron's National Olympic Stadium, PTW and Ove Arup's National Swimming Centre, Riken Yamamoto's Jian Wai SOHO, Steven Holl's Linked Hybrid complex, and Norman Foster's Beijing International Airport. These symbols of progress serve a grand vision for the new capital.

> *New Beijing, Great Olympics*
> Bid Slogan for Beijing Olympics 2008

Beijing has been racing to complete an enormous series of urban developments since the announcement of its successful bid in 2001. These projects include the construction of Olympic venues, housing and hotels for athletes, journalists and tourists, airport expansion, new expressways, thirteen new subway lines, and high profile office complexes within the new central business district including the central television facility of the CCTV project. Key historical sites like the White Tower in Beihai Park, Qianmen Gate, and the Temple of Heaven, are undergoing massive restorations in anticipation for an estimated 1.5 million domestic and international tourists. Social campaigns are also in progress to ensure that Beijing citizens themselves are presentable to visitors. Beijing authorities vowed to eradicate five ill-mannered behaviours among citizens in 2006, including spitting, littering, jaywalking, rowdiness on public transportation, and allowing animals to relieve themselves on the streets.[20] Taxi drivers

Fig. 2.6 Chinese character, *xin*.

★ **New Beijing**

Chinese Etymology : 新 *xin* (new)

Use : 新北京，新奧運 (New Beijing, Great Olympics)

亲 *qin* + 斤 *jin* = 新 *xin*

English meanings for 新 *xin*: New, fresh, novel, beginning, starting, modern, recent, the prefix 'neo'

Etymological analysis of the Chinese ideogram for 'new', 新, reveals a duality: (new) creation is only possible through the act of destruction (of the old). The pictogram depicts the chopping of a hazelnut tree (亲) with an axe (斤) to make way for new beginnings. ★

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19 Rowe, *East Asia Modern*, 137-139.
20 Beijing, "Beijing declares war on spitting, littering," http://au.china-embassy.org/eng/xw/t230563.htm (accessed August 20, 2006).

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attend mandatory language lessons to learn conversational English to welcome tourists. Guo Zhanqi, a retired restaurateur, recently announced his offer to buy flies for ¥2 RMB apiece as a personal effort to help clean up the city for the Olympics.[21] Guo reworked Beijing's Olympic bid slogan to "No flies, New Beijing. No flies, Great Olympics" in hope to upstart a citywide fly-killing campaign. The ambition to write a new chapter of its history permeates into every aspect of urban life, from social conduct to architecture.

The Olympic building boom is synchronous with the emergence of migrant communities since Beijing is the new home for an estimated 4 million rural migrants. Urban residents can obtain housing through four main methods in China since the end of all welfare housing provision through both municipal government and work unit distribution in 1999: assigned public housing, commercial housing through market mechanisms, economic and comfortable housing, and the secondary housing market.[22] Migrants are largely excluded from the mainstream housing distribution system as many of the institutional barriers are still in place. The policy, however, has been relaxed in favour of wealthy migrants in recent years. It is now possible for migrants to obtain a blue-stamp *hukou* in Shanghai with the full payment purchase of homes valued over ¥100,000 RMB depending on geographic location.[23] No such criteria have been made public in Beijing. Therefore it remains extremely difficult, even for wealthy migrants, to acquire housing without proper *hukou* status in the capital city. Rental is the primary housing option for migrants due to income limitations and government restrictions. Other housing options include hotels (賓館, *binguan*), living temporarily with local friends and relatives, and forms of self-built informal housing (棚戶, *penghu*).

Fig. 2.7 Young tailors at their sewing machines in Zhejiang Village, Beijing.

北京啊，我只要你的一扇窗.
O Beijing, I want only one pane of your windows.
Voice of a Beijing migrant

Fig. 2.8 Open sewers and food stalls in Zhejiang Village, Beijing.

Large-scale migrant enclaves became prevalent in Beijing starting in the early 1980s. *Zhejiangcun* (Zhejiang Village), *Henancun* (Henan Village), *Anhuicun* (Anhui Village), and *Xinjiangcun* (Xinjiang Village) are the most prominent of migrant enclaves within the city. Delia Davin, Emeritus Professor of Chinese Studies at the University of Leeds, highlights Zhejiangcun as a notable example of large-scale migrant enclaves in her book *Internal Migration in Contemporary China*. Located only five kilometers south of Tiananmen Square, Zhejiangcun was home to more than 100,000 migrant entrepreneurs from Wenzhou, who organized a successful garment industry despite regular forced evictions by city authorities. Li Zhang uses an ethnographic approach in *Strangers in the City* to illuminate the resilience of Zhejiang migrants in their struggle for power, space, and resident rights.

Fig. 2.9 Pedicabs: the only form of transport in Zhejiang Village, Beijing.

21 Chinadaily.com, "Beijinger buying flies to help clean up city," http://www.chinadaily.com. cn/2008/2007-04/05/content_844099.htm (accessed August 2, 2007).
22 Wu, W. P. "Migrant Housing in Urban China – Choices and Constraints." *Urban Affairs Review* 38, no. 1 (2002): 90–119.
23 Ibid., 98.

Tao: When I first arrived in Beijing, I lived in a basement.

Tao: Humid and dirty.

Tao: Know now I managed?

Taisheng: You've told me a thousand times!

Taisheng: You slept in your plastic raincoat.

Tao: My own brilliant idea!

Fig. 2.10 Screen captures and dialogue from from *The World*, a film by Chinese director Jia Jiangke.

Likewise, Xiang Biao's *Transcending Boundaries* documents the evolution of Zhejiangcun from a small village into a highly successful community network transcending the state-imposed boundaries. Often these villages are considered threats to civic order and safety. Zhejiangcun was ordered to be demolished in 1995, and Xinjiangcun in 2003 during campaigns aimed to "clean up, straighten, and reorder" (清理整頓, *qingli zhengdun*).[24]

Going beyond the specific case of Zhejiangcun, the Beijing Academy of Social Sciences published *Investigation of Urban Corners in Beijing*, a 2004 report from the first comprehensive investigation into what the researchers call the city's *urban corners*. Beijing's urban corners are defined by ten characteristics: filthy environment, few available social resources, insufficient basic infrastructure, abundance of old and dangerous buildings, residents with low cultural levels, residents with low incomes, an aging population, congregation of floating population, congregation of special social groups (ie. out-of-province students, salon girls), and relatively low level of management.[25] Researchers developed an inventory of seven types of urban corners based on the aforementioned characteristics:

1. Cultural heritage (文物保護形, *wenwu baohu xing*) – refers to areas like Qianmen district where migrants and low-income groups live in poorly maintained heritage buildings.

2. Inner city neglected areas (內城遺忘形, *neicheng weiwang xing*) – these are areas with temporary structures that became permanent as a result of negligence, such as derelict areas waiting for development, and abandoned development projects.

3. Villages-in-the-city (城中村形, *chengzhongcun xing*) – refer to large-scale, highly visible migrant enclaves like Zhejiangcun.

4. Factory villages (廠中村形, *changzhongcun xing*) – built and maintained by large factories to provide housing for employees.

5. Interstitial spaces (城市飛地形, *chengshi feidi xing*) – include areas around train stations, underneath highways, power corridors, and riverbanks.

6. Underground spaces (地下空間形, *dixia kongjian xing*)– discussion to follow.

7. Special groups enclaves (特殊人群聚居形, *teshu renqun juju xing*) – enclaves dominated by distinct social groups like the elderly, garbage collectors, and working girls.[26]

This government report focuses on the harmful aspects of Beijing's urban corners as justification for clearance programmes. Similarly, mainstream media use the floating population as convenient and politically powerless scapegoats, blaming them for increased urban crime rates and the spread of diseases (AIDS, and SARS in 2003). News headlines and reports associate

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24 Zhang, *Strangers in the City*, 159-85.
25 Original text in Chinese, English translation by author.
26 Original text in Chinese, English translation by author.

migrants with the ills of city life: overcrowding, chaos, crime, violence, drugs, and prostitution. Even the term *floating population* itself carries negative cultural connotations. Popular descriptors for this population group, like *flood*, *wave*, *surge*, *flux*, are associated with the uncontrollable forces of nature that need to be controlled, tamed, and put into order. Areas of migrant congregation face demolition and forced evictions as Beijing prepares for the Olympics. There are currently 332 urban villages within Beijing, 171 of which are listed for removal before 2008 due to their proximity to Games venues.[27] The authors of the 2004 report issued a warning for the potential dangers associated with underground spaces. This least-documented category is described as a "black hole" threatening civic order and public safety.[28]

A familiar physics theory suggests the universe we live in might be one of an infinite number of universes, each with its own different history. Black holes are hypothesized as thresholds between these parallel universes. This investigation into Beijing's underground "black hole" leads to the discovery of an alternative, parallel universe of the subaltern.

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27   Zhu, *Investigation of Urban Corners in Beijing*, 156.
28   Ibid., 11.

FIRST ENCOUNTER

★ **Monday, May 22nd 2006**

Day 1

I finished packing my bags in the morning, but couldn't bring myself to leave my room until 2:00PM. Somehow it felt like I was going away on a long journey to a far away place, when in fact I was only temporarily staying in a room 45 minutes away from Tsinghua's campus. I could not fathom what it would be like to live in a place without internet and cellular phone reception. Nervous and distraught, I decided to take a taxi downtown, even though the ride was a ¥48 RMB luxury. Negotiating Beijing's public transit with my large backpack was too much to handle.

I arrived at my new living space safely. After having cleared off the pile of items my roommate left on it, I got clean sheets from the superintendent's wife. She was really sweet; she tried to find me the cleanest matching set of linens.

I decided to go for a walk around the neighbourhood. The walk ended shortly. There was too much sand and dust in the air, thanks to the impeccable combination of Beijing winds and an entire street-length of constructions and renovations. I stopped at the nearby KFC, the only brightly lit, relatively clean, and air-conditioned refuge from the street.

Coincidentally, my new roommate walked in and sat next to my table. Obviously she doesn't want to stay in the room either. I watched her empty a plastic bag full of reading material on the table. She proceeded to devour her food for brain... without ordering anything. ★

I wait for Xiao Xiong under the giant Olympic Games countdown clock in front of the National Museum at Tiananmen Square. With twenty-one months left until the 29th Olympiad, 2006 is an unsettling time to be in Beijing. Observing the omnipresent processes of construction and demolition is like watching the process of ecdysis of an insect – the raw tenderness forcing its way through an obsolete exoskeleton. It is also an unfortunate time for tourist visits since Beijing's main historical attractions are all cocooned in Asia's distinctive bamboo scaffolding, undergoing renovations in preparation for the estimated 1.5 million visitors in 2008. Still, a visiting family approached me to take a photo of them in front of the covered Qianmen Gate.

I felt a tap on my shoulder as I was saying goodbye to the family. Xiao Xiong asked whether I wanted to have a photo taken as well. I laughed and suggested that we go for a drink. Xiao Xiong shared her adventures in Beijing over a hot glass of sweet soya milk. She had moved seven times during her first seven months in the city. Five of the seven places were underground hostels.

Fig. 3.1 to 3.6 Photographs of entrance stair-
ways down into basement hostels.

3 UNDERGROUND
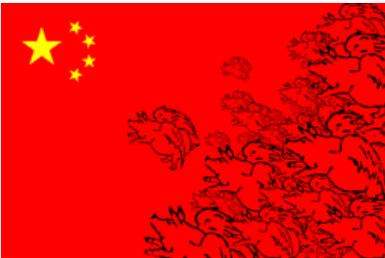
FIG. 3.7 *Above* : Entrance stairway to basement hostel.
FIG. 3.8 *Below* : Illustration of Chinese Dream.

★ Chinese Dream

The sense of security, stability, and rootedness associated with the traditional Chinese home still holds cultural significance in the minds of contemporary Chinese. The term 'Chinese Dream' describes the aspirations of Chinese citizens for a successful and satisfying life. This term typically denotes financial security and material comfort, but can also entail a dream of fame, exceeding social, ethnic, or class boundaries, or simply living a fulfilling life. This utopian dream of freedom, economic prosperity, and opportunity, has attracted millions of rural migrants to Chinese cities. ★

The Descent

> A *Schwelle* (threshold) is a zone. Transformation, passage, wave action are in the word *schwellen*, swell, and etymology ought not to overlook these senses.
> WALTER BENJAMIN[29]

The descent is the distinctive passage into underground migrant hostels. A flight of dimly lit stairs leads to a blast-proof door; its heavy metal frame reveals the seemingly endless corridor beyond. The bodily experience of the descent is dramatic: your skin registers the change in temperature and humidity; the bustling city noise in your ears is replaced with the constant drone of fluorescent tube lighting; the air movement around you grinds to a halt. For newcomers, this threshold down into the underground paradoxically marks the beginning of their ascent to the realization of the Chinese Dream.

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29   Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, O2a, 1.

Basement Anatomy

After walking through the second set of blast-proof doors you are confronted with the main double-loaded corridor. It is wide enough for two people to walk pass each other without touching. The string of rooms seems endless. Thick concrete beams and fluorescent tube lights above alternate to establish a rhythm along the entire length of the path. Trash bins and red fire extinguishers perform similarly on the floor. Welcome to the JTL Hostel.

The content of this chapter is derived of field research conducted in the JTL Hostel - an underground migrant community located in Beijing's Jintaili (JTL) neighbourhood in Chaoyang district. JTL was one of the five underground hostels Xiao Xiong had lived in. Securing a bed was a longer-than-expected process involving a two-month waiting list. The popularity of this hostel comes from its attractive location, close to the city's financial hub at a reasonable price. The JTL experience is typical amongst Beijing's underground hostels. The negative qualities are obvious: lack of natural daylight, poor air circulation, lack of privacy, limited personal space, and negligence in fire safety precautions. But these qualities only represent a fragment of the experience of living there.

The general population do not regard undergrounds spaces to be habitable due to certain cultural stigmas. For example, the humidity level is commonly assumed to be unbearable and leads to physical health problems like arthritis. Personal experience and conversations with basement residents reveal the relatively high humidity of underground space offers comfort during Beijing's dry, cold winter months, when winds from Siberia and Mongolia sweep through the capital city. Underground space, with earth as its insulation, also maintains a stable temperature throughout the

★ **Tuesday, May 23rd 2006**

71 Steps

I'm happy to announce that I had a good night's sleep without any insect bites. It took me a while to fall asleep: people chatting across the hall, furious typing from next door, and that sense of insecurity and vulnerability that enveloped me as soon as the lights were switched off. The mosquito netting is the protective layer that defines my private space. Without lighting, however, it ceases to exist.

It takes 71 steps to walk from my room to the entrance stairway. I don't know what the maximum running distance is in the Chinese building code, but certainly this is far too long a corridor to have only one egress. There are a total of three exits, but two of them have been locked up and used as additional sleeping quarters. If there is a fire, I, being in the very last room, will die without a doubt (knock on wood). ★

FIG. 3.9 Plan of JTL Hostel, shown with immediate surroundings.

A   Room 12
B   Room 31
C   Room 10
D   Room 29
E   Corridor 3b
F   Room 25
G   Blocked exit
H   Corridor 3a
J   Room 10
K   Room 17
L   Room 6
M   Women's washrooms
N   Water room
0   Men's washrooms
P   Room 4
Q   Room 2
R   Entrance to JTL Hostel
S   Superintendent
T   Room 1
U   Street games
V   Newspaper stand
W   Local bulletin and newspaper board
X   KFC

31
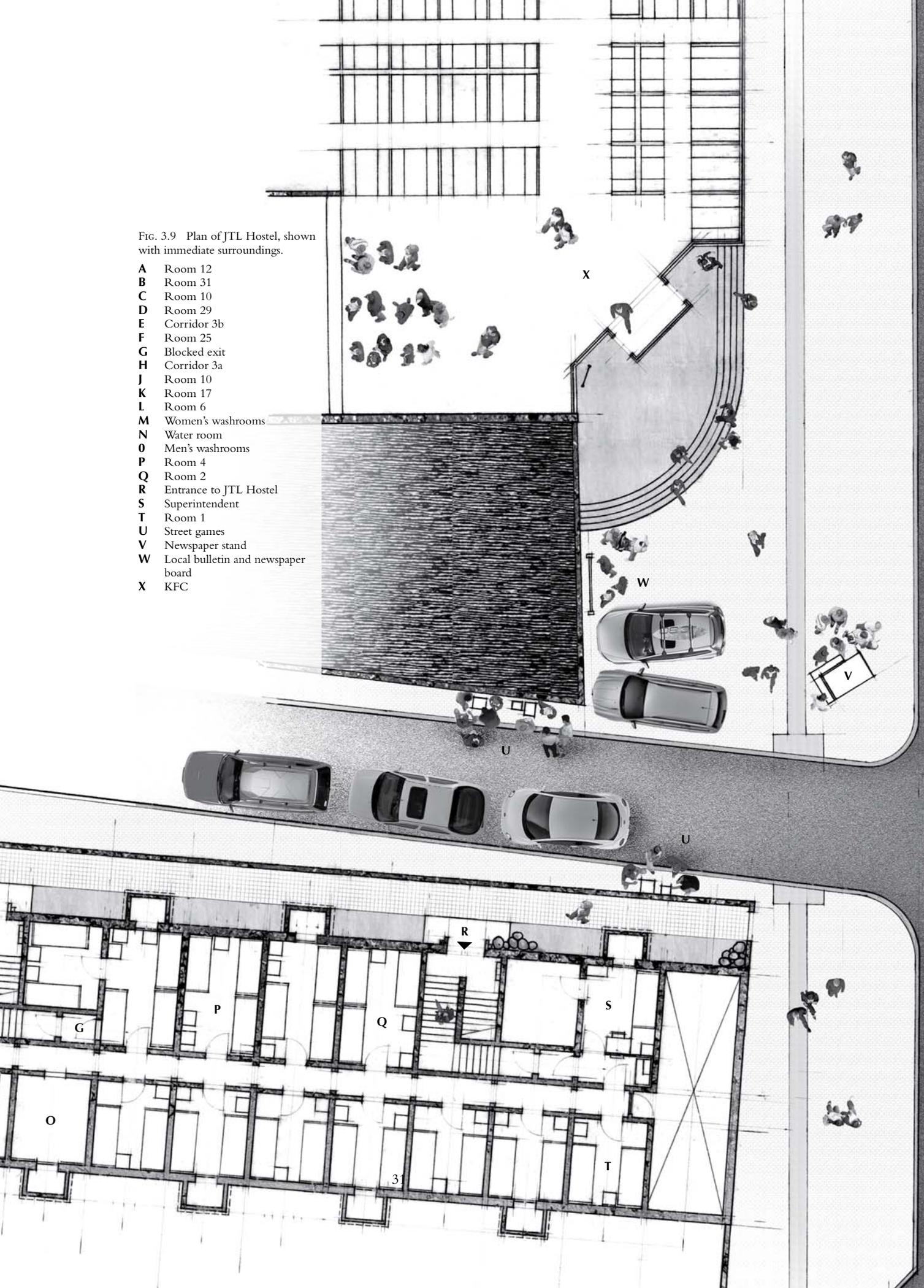
year; meaning that the space is warm during the winter, cool during the summer. The reality of the physical living conditions of underground hostels is contrary to some popular assumptions.

The anatomy of a basement hostel is comprised of private rooms and public amenities linked along a central spine. The monthly rent of ¥240 RMB in the JTL covers the use of a room, typically shared between two to four people, public amenities like access to free hot water in the water room, and washrooms with shower facilities.

Water Room

Fig. 3.10 Photograph of Water Room.

Located at the very centre of the complex, the Water Room is where you have the chance to meet and interact with everyone. The Water Room bustles with activities during meal times, when residents come to wash and prepare food, early mornings when people come to perform their morning rituals before heading off to work, and on the weekends when people do their laundry by hand. Over menial tasks like scrubbing dishes or cleaning fruits and vegetables, residents chat casually with their neighbours.

Women's Washroom

Fig. 3.11 Photograph of Women's Washroom.

There are two toilet stalls and one shower in the Women's Washroom. The enclosure to the shower consists of a 2x4 board, a swinging toilet partition, and a plastic shopping bag to tie the previous two items together. The shower faucet is locked. The superintendent unlocks it after the ¥1 RMB fee is paid.

Corridor

Analysis of the basic architectural plan of defence shelters reveals little of the actual spatial experience. As is typical of most underground hostels found underneath buildings dated from Maoist era, all the rooms are accessed via a double-loaded corridor. Most residents leave their doors open to improve air circulation. A walk down the corridor leaves you with an assemblage of fragments collected from each room: snippets of eavesdropped conversations, aromas of fresh-cooked meals, fleeting glimpses of domestic activities, broken lyrics of the latest Chinese pop song. The long corridor thus becomes a kind of mixing chamber where dreams/nightmares of the urban experience are shared. This mandatory journey through the corridor to the rooms achieves an unintended purpose: the building of a neighbourly bond between a diverse range of residents.

Fig. 3.13 Chinese character, *meng*.

★ **Meng** 夢

The Chinese ideograms for sleep (睡, *shui*) and dream (夢, *meng*) share a common component: the eye (目, *mu*). In both cases, the 'eye' is temporarily blinded with covers of grass or drapes (eyelids). The vision of reality temporarily subsides for the fantastical substance of our unconscious to surface. The immediacy of the present gives way to the enchanted aspirations for the future. ★

Migrant Bedhold

The bed represents the most intimate personal space available for a basement resident since most of the available amenities are communal. A bed is assigned, along with a small storage cabinet, to each person. Bedding and a pillow can be obtained from the superintendent for an extra ¥50 RMB deposit. Also included in the rent is a working land line in each room. This is crucial because cellular reception is generally limited in underground spaces.

A bed is primarily understood as a piece of household furniture, a resting or sleeping place for people and animals. More importantly, a bed is the place for dreams. Chinese migrants' collective dream of stability and prosperity has led to the reality of instability and flux in underground hostels. The 4 square meters of space defined by the bed forms the central component of a migrant's bedhold.

Limitations in space coerce residents to seek creative solutions. The neutrality of the physical tube-frame structure enables it to become an armature open for user appropriation. Extending beyond its material form, the bed is a bed/sofa/dining table/storage device/exercise bench/study/ meeting place for close friends/bike rack. Through the active engagement and necessary inventiveness of the user, the bed is no longer just a bed; it could be this/that/_____. Each bed is custom designed by each occupant based on individual needs and desires. Each is a direct reflection of its inhabitant. The modest base structure of the bed becomes a canvas for the art of living.

A

B

C
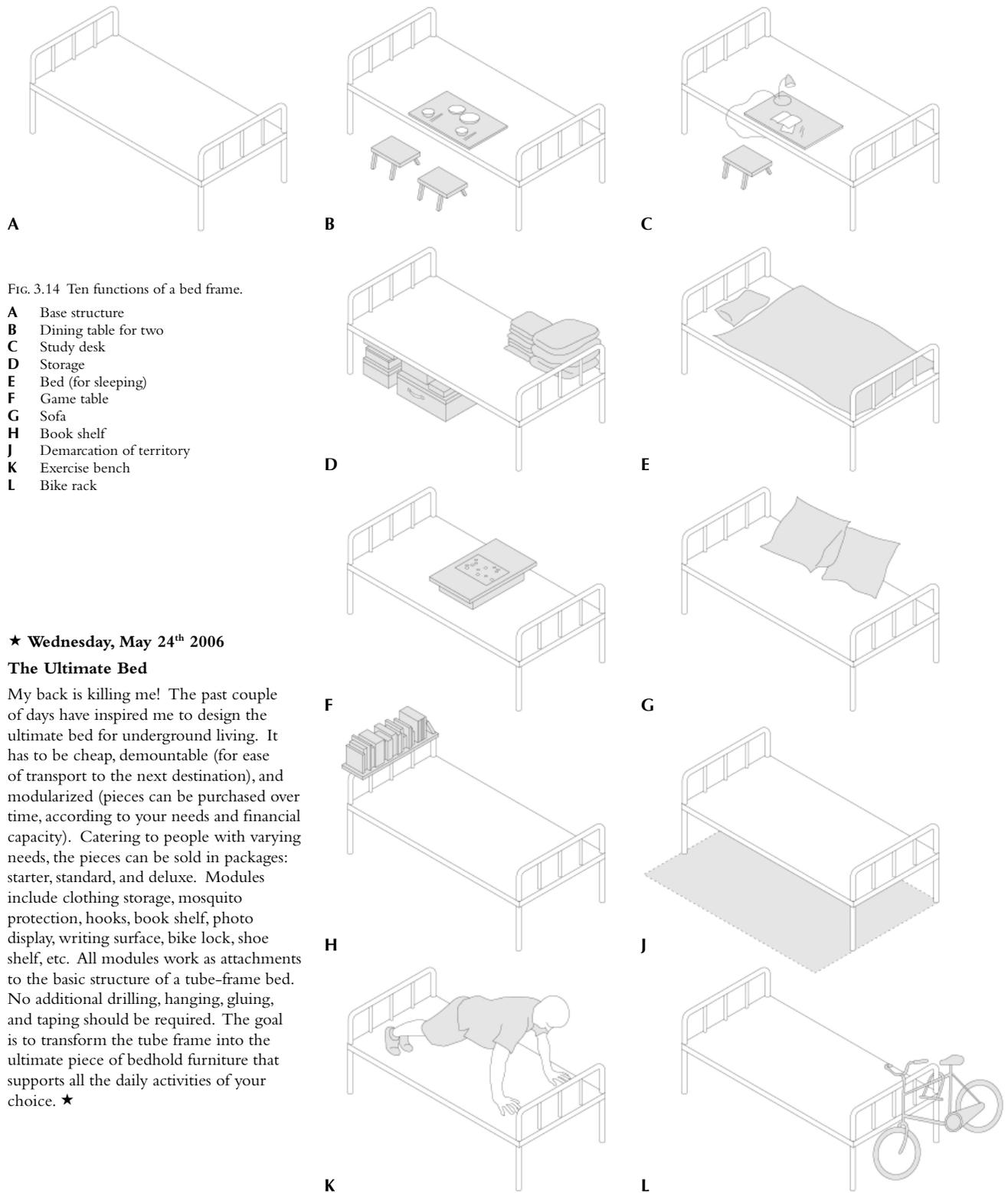
FIG. 3.14 Ten functions of a bed frame.

A Base structure
B Dining table for two
C Study desk
D Storage
E Bed (for sleeping)
F Game table
G Sofa
H Book shelf
J Demarcation of territory
K Exercise bench
L Bike rack

D

E

F

G

H

J

★ **Wednesday, May 24th 2006**

The Ultimate Bed

My back is killing me! The past couple of days have inspired me to design the ultimate bed for underground living. It has to be cheap, demountable (for ease of transport to the next destination), and modularized (pieces can be purchased over time, according to your needs and financial capacity). Catering to people with varying needs, the pieces can be sold in packages: starter, standard, and deluxe. Modules include clothing storage, mosquito protection, hooks, book shelf, photo display, writing surface, bike lock, shoe shelf, etc. All modules work as attachments to the basic structure of a tube-frame bed. No additional drilling, hanging, gluing, and taping should be required. The goal is to transform the tube frame into the ultimate piece of bedhold furniture that supports all the daily activities of your choice. ★

K

L

BETTENSTELLUNGEN　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　**SCHLAFRÄUME**

Bei der Bettenstellung zur Wand und zum Raum ist für das Sicherheits- und Ruhegefühl des Liegenden von großer Bedeutung, ob das Bett:

(1) an der Längswand　　(2) mit dem Kopfteil gegen die Wand　　(3) etwas vor der Wand　　(4) frei im Zimmer steht

Ein selbstsicherer Mensch schläft gern frei im Zimmer ↪ (4), ein ängstlicher lieber an der Wand ↪ (1) u. (2), noch lieber:

(5) in der Raum-Ecke　　(6) am Raum-Ende　　(7) in einer Nische　　(8) oder Wand-Nische

Von Wandbespannungen, Bettform, Lage zur Himmelsrichtung (Kopf möglichst nach Norden), Lage zum Licht (ab vom Fenster) und zur Tür (Blick zur Tür) ist das Gefühl der Ruhe abhängig. Wichtig ist bei mehreren Betten die Stellung der Betten zueinander:

(9) ob Freunde　　(10) Schwestern　　(11) Brüder　　(12) Gäste

in einem Raum schlafen, immer bedingt das in der Zuordnung der Betten gefühlsmäßig bestimmte Forderungen, nicht zuletzt in der Kopflage bei zusammenstoßenden Betten ↪ (11) und (12). Noch feiner sind die Unterschiede bei Ehebetten:

(13) ob Zweischläferbett　　(14) Doppelbett　　(15) zwei Betten neben-　　(16) oder übereinander stehen,

ist weniger räumlich, als durch persönliche Wünsche bedingt. Bei getrennter Bettstellung liegen die Eheleute möglichst nicht in gleicher Richtung, sondern entgegengesetzt ↪ (15) und (16) Heute immer größere Trennung der Ehebetten, früher war die gemeinsame Lagerstatt auch räumlich zusammengefaßt:

(17) im Kastenbett　　(18) Baldachinbett　　(19) Himmelbett　　(20) Betthaus

Letzteres basilikaartig geformt, bei geschlossenen Vorhängen durch Deckenkranzlicht eigenartig erhellt. Diese letzten vier Beispiele zeigen deutlich, wie stark abhängig Raum- und Möbelgestaltung vom Lebensgefühl einer Zeit ist.

Fig. 3.15　Different bed arrangements.

★ **Procrustean Bed**

In Greek mythology, Procrustes is a legendary highwayman in Attica. A generous host, he offers his bed to travelers with the promise that the bed will be a 'perfect fit' for his guests. Those who fall for his trap soon find themselves strapped on an iron bed. Procrustes keeps his promise of 'perfect fit' by stretching those who are too short and amputating the extremities of those who are too tall. The result in all cases is torturous death.

A symbol of forced conformity, totalitarian regimes, and the denial of individuality, the Procrustean Bed of Greek antiquity still holds validity in our understanding of contemporary issues. Social egalitarianism and equitable distribution of wealth were primary concerns in Maoist ideology. Under the leadership of the great Chairman, all citizens ate out of the same iron rice bowl provided by the State. Deng's economic and social reforms were intended to break through the passivity and dependence of the masses. Since 1978, the static population of the Maoist era has transformed into the largest and one of the most dynamic labour forces in the world, but some might argue that Deng's series of economic and political reforms is another version of the Procrustean bed.

Procrustean by nature or not, China's transition to a market economy has instigated a fundamental transformation in the Chinese mentality. Perhaps the unifying link in the psyches of China's 1.3 billion people (the one that was missing in the previous generation), is the sense of hope and aspiration for the realization of the Chinese Dream. ★

Migrant Interiors

> Where we live becomes a kind of stage set onto which our self-image is projected via moveable (i.e. controllable) objects. The house interior for most people – unlike the structure itself – is rarely wholly fixed or finished. Like the exploration of the self, the arrangement of the domestic interior is often in the process of becoming.
> Clare Cooper Marcus[30]

> …the home contains the most special objects: those that were selected by the person to attend to regularly or to have close at hand, that create permanence in the intimate life of a person, and therefore that are most involved in making up his or her identity. The objects of the household represent, at least potentially, the endogenous being of the owner.
> Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi[31]

The following series of photographs is taken from the JTL Hostel where I rented a bed in Room 31 for a period of two months as part of my field research. All the photographs were taken with permission from the residents. It was obvious most people do not wish to be associated with the underground lifestyle throughout the documentation process. Everyone refused to be in the photo with the exception of Qing, who lives in Room 29. Some say they are ashamed of their current living conditions. Others suggest sending the photographs to news agencies to expose the horrid living conditions of the migrant population.

The arrangement of the series is based on the approximate duration of the resident's stay in his/her bedhold. While each bedhold is specific to the individual's habits, taste, and lifestyle, this chronological arrangement is an attempt to document the evolution of migrant bedholds over time: from the bare essentials of Room 4 to the lived-in, individually moulded interiors of Rooms 17 and 29.

The intricate details of each bedhold tell the story of one member of Beijing's floating population.

Room 31

This photo was taken on the first day I moved into Room 31. My bed is the one on the right. My roommate is a mother of two from Shanxi province. She left her children and her husband behind in hope to earn more money for her family in Beijing.

★ **Thursday, May 25th 2006**

Mould

The walls of my room are alive. I acquaint myself with the strange faces, exotic scenery and wild animals that emerge from the mouldy blotches. I can spend hours deciphering the hidden story behind this organic mural. I wonder if the baby elephant, given enough time and moisture, will grow to maturity and cover the entire expanse of the wall with its majestic presence.

This morning, out of kindness, my roommate covered the mouldy walls.

The elephant vanishes behind a selection of the latest fashion trends, real estate advertisements, and entertainment gossip from local newspapers. ★

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30   Marcus, *House as a Mirror of Self*, 24.
31   Csikszentmihalyi, *The Meaning of Things*, 17.

My bed

Fig. 3.16 Photograph of Room 31.

Room 4

This image shows the basic provisions of an underground hostel: a bed and a small storage cabinet. The superintendent installs additional laundry lines at your request. Room 4 remains empty most of the time. I initially attributed its lack of occupants to the unlucky number four (四, *si*) , the Chinese pronunciation of which is similar to 'death' (死, *si*). I later learned from my neighbours that this room is rented out on an hourly basis. Exhausted workers come stumbling in for an afternoon nap. At times this room functions as an affordable love hotel. Room 4 becomes a VIP room for the superintendent's family during their visit to Beijing during national holidays.

Laundry line

Bed

Storage cabinet

Fig. 3.17 Photograph of Room 4.

Room 10

Three construction workers from Henan province share this room. They carry almost no luggage, perhaps just one change of clothing. Everything they own is on their bodies, allowing them to be hyper mobile: they can go anywhere at a moment's notice. The most valuable item they own is their cellular phones, and the most valuable asset they have to offer is their able bodies.

FIG. 3.18 Photograph of Room 10.

Mouldy walls are covered with newspapers and cloths.

Since open-flame cooking is prohibited in basement migrant hostels, electric hot plate is a popular alternative.

Room 2

Room 2 is shared between three girls who became very concerned about my well-being after learning I was new to Beijing. They offered to help with my job search, shared information on the cheapest markets for groceries, and listed fun places to tour and advised on how to travel there cheaply – these gestures convey a definite sense of camaraderie amongst the residents of the hostel.
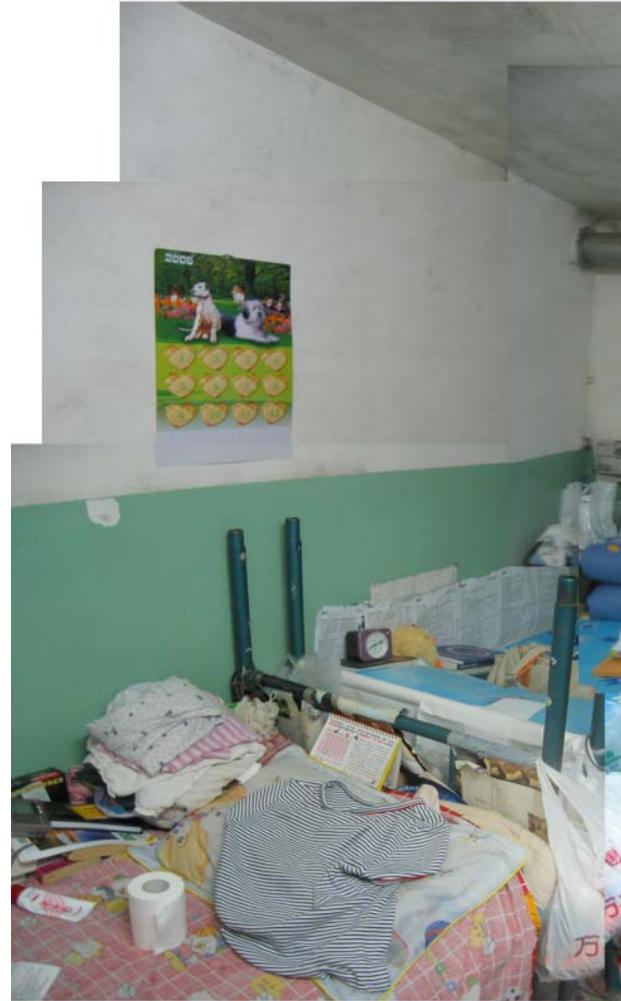
FIG. 3.19 Photograph of Room 2.

Due to the lack of space, laundry lines,
ducts, and bed frames are important
devices for maximizing storage capacity.

Corridor 3a

Any usable space is filled with beds to maximize occupancy. Corridor 3a, accommodating three men, is an example of such practice. You must walk past the three beds to the doorway at the back to access the next room. Corridor beds are slightly cheaper in rent than others due to their lack of privacy.

Door leading to the next room.

Water damage is common to underground spaces, especially in older buildings.

Fig. 3.20 Photograph of Corridor 3a.

Corridor 3b

Walking past Corridor 3a leads you to this room. There was a vacant bed at the time this photo was taken, so for the time being, the sole resident of Corridor 3b enjoys having the room to himself. Covering the mouldy walls with old newspaper is common practice in basement hostels. In this case, he covered the ceilings with a special selection of images: sports cars and half-naked women.

Special selection of images from
newspapers and magazines

Fan to improve ventilation

Bedhold vacancy
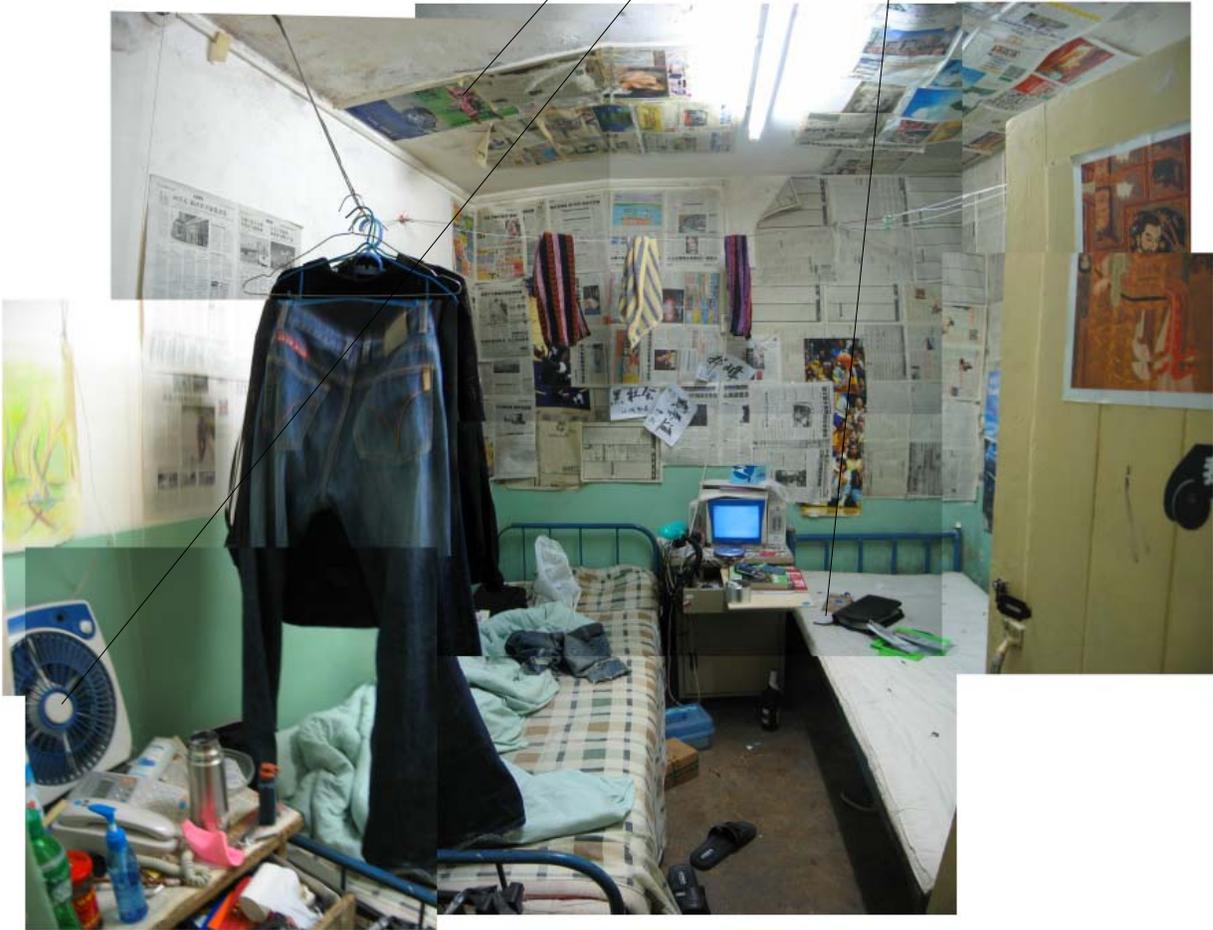
Fig. 3.21 Photograph of Corridor 3b.

Room 1

Room 1 is the closest room to the entrance, making it the only room with cellular phone reception. One of the girls also managed to pull a television line through the ductwork from above. 'Connected' rooms like this one are the most sought after.

TV cable from above

Plastic basins are multi-purpose necessities. They are used for washing, storage, bathing, laundry, keeping fish alive etc.

Fɪɢ. 3.22 Photograph of Room 1.

As a large number of migrant workers are enjoying the Spring Festival family reunion in the countryside, China's city dwellers have to face inconvenience caused by the absence of some daily services provided by migrant labourers.

A Beijing resident surnamed Wang said she now has nowhere to buy steaming breakfast after the owner and waiters of a restaurant in her neighborhood went back to Chengdu, capital of southwest China's Sichuan Province for the Lunar New Year.

Even the market sees fewer vendors during the week-long Spring Festival holiday and vegetables are sold at a higher price than usual.

"Most food and vegetable vendors are rural migrants who have gone home for the annual hard-won family reunion. So, no wonder things are expensive during festival," said a resident surnamed Peng.

In most large Chinese cities, baby-sitters, car wash workers, express delivery and takeout food delivery workers are hard to find during the festival as rural migrants, who make the largest proportion of the service industry laborers, are going home as part of the world's largest "human migration."

China has more than 140 million migrant workers, most coming from poor rural areas. ★

Room 6

A nearby restaurant owner rents Room 6 as accommodations for his employees. The three girls are from the same township in Shanxi province. Waitressing is a demanding job characterized by long shifts and low pay. In fact, migrants are known to take on what are popularly described as '3-D' jobs: *dirty*, *demanding*, and *dangerous*. The girls are nonetheless grateful: long work hours mean they are less likely to waste money (they simply have no spare time for anything else), and the provision of housing by their employer also helps them save up as much money as they can to bring back home. Shanxi province, the coal-mining central of China, is one of the poorest regions in the country. With the coal-mining industry as the prime economic driver, Shanxi offers little to young girls. Many of them decide to migrate as a result to search of better opportunities as a result.

The window of Room 6 remains
permanently closed since the area
directly above is used as a garbage
collection area.

Wall hooks are used as ceiling anchors
from which to hang mosquito netting.
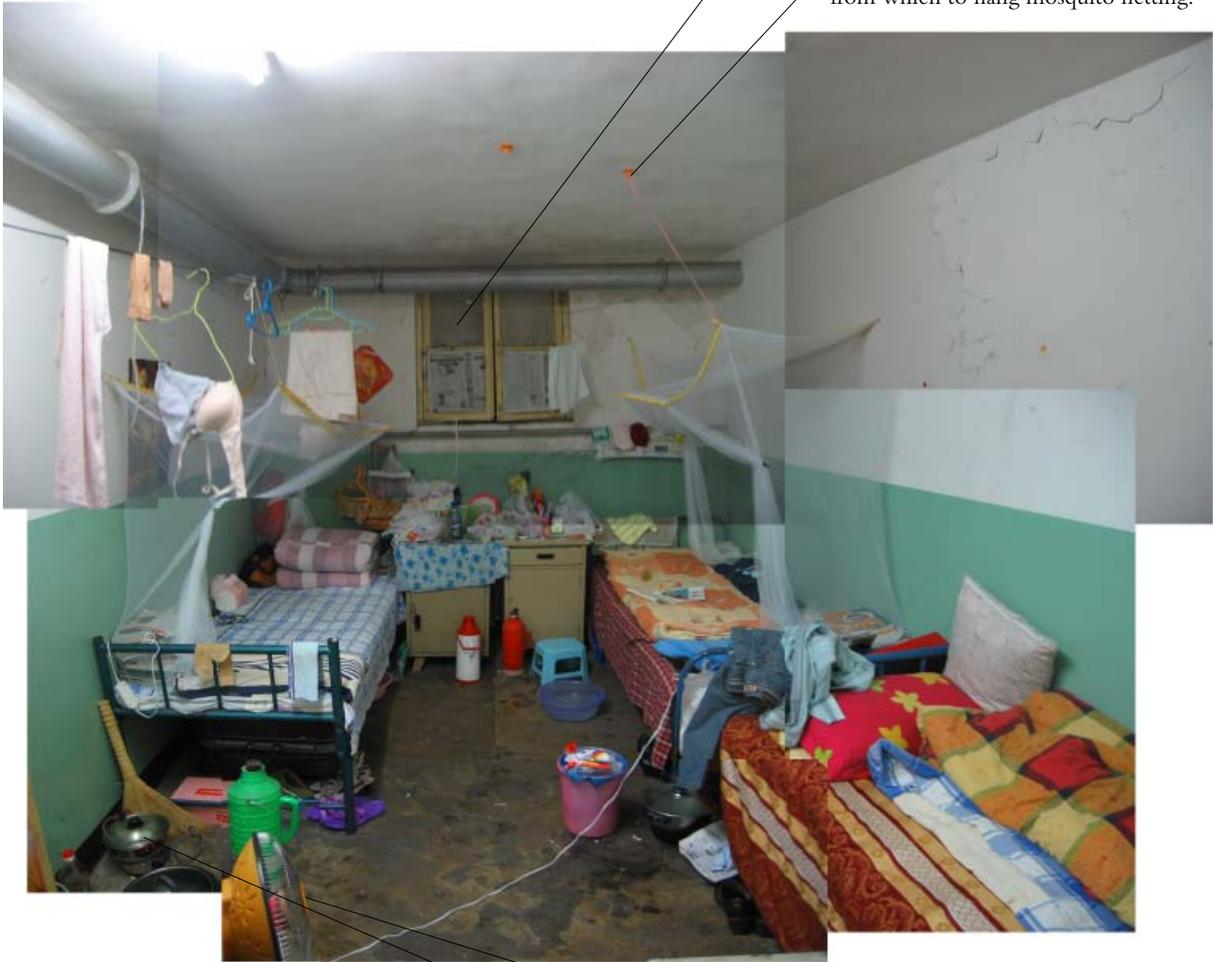
Fig. 3.23 Photograph of Room 6.

Electric fan helps improve air
circulation.

Cooking area.

Room 25

One of the two girls in Room 25 was negotiating with the superintendent to switch to another room at the time of this photo. The two, a student and a salesperson at a clothing boutique, have very different schedules. The student complains the other's habits (coming home late, chatting non-stop on the phone) are disruptive to her studies. The superintendent, who often takes on the role of mediating parent amongst quarrelling siblings, promises to have a talk with the other girl when she returns in the evening.

FIG. 3.24 Photograph of Room 25.

Maps of China and Beijing are frequently seen on the walls of migrant bedholds.

Bed frame used as study desk and bookshelf.

Room 12

Mei and two other girls share this room. Mei is one of the
longest standing residents in this hostel. She has been living
here for almost two years, since completing her undergraduate
degree at a Beijing university. She now works as a translator.
Mei translates English text in user manuals to Chinese for ten to
twelve hours a day. She feels that her current living conditions are
undesirable, but she chooses to remain in the hostel because it is
affordable, and its location is within walking distance to her office.

Mei was in the process of preparing her dinner. She bought five
live fish at the nearby **morning market** and attempted to keep
them alive in a basin of water under her bed. Three of the fish
committed suicide by jumping out of the water. The ventilation
shaft serves as a fridge for food storage during winter months.
Dried foods are kept in sealed containers under the bed or on the
storage cabinets. Food storage is kept at a minimum to prevent
insects.

Fig. 3.25 Photograph of Room 12.

Ventilation shaft is used as food storage during winter months. To send or receive mobile messages residents put their phones in this space in hope for reception.

Dining table (not in use).

Only electric cooking appliances are permitted inside the hostel.

Mei's bed.

Plastic basin used as fish tank.

★ **Friday, May 26th 2006**

A Timeless Way of Being

As I was walking down the long corridor, I heard my neighbour announce that it's raining outside.

Completely oblivious of the realities of the outside world, I came to realize that perhaps an underground room was the most convenient and accessible urban refuge you could find. Simply by submerging below the ground plane, you detach yourself from the city proper. No longer subscribing to the concept of time, time speeds up or comes to a stand still with the flip of a light switch. As I am writing this I only know it is morning because my roommate turned on the light, but is it 9:00AM or 11:00AM? I cannot be sure. It could be 3:00AM again if I turn off the light. I wonder if people age at a different speed by living underground. Perhaps this is why the superintendent appears twenty years younger than her real age...

By dipping below grade, daily cycles cease to exist. Yearly cycles of seasonal changes become negligible. Weather reports can be dismissed since underground space, with earth as its insulation, maintains a stable temperature throughout the year. This feeling of disorientation is similar to the experience of a long-haul flight, where time is determined by the type of meal being served.

Disengagement from the earthly realm, be it in mid-air or underground, engenders a timeless way of being. ★

Room 17

This has been Ling's home for the past two years. Ling spends most of his time in his room working as a freelance graphic designer. A firm believer in the negative health effects of living below grade, he devised his own method for combating humidity: he wrapped his entire room in plastic gift-wrap. Perhaps because of the lack of distinction between day and night in the basement, Ling has six calendars to help him keep track of the passing of days.

Plastic wall sheathing (gift wrap).

Collection of pirated DVDs on top of self-built shelving.

Mirror to create an illusion of a larger space.

Fig. 3.26 Photograph of Room 17.

Room 29

Qing is another long-term resident of this hostel. The aroma of his cooking entices many of his neighbours to visit during meal times. He claims to have the best room in the complex, because on a sunny day a small stream of sunlight penetrates into his basement home. Qing manages to arrange for a high-speed internet connection and ensures clutter does not obstruct his morning sun by maintaining a close relationship with his above ground neighbour.
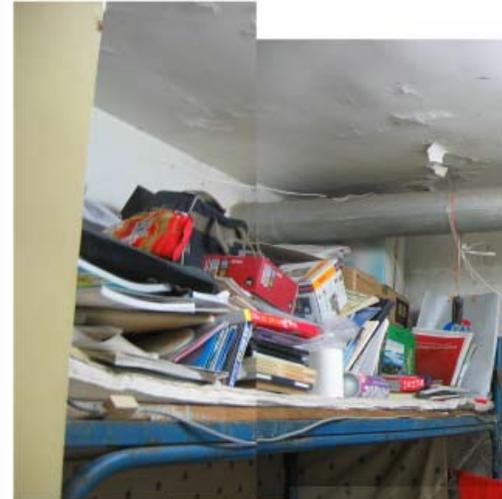
Fig. 3.27 Photograph of Room 29.

China's most popular actress –
Fan Bing Bing.

Colour copies of US money ($100 bills).

Qing's primary connection to the
outside world consists of his computer,
internet connection, and his webcam.

Dining table for entertaining guests.

A Close Encounter

I had to bite my tongue to stop myself from screaming out loud. I almost touched the cockroach that was hiding underneath my toothpaste this morning. I shudder at the thought that every surface I touch has also been graced by the presence of these omnipresent pests. I can't help but wonder: would you rather have all the walls cleaned and painted white so that it is easier to spot the enemies and subsequently facilitate annihilation, or let the mould patches camouflage the critters, knowing that they are impossible to destroy and therefore accepting the need for coexistence? ★

★ **Basement Living Survival Skills: The Cockroach Series**

Strategy 01:
Keep all edibles well sealed. It is best not to have any food in the room. This strategy, however, offers no relief, since you have no control over what happens in your neighbour's room.

Strategy 02:
Buy cockroach poison (a brown powder) and sprinkle in all corners of your room and around the legs of your bed.

Strategy 03:
Materials needed: old newspapers, small pot/mug with a flat bottom. Layer newspapers on a flat hard surface (table/desk). Cockroaches are active during the evening, but they will find places to hide if there are people around. So the newspapers serve as a trap for them. These pests tend to sandwich themselves between the layers. Use the small pot/mug to squash randomly on the newspapers at your leisure (think whack-a-mole). Listen for the distinct crushing sound of cockroach shells – the sound of success. Roll up used newspapers and dispose. Repeat steps as needed.

Strategy 04:
Pull your bed approximately 150mm away from any wall surface to prevent any disturbance during sleep.

Strategy 05:
Make small "skirts" with paper/tin foil plates/small bowls for the legs of your bed to prevent them climbing up.

Strategy 06:
Invest in a mosquito net. Create an enclosure with the mesh material by tucking the edges under your mattress. ★
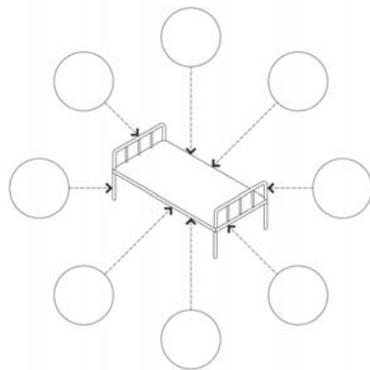

FIG. 3.28 Bed as home.
User creatively transform the bed structure to satisfy a variety of functions.
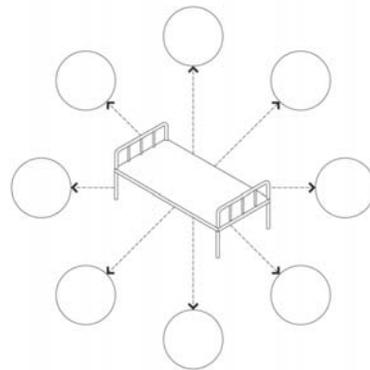
FIG. 3.29 City as extension of home.
Due to the physical limitations of the bed frame, residents extend their bedholds into the urban realm.

Underground Living

Migrant bedholds are defined by the physical size of the bed frame. Spatial deprivation compels residents of underground hostels to creatively appropriate the base structures of their bedholds to accommodate a variety of functions. The intensity of a bedhold's appropriation is directly associated to the amount of time spent underground on a day-to-day basis: someone who works a ten to twelve hours shift devotes less energy on his/her bedhold than someone who works from home. The amount of energy spent on bedhold improvement is also a function of a resident's duration of stay: the longer the resident stays, the more likely s/he will invest in creating a more comfortable bedhold. Another variable contributing to the level of appropriation is the resident's outlook (nomadic versus sedentary); some regard their underground bedholds as transitional spaces during their search for other (better) housing options, while others choose to settle for extended periods of time.

Two trajectories of underground living can be generated based on observations of the lifestyle tendencies of a range of basement residents:

1. Bed as home – residents maximize the performance of the bedhold through creative acts of appropriation.

2. City as extension of home – residents expand the functions of their homes into urban space.

Neither condition exists exclusively; the reality of underground living oscillates between two poles of behavioural patterns. The next chapter is devoted to an exploration of the second condition – city as extension of home.
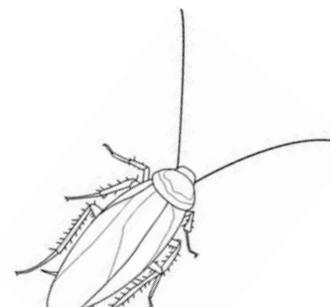
EMERGENCE

You are temporarily blinded by sunlight as you walk up the flight of stairs. The city slowly comes into focus as you squint your eyes and wait for your pupils to readjust their apertures. Your ears tune into the bustling sounds of the streets. Your body acquaints itself with the temperature of the day, the humidity in the air. You feel the wind in your hair. You take a moment to orient yourself. Merging into the flow of pedestrian traffic, you disappear into the crowds.
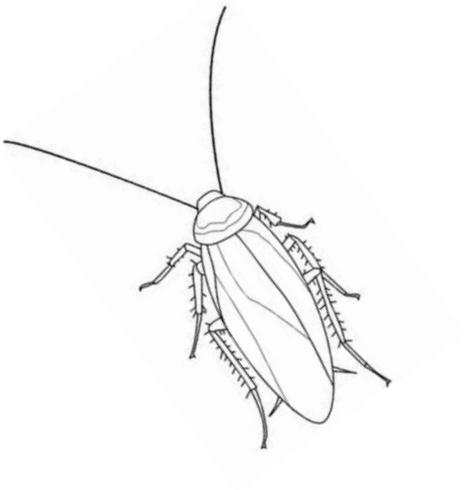
games
room

store

dance-
floor

kitchen

living room

dining
room

library

bedroom

bar

4 Everyday Life

> Everyday life, in a sense residual, defined by "what is left over" after all distinct, superior, specialized, structured activities have been singled out by analysis, must be defined as a totality. Considered in their specialization and their technicality, superior activities leave a "technical vacuum" between one another which is filled up by everyday life. Everyday life is profoundly related to all activities, and encompasses them with all their differences and their conflicts; it is their meeting place, their bond, their common ground. And it is in everyday life that the sum total of relations which make the human – and every human being – a whole takes its shape and its form. In it are expressed and fulfilled those relations which bring into play the totality of the real, albeit in a certain manner which is always partial and incomplete: friendship, comradeship, love, the need to communicate, play, etc.
>
> Henri Lefebvre[32]

> Home is no longer one place, it is locations.
>
> bell hooks[33]

The bedhold of a basement migrant is a mutable system of multiple locations expanding and contracting in response to changing needs and conditions. The cramped dimensions of their bedholds lead residents to seek other locations to serve as extensions of their homes. The construction of a migrant's *jia* injects an unplanned sense of difference, vibrancy, and surprise into the urban experience. Their spatial practices contribute to the formulation of an alternative urban geography that is charged with the vitality of everyday life. The following series of drawings of the everyday lives of four JTL residents (Mei, Qing, and Mr. and Mrs. Ai) are made at the ground level, tracing individuals negotiating the urban realm.

Studying the everyday lives of JTL's residents reveals the urban sites of their bedhold extensions. Each individual's trajectory contributes to the formulation of a new urban vernacular that capitalizes on interstitial 'gaps' within the city. There are five identified sites of emergent spatial praxis exercised by the migrant population: *streets*, *morning markets*, *pedestrian overpasses*, *internal courtyards*, and *fast-food restaurants*.

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32   Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*, 97.
33   hooks, *Breaking Bread*, 148.

Fig. 4.1 Home as a series of locations.

65
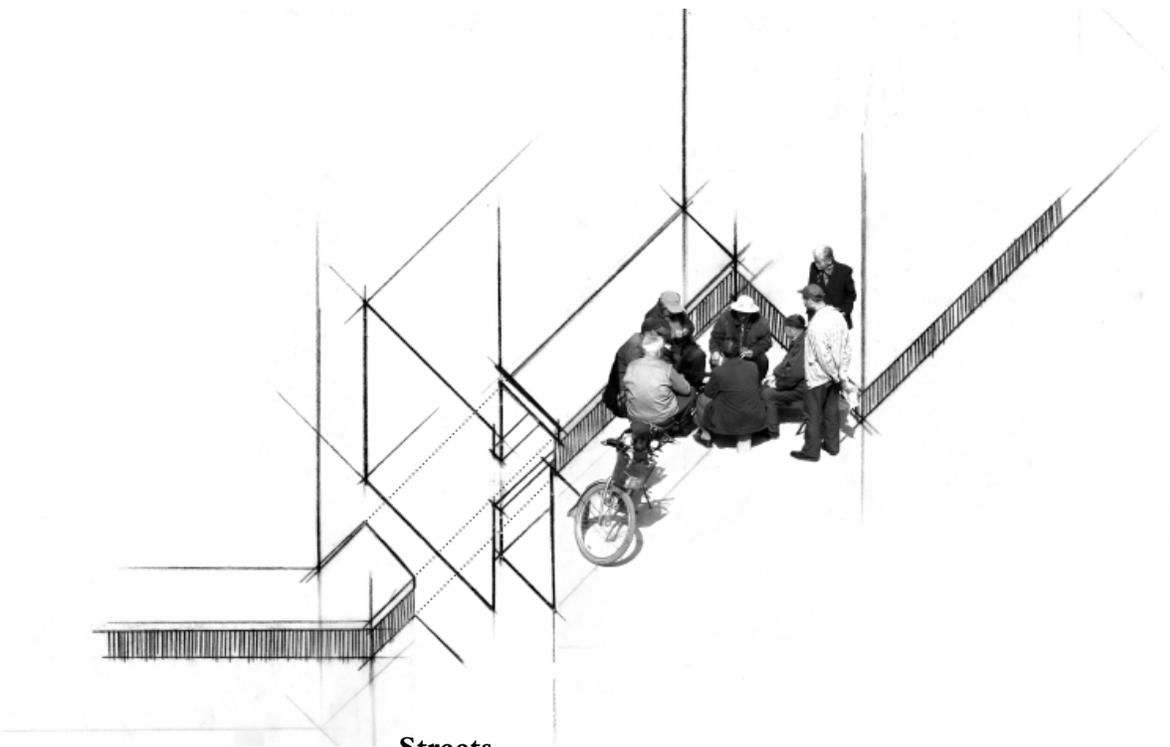
Streets

FIG. 4.2 People nestling in a building niche for informal games and chatting.

FIG. 4.3 The street comes alive with the impromptu chess and card games. Passerbys stop to watch, chat, and perhaps join in for a game.

FIG. 4.4 Windows on the first three floors are typically secured with metal frames to prevent break-ins. Residents make use of security window frames to hang their stools and foldable chairs.

The streets' inhabitants transform the imposed geometry of urban planning into lived-in spaces. Enclosure is not something fixed in stone, but rather a dynamic, mutable configuration formed by the gathering of bodies. A congregation of people has a paradoxical affect: it repels intrusion by forming a 'wall,' but the presence of a crowd attracts more people to gather. These rooms appear, expand, and contract as needed. Regular participants in these informal assemblies develop a series of street furniture: foldable chairs that can be chain locked to nearby window frames, junk wooden planks, cardboard boxes, and beer crates combined to make impromptu game tables. They disappear and lie dormant when not activated. Niches found along building edges, corner conditions, partially covered areas, and open ledges serve as points of traction for the gathering of people in space. The hours before and after dinner are high times for street activities. A plethora of unplanned events, people engaged in card games, casual conversations, or storytelling, forms clusters along the sidewalk. Pedestrian traffic reduces as curious walkers pause momentarily in their paths to have a peek between the gaps of huddling bodies.

The official city map prescribes linear routes designed for maximum efficiency. Yet the everyday experience of the streets reveals quite the opposite. The street plays an important role in maintaining a vibrant urban life. It is where people are free to engage and participate in activities of their choice. The atmosphere of the space changes with accordance to those who are engaged in the arena. Streets of Beijing serve as open stages for creative improvisations in their lack of pre-determined functions and programmes.

66

FIG. 4.5 *Above*: Morning market vendor selling green onions.

FIG. 4.6 *Above right*: Photograph of morning market.

Morning Markets (早市, *zaoshi*)

Traffic signs regulate not only vehicular and bicycle traffic but also horse-drawn buggies in Beijing. Farmers from the city's outskirts venture daily into the city to sell fresh fruits and vegetables at morning markets. An internal street transforms into a bustling market between 5:00AM to 7:00AM. Many people, like Mrs. Ai and Mei, prefer morning markets to supermarkets because they offer the freshest and cheapest local produce.

There is no permanent indication of morning markets. Nor do physical boundaries demarcate their territories. Morning markets constitute an integral part of the everyday life of local residents, yet they are not found on any official maps of the city. They appear, then disappear without a trace.

Fig. 4.7 Jewelry vendors on pedestrian overpass.

Pedestrian Overpasses

Increasing at a rate of 1,000 per day, cars dominate the streets of Beijing. Pedestrian traffic is often segregated from the vehicles by means of overpasses. The elevated pathways become prime real estate for street vending. Offering anything from fresh produce, batteries, children's toys, pirated DVDs, to jewellery, the petty entrepreneurs come and go in accordance to the intensity of street traffic. The barren guardrails function as base supports for the vendors' merchandise displays. Unlike the reassuring repetition of 7-Elevens, the fleeting existence of street vendors makes it next to impossible to ascertain whether a certain product will be available at a certain location at a certain time. Pedestrian overpasses allow for an injection of surprise in the urban experience.

FIG. 4.8 Distribution of McDonald's restaurants in Beijing.

FIG. 4.9 Business men and a JTL resident in the nearby KFC restaurant.

Fast-food Restaurants

Fast-food restaurants like KFC and McDonald's serve a much broader set of functions within the city in addition to food provision. With more than ninety locations strategically established around the city, one can be certain to find a McDonald's in every neighbourhood.   Restaurant premises are limited to customers as a general rule, but the lack of enforcement opens the doors for alternative activities to take place. The elderly read their daily newspapers, people watch, and enjoy the air-conditioning in the morning. Students come to study and do homework in the brightly lit interiors after school. I witnessed a woman conducting business interviews at a KFC during my field research. She interviewed six potential candidates while sipping slowly on the one drink she purchased, and then arranged for more appointments on her mobile phone. Many of the residents of the JTL take advantage of the accessibility of the nearby KFC and use the popular restaurant as an extension to their bedholds. Mei escapes to her favourite booth in KFC to read several evenings a week. I often found myself seeking refuge from the dust and pollution in fast-food restaurants during the sandstorm season in March and April. Welcoming everyone, with or without purchase, the vast network of fast-food restaurants offers additional space for marginalized groups.
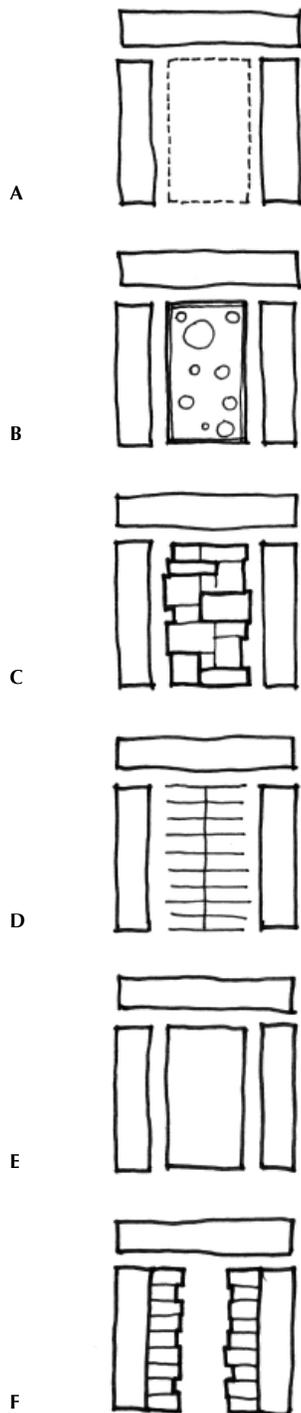
Internal Courtyards

Internal courtyards (distinct from traditional courtyard homes) function as extensions of migrant bedholds. The residential landscape of Beijing varies with each concentric ring road. Traditional *hutongs* and courtyard homes are found predominately within the old city circumscribed by the 2nd Ring Road. Soviet-influenced worker housing complexes from the Maoist era constitute the bulk of the housing stock from the edge of the old city centre to 4th Ring Road. Worker housing was originally part of a State-owned work unit compound. The number of State-owned enterprises has continued to decline since the market reforms of the late 1970s due to their inability to compete in a free market economy. The ownership of previously state-owned housing is transferred to residents at a highly subsidized price. "Lined up in rows" (行列式, *hanglieshi*) is one characteristic development model of residential areas during the socialist era. Low-rise north-south apartments are organized in parallel rows to maximize sunlight and natural ventilation. Of interest here is not so much the physical housing structure, but the courtyard-like spaces found *between* the highly standardized row housing. These pockets of inner-block open spaces have evolved over time to serve a variety of functions. A walk through the depths of Beijing's superblocks offers a certain level of surprise as a result. Some internal courtyards become sites for self-built informal housing; others transform into parking lots for cars and bicycles, children's daycare, or open-air gyms for the elderly. Mrs. Ai frequents one courtyard that remains as open green space to hang her laundry to dry when the weather is nice. Mei makes full use of the outdoor gym equipment as part of her morning exercise routine. Nested within Beijing's superblocks and without pre-determined programmes, the internal courtyards serve as another open platform for user appropriation.

Fig. 4.10 Types of courtyard appropriations.

A   Basic courtyard formation
B   Children's playground
C   Self-built housing
D   Car parking
E   Green open space
F   Encroachment by adjacent residents

Fig. 4.11 Courtyard as children's playground.

Fig. 4.12 Courtyard as open green space.

Fig. 4.13 Courtyard as elderly exercise gym.
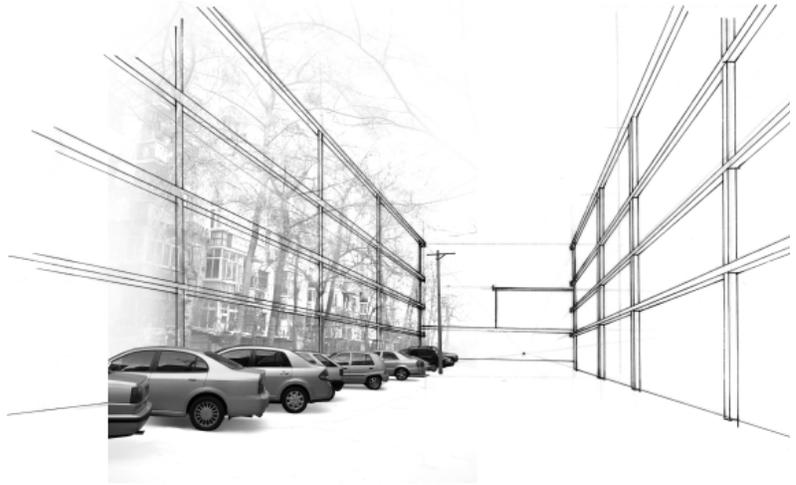

Fig. 4.14 Courtyard as parking lot.
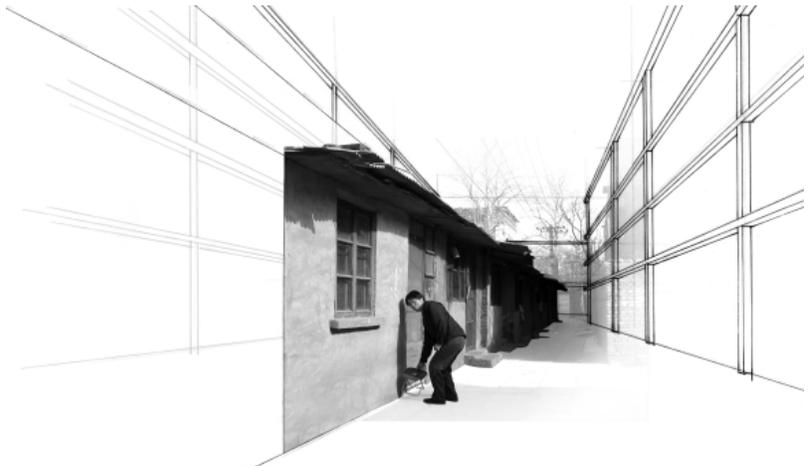
Fig. 4.15 Courtyard space filled by informal housing.

Fig. 4.16 Self-built extensions by ground level residents into courtyard space.

71

80 m / 1 min

40 m / 0.5 min

0 m / 0 min

FIG. 4.17 *Left* : Everyday spaces.

Roads

Inaccessible – Built Volumes

Inaccessible – Open Space

Accessible

A   KFC
B   Room 12
C   Room 31 (my room)
D   Room 29
E   JTL Hostel
F   Mr. and Mrs. Ai's room
G   Dead end/outdoor living room/chess table
H   Basement hostel
J   Pedestrian overpass
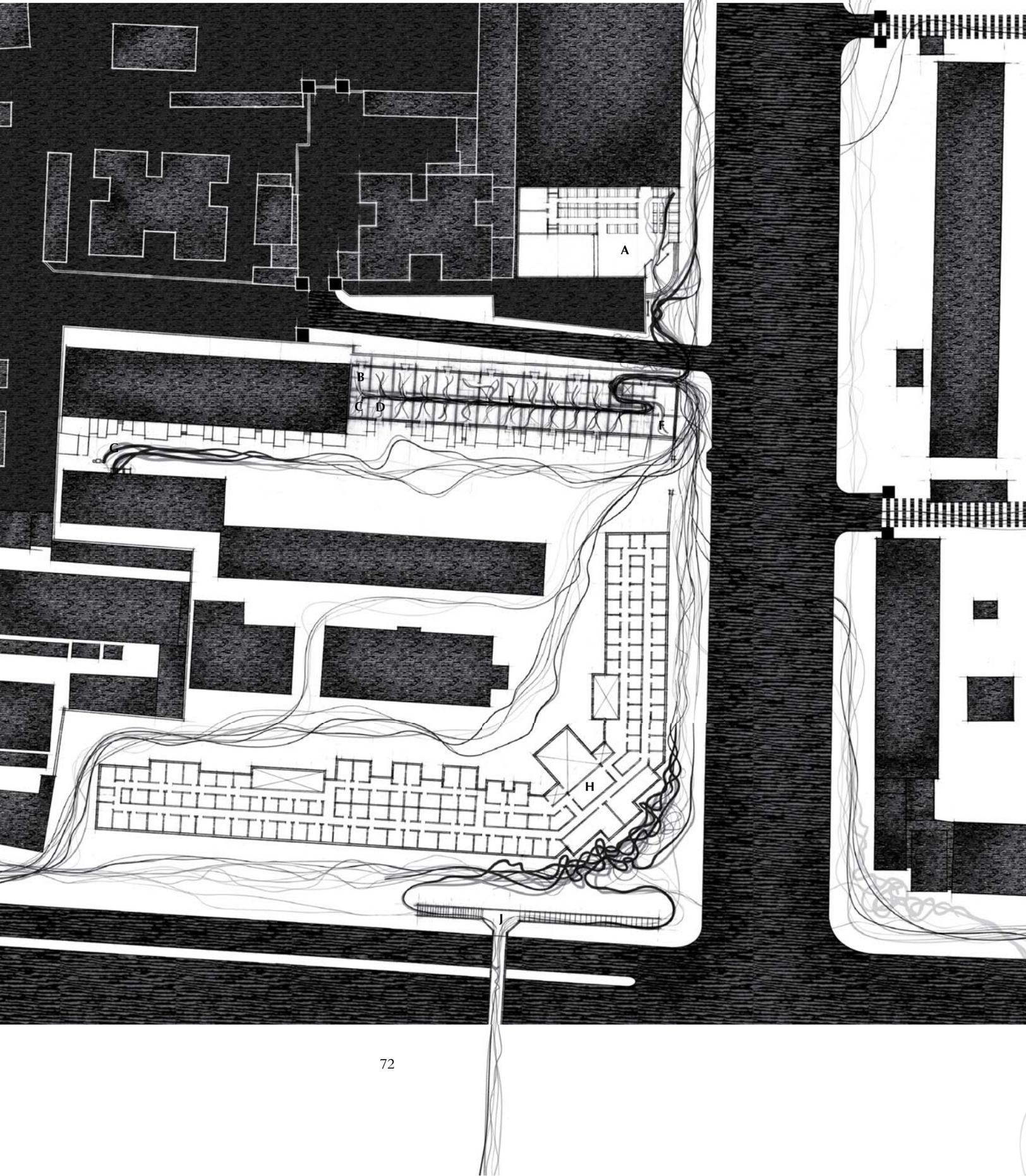
Mei

Mei never imagined she would be living in JTL for two years, but spending ten to twelve hours a day working as a text translator leaves her with little time to search for other options. Nor does she intend to settle down in Beijing; home is still waiting for her in Hebei province, where her family resides. As a result, Mei owns very few possessions. Her most prized possessions are specialty foods like ground corn and dried baby shrimps prepared by her parents, brought to Beijing from home during her annual Chinese New Year visit. Mei's days are subject to a highly rigorous schedule: morning jogs around the neighbourhood, groceries at the nearby **morning market**, work, late dinner at home (leftovers are packed for the next day's lunch), sleep, and the cycle repeats. The local bookstores and libraries are her favourite places to visit if she has spare time. Mei goes to the bookstore day after day to read a few pages at a time of books unavailable at the public library. When her roommates in **Room 12** are too noisy, she escapes to the nearby **KFC** to read.

.... **80 m / 1 min**

....

.... **40 m / 0.5 min**

....

.... **0 m / 0 min**

FIG. 4.18 *Left* : Everyday spaces.

Roads

Inaccessible – Built Volumes

Inaccessible – Open Space

Accessible

Greenery
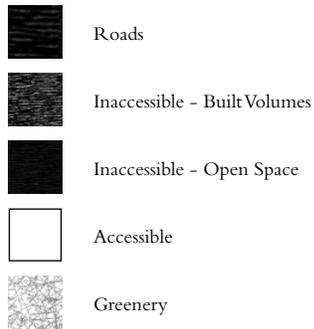
A Open courtyard
B Green courtyard
C Children's playground (inaccessible)
D Running track (inaccessible)

Qing

Originally from the northeast province of Heilongjiang, Qing is the proud resident of **Room 29**. His room is adjacent to mine (**Room 31**). After many frustrating experiences sharing accommodations with both friends and strangers, he decided to move into an underground hostel, where he can afford to rent an entire room for himself in one of the most central locations in the city. He professes to be in the construction business, mainly doing small-scale interior renovations. Based on my observation, however, Qing hardly ever works. Most of his day is spent chatting, playing online games in his room, and cooking fantastic meals that leave his neighbours drooling.

.... **80 m / 1 min**

....

.... **40 m / 0.5 min**

....

.................................... **0 m / 0 min**

FIG. 4.19 *Left* : Everyday spaces.

Roads

Inaccessible – Built Volumes

Inaccessible – Open Space

Accessible

Greenery
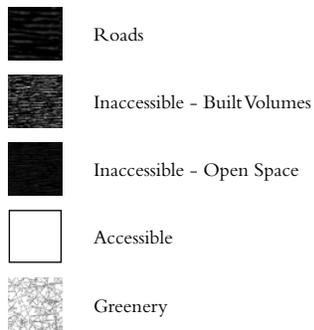
A Underground hostel – tower type
B Morning market
**C** Inaccessible courtyard

Mr. and Mrs. Ai

Mr. and Mrs. Ai are the superintendents of the JTL, and they have been so for the past three years. They are good complements for each other: Mrs. Ai is warm and motherly, always trying to accommodate everyone's needs, while Mr. Ai is more aloof, talking business only. Unlike other migrants, the nature of their job requires the Ai's to stay in Beijing throughout the year. Their children and grandchildren travel to Beijing from Hebei province to visit during major holidays. In fact, **Room 4** is left vacant for their visits. On a typical day, Mrs. Ai stays in the hostel most of the time, leaving only to buy groceries at the nearby **morning market**. She claims that she knows everyone in the hostel by the sound and rhythm of his/her footsteps. Mr. Ai enjoys playing games with his friends on the **streets**. If the weather is bad, he practices his video game skills on an old Super Nintendo given to him by his grandson. Occasionally he earns extra income by selling items left behind by tenants.

Fig. 5.1 Underground locations within study area. The JTL Hostel is highlighted in red.

5 Emergent Spatiality
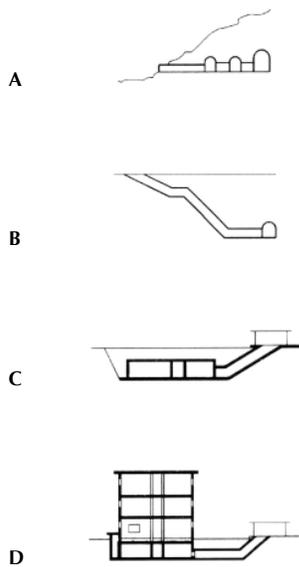
Fig. 5.2 Four types of air defense shelters.

A   Tunnel (坑道式, *kengdao shi*) – constructed in hilly areas, floor level remain consistent with entry level.

B   Earth-tunnel (地道式, *didao shi*) – constructed in flat areas, floor level of shelter lower than entry level.

C   Single excavation (單建掘開式, *danjian juekai shi*) – independent shelters without permanent structures above.

D   Attached (附建式, *fujian shi*) – also known as air defense basement.

The JTL is one of the many basement migrant hostels found within the study area. Fieldwork plays a crucial role in the gathering of data in the absence of official military statistics on the numbers and locations of defence shelters. Field research conducted over six months in 2006 reveals more than ninety underground locations in the study area, eighty of which are converted to function as migrant hostels.

The construction of air defence basement shelters began in the 1950s when political tensions surfaced between China and the Soviet. The building of air defence basements continues to be an integral part of the national defence programme in accordance to Mao's instruction for the nation to "dig deep tunnels, store food, and prepare for war" (深挖洞,廣積糧,不稱霸, *shenwadong, guangjiliang, buchengba*). There is an estimated 1,000 underground locations within Xuanwu district, with a total area of approximately 1.4 million square meters.[34] To this day, every new development is required by code to devote a certain percentage of building area to the construction of defence shelter. Promoting functionality during times of both war and peace to maximize economic profit, underground defence basements serve a variety of functions: restaurants, parking lots, storage, and retail shops. Underground spaces are often retrofitted to become migrant hostels like the JTL in residential areas.

There is a high demand for this housing form. Commuting distance and cost are influential factors in housing choice in a city of Beijing's scale. The ubiquitous network of underground hostels is an appealing option for many migrants because it offers proximity to any location at an affordable price range. My conversations with the people encountered in everyday life, waiters at restaurants, cashiers at the convenience stores, and custodians, revealed many of them once lived in, or are living in, underground hostels. The dormitory-like living arrangement of underground housing caters to a large portion of the migrant population, since population studies have shown the majority of sojourners to be comprised of young, unmarried workers.[35]

Building typology dictates the form of underground spaces. There are

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34   Zhu, *Investigation of Urban Corners in Beijing*, 11.
35   Liang, Zai, and Zhongdong Ma. "China's Floating Population: New Evidence from the 2000 Census." *Population and Development Review* 30, no. 3 (2004): 480.

two general types: *linear* and *tower*. The linear type is generally found underneath four to six-storey standardized residential complexes from the Maoist era. The JTL case is an example of the linear form in which basement rooms are arranged along a double-loaded corridor.

Advances in construction techniques and urban population growth foster the embrace of the tower form in recent residential architecture. A reduction in building footprint and an increase in total floor area demand an increase in the number of basement floors, extending up to three levels below grade, to satisfy area requirements for defence structure. Spatial arrangement in tower basement hostels differs fundamentally from linear ones like the JTL: rooms are arranged around a central elevator core rather than a double loaded corridor. Basement rooms located more than one level below grade are characteristically colder and more humid. The flexibility and adaptability of a migrant's bedhold make the appropriation of both linear and tower typologies possible.

Fig. 5.3 Section drawings of civil air defense basements typical of residential buildings.
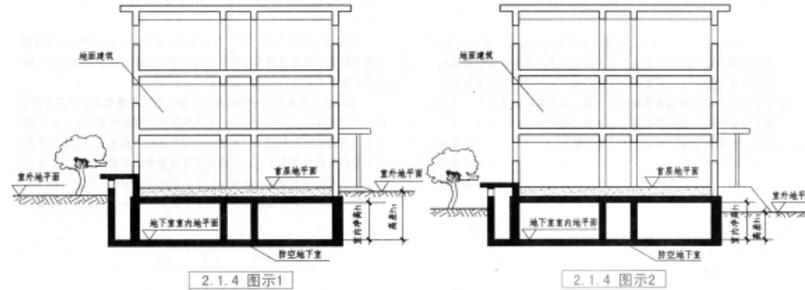
Underground spaces form a dispersed network blanketing the city. The development of each bedhold begins with the humble structure of a bed. Over time, each invisible node extends into the urban realm. There is no final form of a bedhold, for each is a unique reflection of a basement resident. Through the resident's everyday negotiations in the urban arena, a bedhold grows to include clusters of recreation rooms found along the side of an adjacent side street, exercise spaces nestled in between buildings, a winding jog through Beijing's labyrinthine inner block pathways, or a window-side reading booth in the nearby KFC. A rhizome is an appropriate metaphor for Beijng's underground bedholds. The city's vast resource of dispersed underground spaces operates like a collection of nodes. When activated, strands stem from the nodes and grasp onto the cracks and fissures of the formal city. The interweaving of a myriad of individual pathways and stopping places forms a rhizomous fabric, stretched across the rings of Beijing.

Subtle signs betray the presence of these subterranean inceptions: discreet advertisements on windows and telephone poles, covered ventilation shafts lining the sides of buildings, small shed-like entrance structures, and hand-painted welcome signs marking the entries into the underground.

FIG. 5.4 – 5.9 Various discreet signages on tele-phone poles, fences, and windows.

FIG. 5.10 – 5.13 Ventilation openings along the sides of buildings.
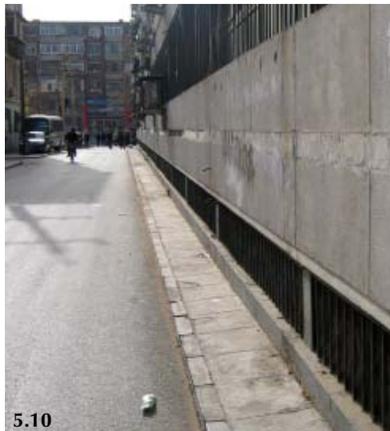
Three Examples

Three examples outside of the study area are presented to demonstrate the prevalence of basement hostels in Beijing. They are found beneath institutional buildings (Hostel 1), new high density residential complexes (Hostel 2), and older workers' housing from the 1970s (Hostel 3).
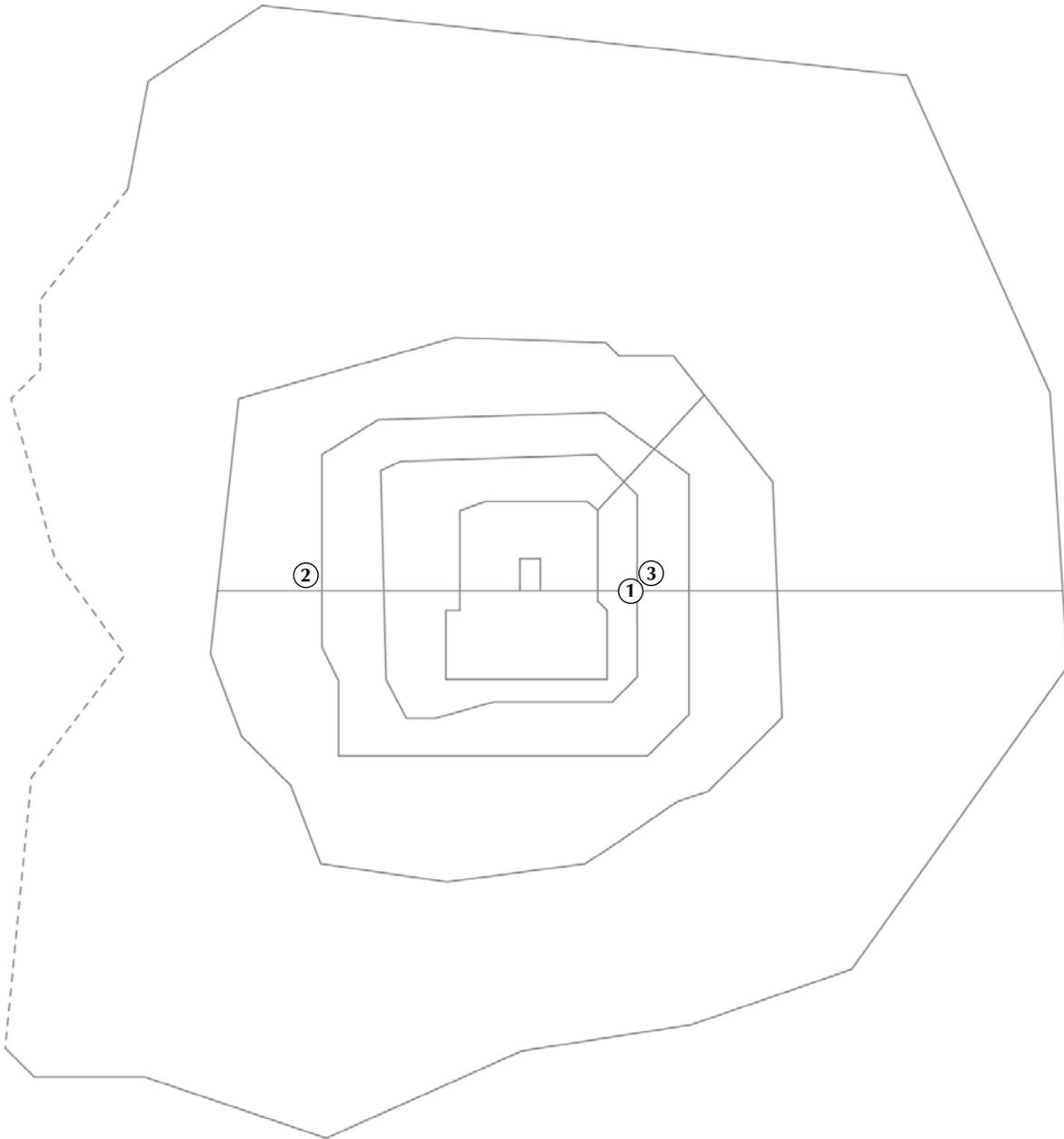
FIG. 5.14 Hostels 1, 2, and 3 location map.

Hostel 1

Located beneath an old institutional building, Hostel 1 is one of the most crowded examples of basement hostels. The use of bunk beds, despite their prohibition since 2005, allows for a density of six to eight people per room.[36] Hostel 1 is strangely the most expensive one.

Fig. 5.15   Exterior view.
Fig. 5.16   Entrance stairway.
Fig. 5.17   Corridor view through blast-proof door.
Fig. 5.18   Water room.
Fig. 5.19   Ventilation fan on room door.
Fig. 5.20   Laundry lines along corridor.
Fig. 5.21   View of room interior.

Location : East 3rd Ring Road, near Guomao subway station
Residents' backgrounds : Mostly students, with a handful of workers
Price :¥360 RMB/month
Density : 8 people/room

36 http://www.bj.xinhuanet.com/bjpd_sdzx/2005-05/10/content_4203241.htm (accessed April 13, 2006).

83

Hostel 2

Hostel 2 is found in a relatively new residential complex named Changan New Town. There are approximately four basement locations within the entire residential development, all of which are converted into underground migrant hostels. Lawsuits are often filed against management companies of new housing developments by angry homeowners who are frustrated with an infiltration of migrants under their homes.

FIG. 5.22 Exterior view.
FIG. 5.23 Entrance canopy.
FIG. 5.24 Entrance stairway with welcome signage.
FIG. 5.25 Corridor view.
FIG. 5.26 View of room interior.
FIG. 5.27 Laundry lines along corridor.
FIG. 5.28 Cooking area outside of room entrance.

Location : West 4th Ring Road
Residents' backgrounds : Mostly workers from Henan province
Price : ¥160–400 RMB/month (price dependent on whether the room has a window)
Density : 1–4 people/room

Hostel 3

As part of an older generation of workers' housing, the physical condition of Hostel 3 is in a comparatively poorer state than the previous two examples. Mould and water damage are visible in almost all the rooms. Its central location, however, enables it to attract full occupancy.

Fig. 5.29   Exterior view.
Fig. 5.30   Covered ventilation shafts on building side.
Fig. 5.31   Ventilation shaft used as storage space.
Fig. 5.32   Entrance stairway with blast-proof door.
Fig. 5.33   Corridor view.
Fig. 5.34   Bed used as dining table.
Fig. 5.35   Laundry lines inside hostel room.

Location : Chaoyang district, near Central Business District
Residents' backgrounds : Mixed
Price :¥240 RMB/month
Density : 2-4 people/room

85
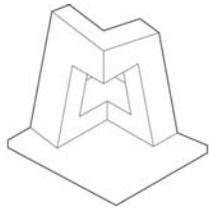
= 450,000m²

★ 36 CCTVS

In a lecture at Tsinghua University on November 3rd 2005, Ole Scheeren, partner–in–charge of OMA's CCTV project, announced to a packed conference hall full of students that the first piece of super-structure arrived on site. After much controversy, Rem Koolhaas' CCTV is moving full speed ahead to meet its 2008 deadline. This ¥5,000,000,000 RMB project is a 10-minute walk away from my ¥240 RMB/month basement hostel bed. I often imagine what the experience would be like to emerge from the underground, and as my eyes adjust to the blinding sunlight, I am confronted with CCTV's imposing super-structure. Based on the minimum standard of 4m² living space per person in underground migrant hostels, 16 million m² of space is required to house the city's estimated 4 million floating population – an equivalent to 36 CCTVs. ★

FIG. 6.1 36 CCTVs.

6 Reflections & Projections
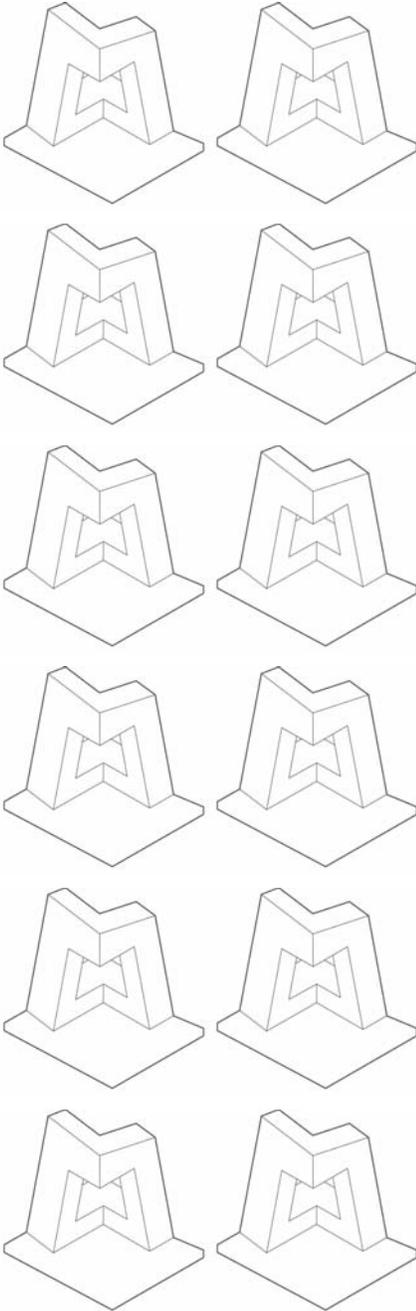
Stories…everyday, they traverse and organize places; they select and link them together; they make sentences and itineraries out of them.
MICHEL DE CERTEAU[37]

The present upsurge of the peasant movement is a colossal event. In a very short time, in China's central, southern and northern provinces, several hundred million peasants will rise like a mighty storm, like a hurricane, a force so swift and violent that no power, however great, will be able to hold it back.
MAO ZEDONG[38]

1978 marked the beginning of a complete reversal of the State's attitude towards rural-urban migration. Fostering labour mobility, the gradual relaxation of the *hukou* system is like the dismantling of a great invisible dam, unleashing the power of the masses. China has created a dynamic labour market closer in character to America's flexible work force than to the static societies of Europe or Japan. "In the global economy, two of the most important factors are mobility of capital and mobility of labour," says Mohamed El-Erian, president of Harvard's trust funds and a noted emerging-market bond expert. "Capital trades internationally, but labour does not, which is why domestic migration is so important." Population mobility will inevitably be promoted and exploited as a recognized catalytic agent in the building of the national economy.

A transition from a primarily sedentary lifestyle in rural areas to a nomadic culture moving from city to city calls for a redefinition of *jia*. For some of Beijing's migrants, *jia* is found in the form of underground bedholds. Limited by the four square meters defined by the bed frame, the bedhold of a basement resident follows two models of development: bed as home, and city as extension of home. This study reveals bedholds to be mutable entities highly responsive to individual needs and external circumstances. Its strength comes from its ability to adapt and appropriate local conditions. Its survival results from its seemingly 'weak' system of urban tactical manoeuvres. The study of the homes of Beijing's migrants expanded my understanding of what a home consists of. It challenges the traditional

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37 De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 115.
38 Mao, *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse Tung*, 119.

notion of the home as a fortified fixed entity separating the private and the public domains. The bedhold of a migrant traverses across different territories, transcends imposed boundaries, and defies classifications.

> A human being should be able to change a diaper, plan an invasion, butcher a hog, conn a ship, design a building, write a sonnet, balance accounts, build a wall, set a bone, comfort the dying, take orders, give orders, cooperate, act alone, solve equations, analyze a new problem, pitch manure, program a computer, cook a tasty meal, fight efficiently, die gallantly. Specialization is for insects.
> ROBERT HEINLEIN[39]

> The masses have boundless creative power. They can organize themselves and concentrate on places and branches of work where they can give full play to their energy; they can concentrate on production in breadth and depth and create more and more undertakings for their own well-being.
> MAO ZEDONG[40]

Substantial evidence of user creativity and adaptability can be traced throughout this study of Beijing migrants' bedholds: from the appropriation of the city's vast resource of neglected underground spaces, the multiple uses of a simple bed frame, to variations of internal courtyards. The tradition of post-mortem meetings held at the end of architectural projects emphasizes, to me, a disregard for user creativity in conventional professional practice. The design team reflects upon the long journey one last time before closing the files and deleting the project number from the list of active projects on the office timesheets. Yet I argue that the life of a building only begins when its occupants transform built volumes into lived-in spaces.

I believe this disengagement between the design and use of a building is a missed opportunity. The study of the architecture of Beijing's migrant communities reaffirms the creative capacity of people. Seeking and creating shelter in adverse situations is an innate part of human survival instincts. However, the ingenuity of users is often an untapped resource in conventional design process in which users are rendered as passive 'consumers.' The ideas offered by architects like John Habraken, Aldo van Eyck, and Christopher Alexander point to an alternative. They seek to mediate this chasm by redefining the role of the architect and the architectural process as a whole. The architect's mission should not, according to this view, provide fixed end solutions, but instead should support open-ended, flexible frameworks for future evolution. The humble bed frames found in the JTL Hostel are examples of a participatory design process in which the users fully engage in the design and construction of their homes.

The informal architecture of a migrant's bedhold also demonstrates the ability for people to adapt their lifestyles to suit exterior circumstances.

★ **Sunday, May 28th 2006**

Zai Jian

This is my last day in this little windowless room. I told my roommate (I call her *Da Jie*, which in Mandarin means 'big sister') that I will be moving out today. She became quite worried about who will take my place after I leave. As I packed, Da Jie gave me a lecture on how I should go out into the world and train myself while I'm young, visit as many places as possible, and seize any opportunities that come my way. Then she proceeded to ask me how old I am. I told her I will be turning 26 this year. Her response was priceless: her eyes bulged out in disbelief and exclaimed, "26?! Do you have a boyfriend?! How come you are not married?!" I couldn't stop laughing.

It took me less than half an hour to pack and clean my side of the room. As I walked down the hallway I felt many eyes on me. No one said goodbye. People coming and going, it is all part of the daily routine here. This long, dead-end corridor is merely a threshold through which people flow through in pursuit of their goals and dreams in the big city of Beijing. ★

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39 Heinlein, *Time enough for Love*, Intermission.
40 Mao, *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse Tung*, 118-19.

Without advocating for substandard housing, adverse situations push existing boundaries and hold the potential for innovative, alternative spatial praxes. This observation ultimately questions the well-intentioned regulations of our building codes. The standardization and minimal requirements are meant to maintain an acceptable standard of building quality. But could a set of well-intentioned standards be obstructing the potentials for alternative practices?

> Architects, planners and others could then look more closely at the potentials and the problems that exist all around us, even among the poorest communities. The poor, in turn, could tap into a wider range of hopes, fantasies and strategies. Significant theoretical questions in the arts, culture and politics would come to the fore, not just critiques. How do innovations take hold? How do we extrapolate from one domain to another? When do constraints hamper possibilities, and when do they ignite creativity?
> Gwendolyn Wright[41]

In the absence of building guidelines and professional designers, how are people housing themselves in the world? Rudofsky showed us the world of vernacular architecture that predated modernization. Mike Davis, on the other hand, predicts "the cities of the future, rather than being made out of glass and steel as envisioned by earlier generations of urbanists, are instead largely constructed out of crude brick, straw, recycled plastic, cement blocks, and scrap wood" by non-architects.[42] Informal housing forms are extremely responsive to local political, economic, social, and ecological climates. The results are timely, sensitive, and efficient solutions that turn challenges into constructive catalysts. The specific site conditions of each location give rise to a unique type of contemporary vernacular architecture. My study of the bedholds of Beijing's underground finds fundamental agreement with Rudofsky and Davis. It is tempting to offer this housing form, found primarily in the capital city of China, as a contribution to a contemporary edition of *Architecture Without Architects*.

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41 Wright, Gwendolyn. "Informal Cities, Multiple Realities." Chap. 2 in *Informal City: Caracas Case*, 82.
42 Davis, *Planet of Slums*, 19.

Appendix : Informal Housing Case Studies
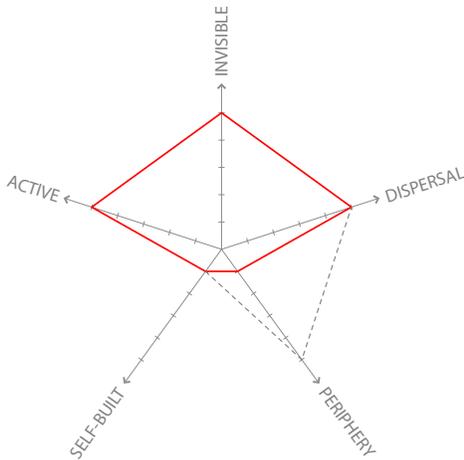
Fig. 7.1 Star profile for Beijing's underground communities.

Fig. 7.2 *Below* : World map indicating the locations of case studies.

This appendix contains nine cases of urban informal housing that might be included in a contemporary edition of *Architecture Without Architects*. The range of the case studies is broad, but they share one commonality: their forms are driven by their regional political, economic, social, and ecological specificities.

Star diagrams are often used to represent multivariate properties of a system. The intention is not to reduce the complexity of the multiple forces at play to a simple diagram, but it is useful in this context as a preliminary analytical device for comparative studies between different informal housing systems. A profile is generated for each case based on five parameters: (1) invisible/visible, (2) dispersed/concentrated, (3) periphery/inner-city, (4) self-built structures/appropriation of existing, and (5) active/inactive.

Using Beijing's underground as example, its diagram conveys the Beijing case to be dispersed throughout the city, can be found in both inner-city and peripheral areas, the residents appropriate existing structures, and is a very active form of urban informal housing. A quick glance across all the profiles reveals how Beijing's underground shares similar properties with Cairo's rooftop shanties – they are both invisible from the urban proper, dispersed across the urban fabric, and very active communities. They are different because Cairo's rooftop shanties feature self-built structures and are found primarily in the old city centre. This method offers a platform for comparative analysis of otherwise unrelated phenomena.

Fig. 7.3 Star profile for Beijing's Zhejiang Village.

Case 1 Zhejiang Village
Beijing, China

Zhejiangcun was a well-known example of large-scale migrant villages in Beijing. It was considered to be threats to civic order and safety by local authorities because of the high concentration of migrants. The physical environment of villages like Zhejiangcun is described as "dirty, chaotic, and miserable" (髒亂差, *zang luan cha*). As Beijing embarks on various beautification campaigns in preparation for the 2008 Olympics, many more of these highly visible areas of migrant congregation face demolition or forced evictions.

Zhejiangcun was only five kilometres south of Tiananmen Square, China's political centre. Migrants from Zhejiang province began renting houses from local peasants to start businesses in the garment industry around 1983. Its humble beginnings grew to be a conglomerate of twenty-six existing villages, occupying 26km² of land by the mid-1990s.

In the name of protecting the interests and safety of local residents, Beijing authorities implemented an official campaign to "clean up and reorder" (清理整頓, *qingli zhengdun*) Zhejiangcun in 1995. This event led to the expulsion of more than 40,000 migrants from Beijing, the demolition of 9,917 houses, and the closing of 1,645 unlicensed businesses.[43] The intention behind this large-scale demonstration of police action, decided at the very highest level by Premier Li Peng,[44] was to serve a warning to all others who ventured into cities illegally.

Case 2 Village-in-the-city
Pearl River Delta, China

> I saw a dense structure abruptly interrupting the Chinese urbanity, irritatingly injecting disorder into the generic sprawl of skyscrapers, officially envisioned to produce a contemporary "garden city." This anomalous fabric consisted of tiny towers, all seven floors high, in an extreme dense layout. Paradoxically, the impression was one of human scale, a feeling of place and space missing in the surrounding make-belief city. I was told that this had previously been a farming village.
> Yushi Uehara, Guest Professor, Berlage Institute[45]

Fig. 7.4 Star profile for Pearl River Delta's Village-in-the-city.

Villages-in-the-city (ViC) began as 'stand-alone' farming villages. At the initial phase, farmers were allocated land for agricultural use. Cities started to expand after Deng Xiaoping's reforms in the late 1970s. Pressured by the speed of urbanization, authorities negotiated with farmers to purchase their land for new urban developments. Farmers received monetary compensation and smaller plots of land (approximately 100m²) were also allocated for residential use. Stripped of their sole mode of income

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43 Zhang, *Strangers in the City*, 159–85.
44 Ibid.
45 The Berlage Institute Research Studio, *Urbanism of Victims: Unknown Urbanity in China – Village within the City*, 2006.

(traditional crop farming), farmers began to 'grow' dense residential and commercial buildings to generate alternative income (rent collection). ViCs mature to their current formation as the rapidly expanding cities quickly swallow the villages, creating islands of dense, self-built block developments within a sea of skyscrapers. Villages that were once on the periphery now occupy central locations within the cities. Farmers who were once penniless are now wealthy landlords.

The Pearl River Delta region in southern China witnessed the formation of many ViCs. Extrusions of the villagers' 100m² plots create a vast, timely supply of residential living space to satisfy the housing demands of the influx of rural migrants. In order to maximize rentable floor area, the builders of ViCs developed a new building type known as *handshake buildings*. The name of this characteristic ViC architecture is derived from the residents' ability to shake hands with their neighbours living next door. The resultant F.A.R. of ViCs ranges from 3.5 to 5.0.

Developers are reluctant to participate in the redevelopment of ViCs because of two reasons:

1. A high F.A.R. requires an even higher F.A.R. for the development to be profitable. The current government restrictions on F.A.R. make ViC redevelopment projects economically unattractive.

2. Developers shy further away from these areas because of the complications often associated with resettlement negotiations.

ViCs continue to be vibrant neighbourhoods offering affordable housing for rural migrants at the time of this writing. But the future of ViCs remains uncertain since the Chinese government is already seeking for ways to gain control over the development of ViCs.

Case 3 Rooftop Shanties
Cairo, Egypt

Alaa Al Aswany's novel, *The Yacoubian Building*, revolves around a once glamorous, now run-down apartment complex built by an Armenian millionaire. Contrary to most cities, where higher floors come at a premium, the Yacoubian rooftop bows under the weight of makeshift shanties built by Cairo's poor.

Cairo's change in government in 1973 saw a shift in policy to allow private developers and speculators to partake in housing provision process. This resulted in slum clearance, replacing subdivided villas with new luxury apartment blocks. By 1973 the population of Cairo reached 5 million, 42% of Egypt's total urban population.[46] The government failed to provide adequate housing for the exploding urban population in Cairo. Disadvantaged groups began to build illegally on the periphery of the city as a result. Others re-appropriated tombs in the Cities of the Dead
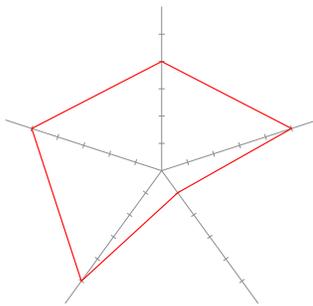
Fig. 7.5 Star profile for Cairo's rooftop shanties.

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46 El-batran, Manal, and Christian Arandel. "A Shelter of their Own: Informal Settlement Expansion in Greater Cairo and Government Responses." *Environment & Urbanization* 10, no. 1 (1998): 217-232.

to become living space. Another informal housing type is found in the old Islamic (medieval) city, where the urban poor resorted to developing rooftop shanties.

Similar to Beijing's underground migrant hostels, the success of Cairo's rooftop shanties hinges upon their relative invisibility from the urban proper. An aerial view reveals these parasitic self-built structures as a thin layer of informality, blanketing the existing city fabric.

Case 4 Rocinha
Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

> Maria das Gracas Freitas de Sousa said yes to Rocinha and Rocinha said yes back.
> Robert Neuwirth[47]

Fig. 7.6   Star profile for Rocinha *favela* community.

Rocinha is one of the best-known informal communities in Rio de Janeiro with a population of 150,000 residents.[48] Named after a resilient weed that thrived in rough terrains, Brazil's *favelas* represent a long tradition in the formation of informal settlements. From the humble beginnings of mud and scrap wood shanties on Morro da Providência in the late 1890s, there are now approximately 600 *favelas* in Rio de Janeiro.[49] These illegal communities are created over decades of guerrilla occupation of land. Self-built structures blanket the hillsides, connected by ad hoc networks on stairways and sidewalks. Much like other informal communities across the globe, Rio's *favelas* carry heavy negative associations. They are often faulted for the ills of urban society. The survival of the remains precarious even the scale of *favelas* leaves the authorities with no choice but to tolerate. During rain season, hillside *favelas* live under the threat of landslides.

Case 5 Tent City
Toronto, Canada

> Tent City is not a city and we don't live in tents. We live in shacks and shanties on the edge of Canada's largest metropolis where the river meets the lake. There's a fence dividing these 27 acres from the rest of Toronto, and on this side we've built what dwellings we can with the rubble of a scrap yard, a no-man's landfill caught in confusion between the city and private business. Sometimes it seems like a community and sometimes like chaos. Junk Town would be a better name.
> Shaughnessy Bishop-Stall[50]
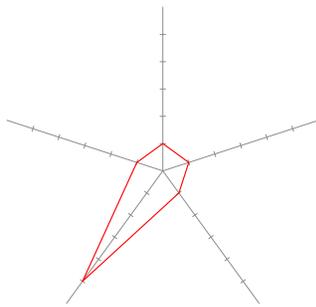
Fig. 7.7   Star profile for Toronto's Tent City.

On Tuesday, September 24th 2002, security officers hired by Home Depot Canada evicted about 100 squatters living in what came to be known as Toronto's Tent City.[51] People squatted on the other side of a fence separating Tent City from the rest of Toronto for four years. They were "on

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47   Neuwirth, *Shadow Cities*, 25.
48   Ibid., 28.
49   Ibid., 39.
50   Bishop-Stall, *Down to This*, 1.
51   Ibid., 455.

the edge of the world but smack in the middle of it all." For people who do not fit in with the current social norms, Tent City was a place where they are free to be who they are.

Case 6 Gecekondu
Istanbul, Turkey

The *gecekondu* housing type exploits a legal loophole that traces back to the Ottoman Empire. Ottoman land law protected the use of land, not the commodity value of the land. The laws were meant to ensure the land is put to good use. In Turkish, *gece* means 'night' and *kondu* means 'placed' or 'put,' thus the term *gecekondu* literally means 'built overnight.'[52] By law, any building that begins construction after dusk and is completed before dawn the next day without being caught, then the authorities are not permitted to demolish the structures without proper legal actions (and thus typically the buildings are allowed to remain). People have learned to build quickly and out of sight from the authorities. Robert Neuwirth estimates that half of Istanbul's population, some 6 million people (mostly rural–urban migrants), live in *gecekondu* homes. More common in rural areas in the east side of the country, the *gecekondu* phenomenon is typically linked with issues of unemployment and poverty.

Gecekondu communities are not found in central areas. Hidden in a valley, camouflaged behind larger developments, *gecekondus* are often beyond the reach of vision. Older *gecekondu* areas, developed over time, are indistinguishable from legal settlements. They evolve into successful commercial and residential districts.

Case 7 Barrios
Caracas, Venezuela

> "What you call a barrio, I call my home."
> Francisco Perez, Community Leader
> Las Casitas Barrio, La Vega[53]

> These barrio communities contain no institutional buildings, no representations of formal bureaucracy; they lack such services as refuse and wastewater disposal, and electricity is stolen. A yet they function: their self-regulating system creates living spaces for millions and entire new cities within the existing urban framework, without government assistance.[54]

Each development cycle in Venezuela further exacerbated the gap between the rich and poor since the economic downturn suffered during the 1960s and 1970s. The emergence of *barrio* communities goes hand-in-hand with the country's political and economic development. As the rich become richer, marginalized groups are pushed to the periphery of the city to
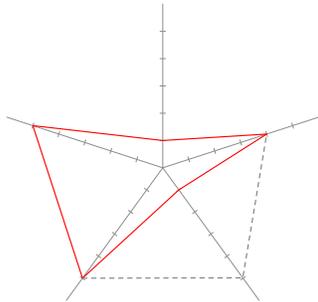
Fig. 7.8   Star profile for *gecekondu* communities in Istanbul.
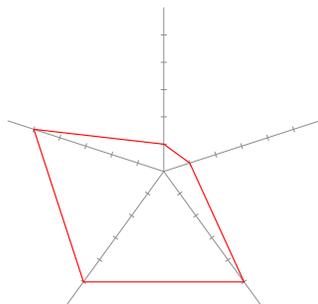
Fig. 7.9   Star profile for Caracas' *barrio* communities.

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52   Neuwirth, *Shadow Cities*, 144.
53   Brillembourg, *Informal City: Caracas Case*, 38.
54   Ibid., 21.

inhabit undesirable areas in the valleys. Approximately 75% of Venezuela's poor live in urban areas. Caracas' *barrios*, characterized by sprawling, rhizome-like shapes, are home to approximately one million families.

Until recently, the official maps of Caracas left *barrio* locations as blank white spaces, denying them formal recognition. For the members of the Caracas Urban Think Tank, however, the study of informal urbanism "marks a significant shift of focus from architecture as a driving force in urban development to real estate tactics and represents a self-organizing means of territorial appropriation." The unregulated urbanization of *barrios* is considered by the group to be the "most significant, if misunderstood, force in the development of Caracas."

Case 8 Bauwagen
Hamburg, Germany

> "Bauwagen" are alien elements wedged into the city's structure, improvised out of rundown vehicles, wooden beams and beautiful window-frames scavenged from demolished buildings, metal sheeting, Styrofoam, tar, and just plan debris. Since they lack cellar and attic, the outside is used as storage space. "Bauwagen" are an architecture without architects, growing from the inside out, spilling their guts onto the wasteland.
> STEFAN CANHAM[55]

FIG. 7.10 Star profile for Germany's mobile squatter communities.

Bauwagen, a hybrid form of squatting, emerged in the late 1980s to counter the changes in official policies in Germany. The definition of the term *bauwagen* is a trailer originally produced to accommodate workers on building sites. People are able to move their homes around the city by permanently living in disused vehicles. *Bauwagens* render the threats of forced evictions and demolitions negligible by achieving hyper mobility through the appropriation of trucks, wagons, trailers, and buses.

Stefan Canham considers the *bauwagen* phenomenon to be "one of the most significant and controversial manifestations of an oppositional architecture in Germany." The occupation of disused plots begins with an organized group systematically roaming the city in search for suitable sites. In the last twenty years, *bauwagen* residents have developed a nation-wide network, complete with weekly plenums, annual meetings, and community newspaper to facilitate discussion and information sharing among members. The status of the estimated 10,000 permanent *bauwagen* residents remains precarious.

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55   Canham, *Bauwagen*, 5.
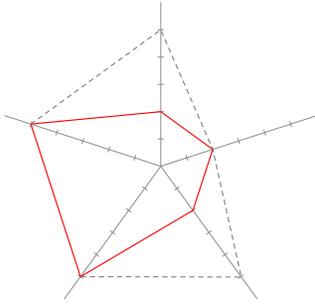
Fig. 7.11 Star profile for Algiers' *bidonvilles*.

Case 9 Bidonvilles
Algiers, Algeria

Roland Simounet, an Algerian-born architect, conducted the first comprehensive analysis of a *bidonville* called Cité Mahieddine. Simounet's research of the *bidonville* housing stock included an inquiry into the social conditions based on interviews with the residents in addition to the conventional architectural mapping, documentation and analysis. His findings were presented by the Algiers Group at the ninth meeting of CIAM (Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne) in 1953.

> The creativity of the CIAM–Alger group was in its unusual approach to the squatter settlement; behind the poverty; they saw valuable design lessons. An introductory report stated the overriding goal of the group simply as 'to recognize in the inhabitant of the bidonville the man himself and to get to know him profoundly,' and to consider 'the problem [of human habitation]…in its total reality: its forms, its multiple expressions, and its life.'
> Zeynep Celik[56]

Bidonvilles used existing terrain to their best advantage. They were hidden from sight since they were often situated in the valleys. Dense clusters of mutually supporting shacks are linked with a single winding pathway that provided efficient access to housing units. *Bidonvilles* were most characterized by their fragile structures, the variety of the materials used, and the scale of individual units. An entire family was housed in a single-room unit. The cohabitation of several families in one unit was common practice. The mosque was often the only solid building in an area with a predominately Muslim population. Shops are found near the mosque and at the periphery of the settlement.

One of the dwelling types studied by the CIAM–Alger team was the dormitory.

> A typical dormitory was a two-storied structure with the bedroom above and a gargotte (eatery) below; a ladder at the corner linked the two levels. The bedroom accommodated eight to ten men lined along one wall on either planks or mats. Shelves above were reserved for baskets to keep personal goods. The eatery on the street level, which served meals and non-alcoholic drinks, had a kitchen on one end and tables against the walls. An outside porch provided space for outdoor eating.[57]

Looking beyond the undeniably poor living conditions, the CIAM–Alger team members considered the dormitories to be "efficient buildings that sheltered multiple functions economically, separated the private and the public realms, related to the street, and responded to climate."

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56 Celik, Zeynep. "Learning from the Bidonville: CIAM Looks at Algiers." *Harvard Design Magazine*, no.18 (2003): 70.
57 Ibid., 73.

Zeynep Celik identified the 'spontaneous' *bidonvilles* on any available land around the city as one of the three main kinds of new housing in Algiers today. Described as "not always legal, but often legalized," their development continued despite political changes throughout the years. Old and new *bidonvilles* are found scattered throughout contemporary Algiers.

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