

The Lady in Red:

Spirit of the Historic Alleyways in the Ancient Capital

by

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thesis requirement for the degree of
Master of Architecture

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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.

– FERNIE LINGIE LAI, 2014

Only a living culture, at once faithful to its origins and ready for creativity on the levels of art, literature, philosophy, and spirituality, is capable of sustaining the encounter of other cultures — not merely capable of sustaining but also of giving meaning to that encounter.

– PAUL RICOEUR, *IDEAS IN REGIONALISM*

A B S T R A C T

THIS is a record of a place in flux, the hutongs of Beijing. It is a patchwork where the essence of place can be experienced. It is a journey of discovery. It is a document that, in the face of terms such as heritage and preservation, reminds us of the intangible beyond.

The hutongs are a series of alleyways immediately surrounding the Forbidden City. The remnants of old Beijing, they are the geographical heart and center of Beijing's ever-expanding development. As Beijing undergoes a drastic transformation, the hutongs remain in a state of tension: between the old and the new, the large and the small, the imperial and the modern, the power and the people.

The hutongs exist outside of time. They are quiet and calm amid the chaotic life of a giant city. They form a place of escape, a city within a city, a secret garden. Moving through the hutongs, a person needs to constantly navigate boundaries, mediate divides, and cross thresholds.

The Lady in Red observes before thought takes form: the prelude to the formation of an idea that we cannot find time for. *The Lady in Red* explores encounters with the in-between. *The Lady in Red* grasps at the invisible threads that weave the fabric of place.

A C K N O W L E D G E M E N T S

I AM only a medium and this thesis would not have been possible without the support and guidance of many people.

I thank my supervisor, *Donald McKay*, for guidance, for helping me see and find the core of the work, for showing me beautiful books and beautiful photographs, for telling me stories.

I thank my committee members, *Dereck Revington* and *Anne Bordeleau*, for igniting the flame, for opening my eyes and my mind, and for the valuable insights and references along this journey.

I thank my friends, my thesis-family, *Amrit Phull* for being a pillar, for endless encouragements countering all moments of insecurities; *Connor O'Grady* for intangible yet tangible conversations; *Currin Suteria*, a guardian; *Mark Zupan*, a brother; *May Wu*, a sister; and *all others that crossed paths with me*. I am very glad to have met you, you are all within this thesis.

I thank *Terri Meyer Boake* and *Lloyd Hunt* for their recommendations that made this journey rich and possible; to *my friends in Beijing* for showing me the city; *F_RMLab* and *On Empathy* for being a platform for inquiry; *Jenne Janke* and *Laura Legge* for helping me through the struggle with words.

Thanks last but not least to my family, my sister *Crystal Lai* for the detailed gaze and inquiring mind; to *Tao Zheng*, for inspiration, for acceptance, for support; to the best parents one could ever ask for, *Allen Lai and Cecilia Ho*, for the support and encouragement to explore, to grow, to make mistakes, to heed warnings, but to go onwards anyways.

To all of you, for being an important part of this journey.

INVITATION

DEAR READER,

Immerse yourself in this place, in this journey into the liminal space between my memories and your imagination.

The year is 2014. I cross the divide and enter the city within a city. Six years since I first set foot here, it is already a different place. Different because I have evolved and it has evolved.

Physically I find myself here, but my mind has wandered off, following an old couple who have turned a corner. I find myself wondering where they are off to, where they have come from. Before that thought can take form, desire triggers motion: recording the moment, forming an image.

In my investigation of this place, I am sometimes a solitary *flaneur*, a nameless wanderer. In other moments, I have a different urge—to break the facade of my invisibility, to have people tell me stories.

I am here to present a place, an exploration of the perceived. Come with me; look with me. Then formulate your own ideas, your own perspectives, and your own stance.

– FERNIE LINGIE LAI, 2014

Arriving at each new city, the traveller finds again a past of his that he did not know he had: the foreignness of what you no longer are or no longer possess lies in wait for you in foreign, unpossessed places.

– ITALO CALVINO, *INVISIBLE CITIES*

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THE LADY IN RED

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BIBLIOGRAPHY

... a study in scarlet, eh? Why shouldn't we use a little art jargon.
There's the scarlet thread of murder running through the colourless
skein of life, and our duty is to unravel it, and isolate it, and expose
every inch of it.

– SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE, *A STUDY IN SCARLET*

There's the scarlet *thread of Love*
running through the colourless skein of life.

There's the scarlet *thread of Terror*
running through the colourless skein of life.

There's the scarlet *thread of Celebration*
running through the colourless skein of life.



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超市

北京特产烟酒茶食品超

7
东四店欢迎您

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CRAWL through traffic, weave. Look out for scooters buzzing by, or the tricycles with dull cowbells that ring constantly as they move down the streets. Dodge through pedestrians and arrive amid crowds of tourists, trying to politely step in front of one another for that perfect photograph with the plaque, the street name carved into stone. Squeeze through warm bodies. Arrive at the first street.

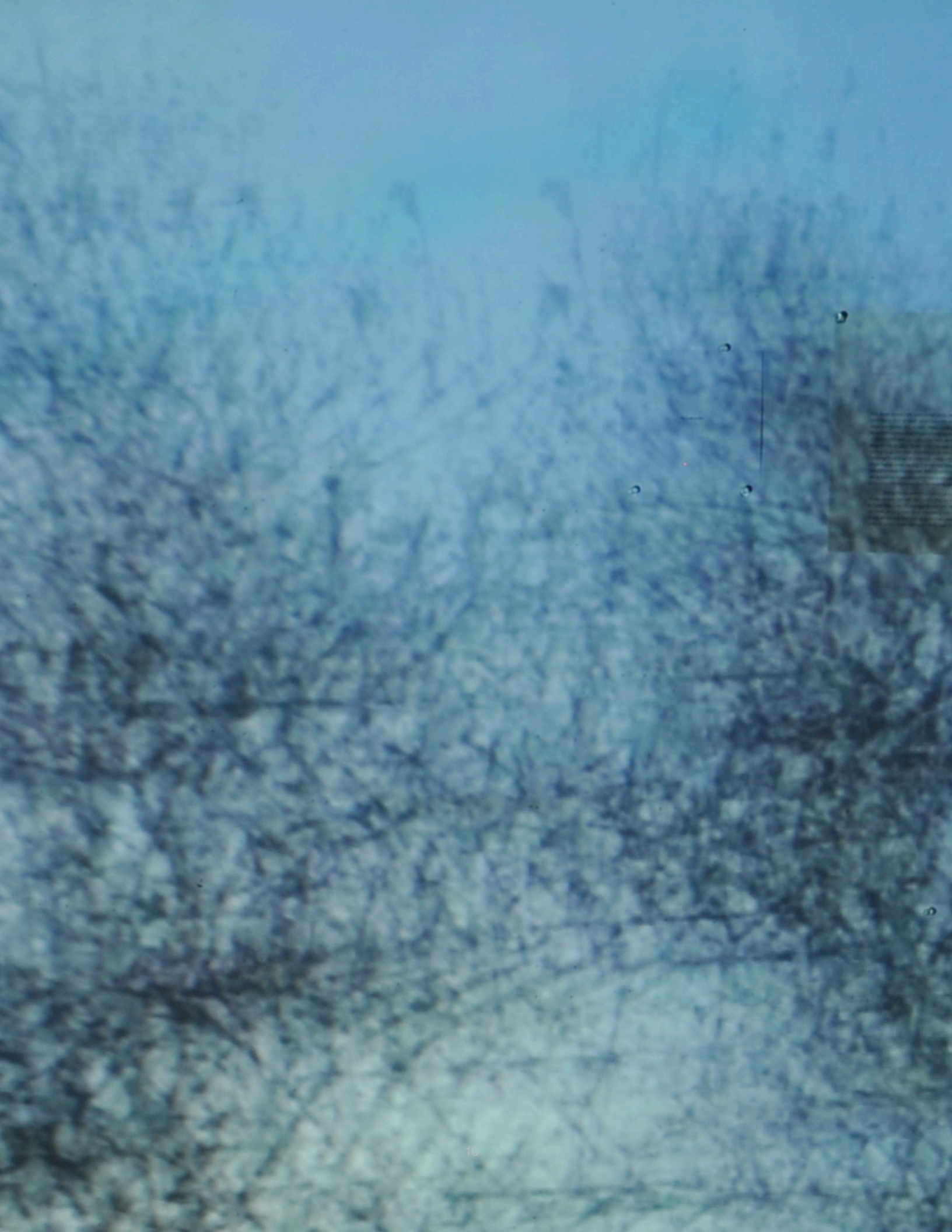
Here, people meander from left to right, from store to store, looking at this and that. Cameras snapping, eating street food, chattering in so many different dialects, even languages. Waiters, waitresses vie for attention, offering a good time cheap food fun drinks while the same popular songs, played on the same cheap karaoke stereos, seep through the doors behind them.

Escape from the crowd. Turn a corner. The alleyways aren't lined with shops anymore. At first, the crowds persist, stores still peppering the street here and there. The deeper you venture, only walls — just beyond the reach of your fingertips— surround you on either side, walls that protect the privacy of countless families interrupted only by thresholds,

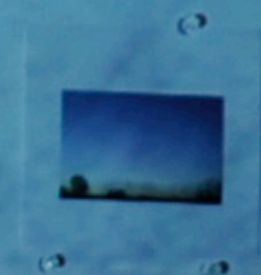
opening deeper into the maze. The spaces between houses are webs of alleyways. Behind every threshold, fresh encounters: on low, tattered benches old grandpas play Chinese chess in the shadows of even more ancient trees; across the street, bystanders chatter on the stone steps below a big red door. The real spirit of the hutong resides in the combination of these intimate moments.

Mediating the metropolitan forest and the walls of power are the hutongs of Beijing. Different from the strict hierarchy of the palace, and the monstrous ringed roads, alleyways fold in an intricate pattern. Neither temple nor palace, the monument exists not in a single structure, but in a confluence of structures. Embedded in this membrane are the traces of this country's history, drawing lost souls into its maze. Yet, despite all its allure, this intricate artifact is defenseless against eroding time.

Millions of tourists walk these streets, wide, comfortable, shiny street lined with newly-renovated stores, facades of fake bricks and synthetic ornaments. These thin tiles plastered on concrete walls conceal the real story: the old wall demolished and forgotten as the streets are widened to accommodate our modern-day comforts. Very little of the beauty that exists on the other side of these walls is known. The narrow, meandering streets hold in their encounters, close to the heart of a secret society. Hidden even deeper in the slums and the ruins, lies a lady in red. She waits to be released; she waits for the awakening.



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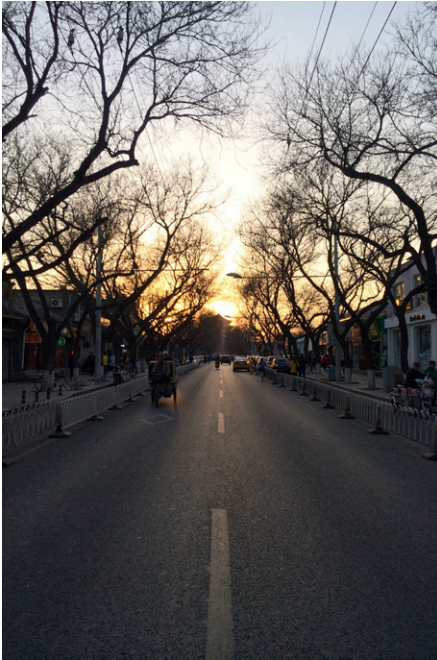




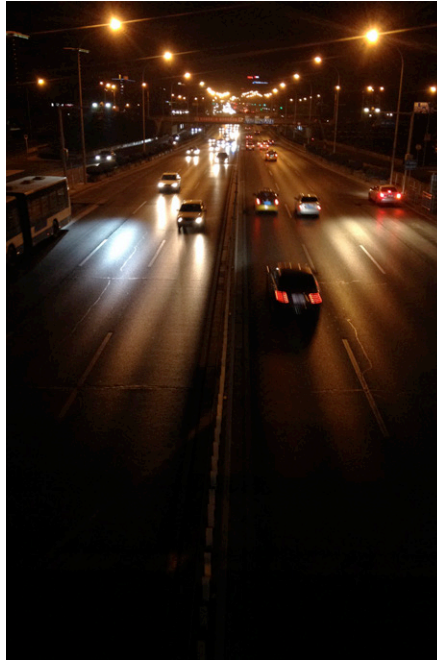
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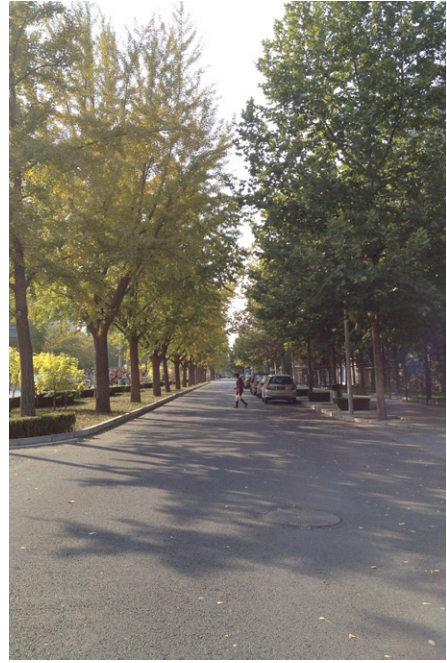
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PAUSE; brace yourself; enter. This is a one-way street, and the exit is sealed behind you. Hold your breath. Wait for the possibility of an encounter. If she comes, there will be no dodging her; there will be no slowing her down. If she comes, she will come head on; she will come full force.

Glimpse her from afar; count the steps between you. You are afraid; you want to turn around and run; but you let your curiosity pull you. Draw a full breath; steady yourself for the encounter. With one last step, come face to face with her. The long-awaited calm, like a long lost friend, embraces you. Watch her go. With one silent farewell, turn around and continue on.



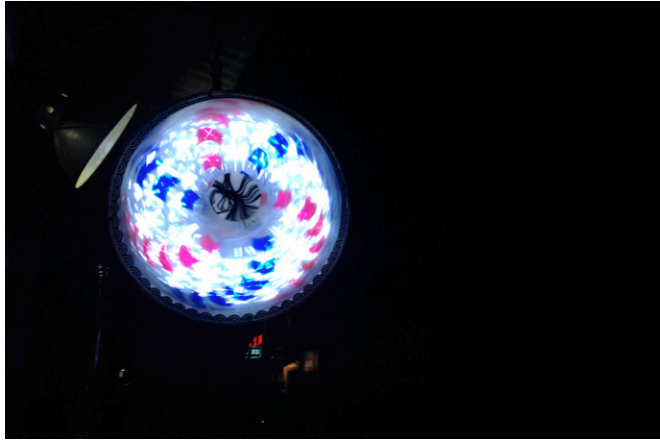
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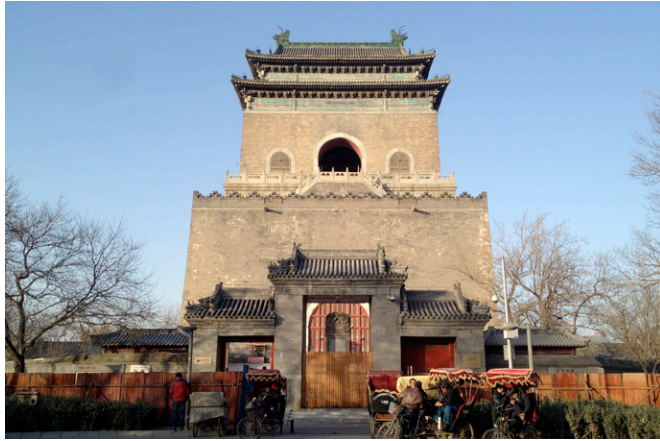




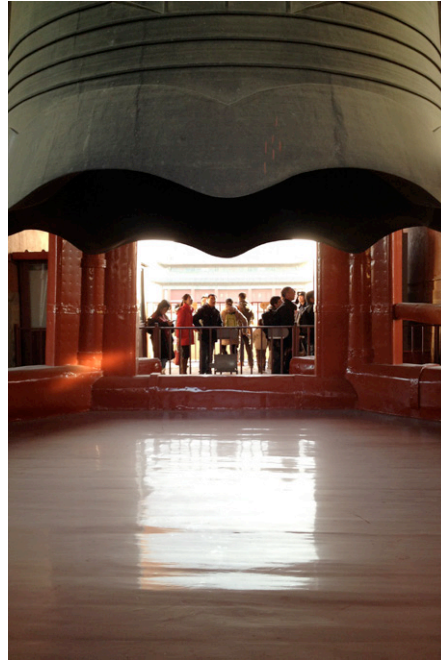
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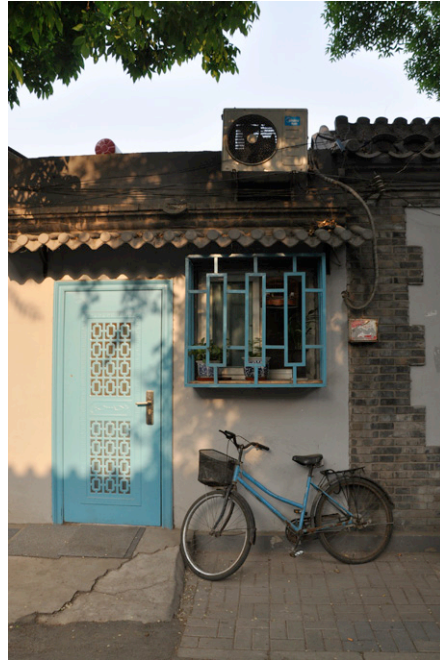
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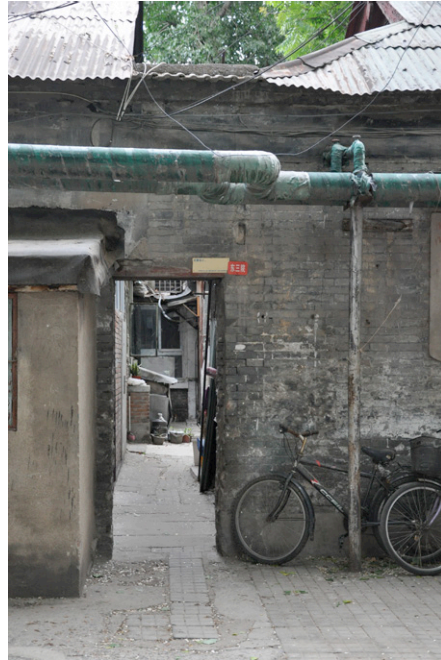
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Designed as a place that evoked emotion in the shape of motion as one travelled through it: Scudery's map [of tenderness] drew a landscape of emotions to be experienced as a series of sensational movements. In this "moving" way, it made "sense" of the place of affects. It also made sense of sentimental displacement.

– GIULIANA BRUNO, *ATLAS OF EMOTION*

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RIDE down the alleyway. Flow like chi. Scenes unfolds in a movie. No more no less; don't stop; don't linger; don't study. A passing glance, the speed you ride, moments revealed in sequence – flowing imagery.

Doorways frame life within, the life of others. Though the interiors are still, motion stitches them together, moving images. Unwinding frame after frame, like a roll of film, alternate universes unfold before you. Stories, still images caught in your mind's eye: middle-aged lady, arms half raised to hang laundry on a clothesline; old grandma, squatting to tend to her small garden; objects stacked here and there, whisper in a secret picture language.

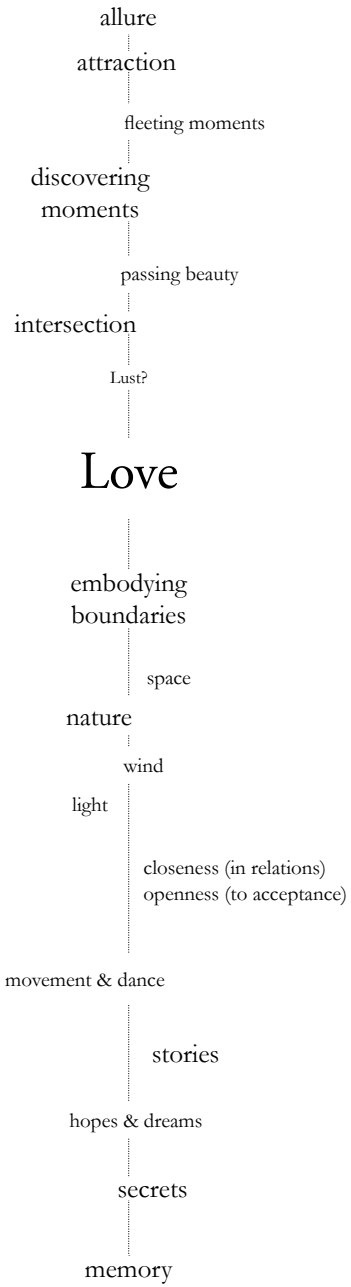
Trains meander through the faces of buildings unseen, canvas of news, strokes of light. Is there a destination? Gone too far and turning back.

Always temptation: the allure of half-closed doors and peeling walls, disrupted by shadows, disrupted by turns. Perpendicularity is strict, interrupted only by nature, nature's triumphs over man. Interior–exterior space, hallways to another place, the ceiling is the moving sky, magical.

Exit. Merge with a flock, bikes, like birds migrating south before winter.



14.04.21-17.47.00.JPG





14.05.01-16.05.00.JPG



12.10.02-17.05.JPG



14.04.21-18.29.00.JPG



14.04.21-17.04.02.JPG



14.01.01-15.13.JPG



14.02.19-14.38.01.JPG



14.03.23-16.51.JPG



14.04.21-17.52.00.JPG



14.05.01-15.50.00.JPG



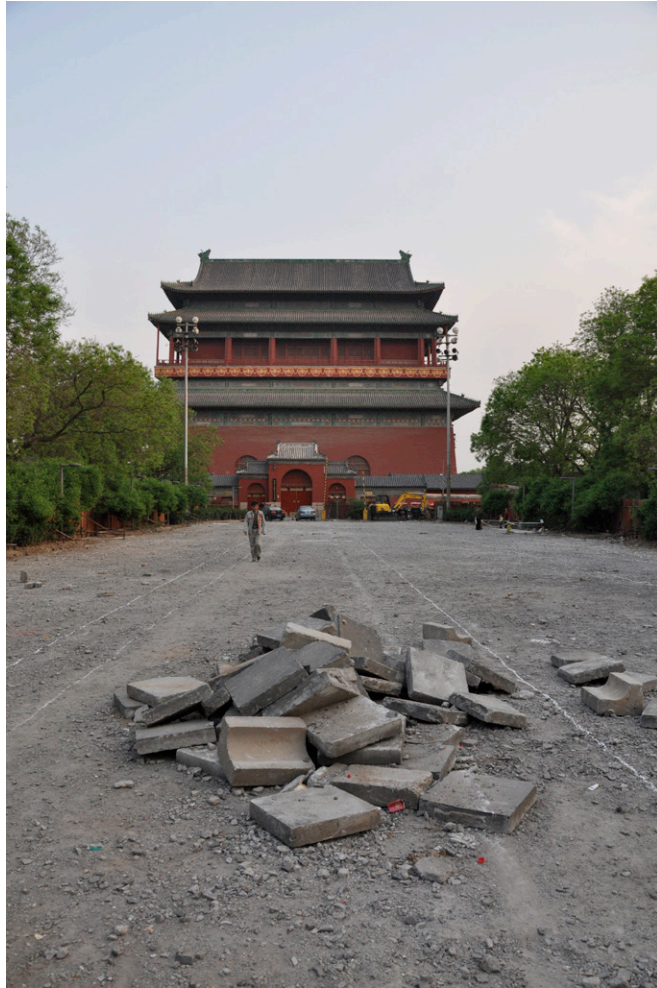
14.04.21-18.17.00.JPG



14.01.01-15.03.JPG



14.05.01-16.20.01.JPG



14.04.21-18.13.00.JPG



13.01.07-16.42.JPG



14.04.21-18.19.01.JPG



13.11.10-16.38.JPG



14.05.01-16.06.00.JPG

exhibit 14.02.05-21.41.00.txt

BEIJING, BEIJING, and it is sung with a howl:

As I travel along its every street,
I can never seem to still my heart.
Other than the motor's rumble and electric's hum,
I seem to almost hear its wrenching heartbeat.
I laugh here, I cry here, I live here, and die here.
I pray here, I dream here, I search here, and dismay here.
Beijing, Beijing.

Three blocks between the coffee shop and the Square,
the distance from neon lights to the moon.
People comfort each other amid struggle.
Searching, chasing the last breath of scattered dreams.
We laugh here, we cry here, we live here, and die here.
We pray here, we dream here, we search here, and dismay here.
Beijing, Beijing.

If there comes the day I must depart,
I hope people will bury me here.
It is here I feel my existence.
Here holds too many objects of my desire.
I laugh here, I cry here, I live here, and die here.
I pray here, I dream here, I search here, and dismay here.
Beijing, Beijing.

— sung by Feng Wang, translated by author



12.11.11-20.15.JPG



14.01.01-14.15.JPG



14.04.21-17.20.00.JPG



14.04.21-18.10.02.JPG



14.04.21-18.10.01.JPG



14.01.01-15.08.JPG



14.01.01-15.09.JPG

exhibit 14.05.01-16.03.00.txt

THERE IS aggression. We believe we are all-powerful, that we have the right to alter our current conditions. Our decisions are “just” and are “improvements” to society. What of the loss of identity, the loss of culture, the dangers of ignorance? Who is to say what is better or worse, whether beauty is relevant in the face of survival.



14.05.01-16.03.00.JPG



14.05.01-16.51.00.JPG

exhibit 14.05.01-16.51.00.txt

This is a beautiful photograph.

*Perfectly framing the layers of walls,
the division of materials in low-angled light.*

*Now smell the urine, smell the rotten wood,
feel the crunch of discarded materials,
feel the floorboards bowing under the weight of each step you take.*

*This is a beautiful photograph of forgotten decay, presenting
beautiful, alluring terror.*

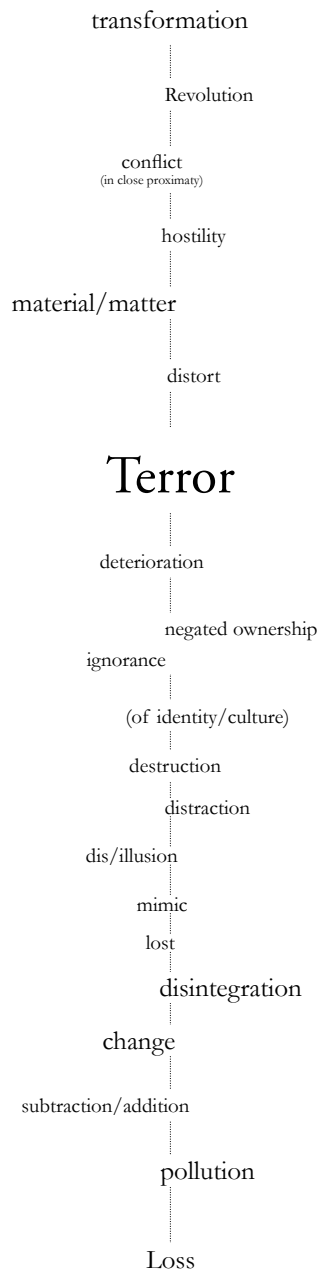
WAKE UP, get up. I'm running, or rather, I'm dashing.

I dash across the room, jump out of my window, and land on a neighbor's balcony, next to the exterior bay window, which contains their kitchen. In this way, I make my way to the ground from the fourth floor, hopping from balcony to balcony.

I land in a swirl of dust. I pause to decide what path to take, left or right. There is an instinctive rhythm to my movements, and I make my decision in tempo.

I run to the left, dodging people, turning corners as I head down familiar, yet strange, streets. There is that gateway opposite the house I considered living in; there is that grey wall I watched a dog pee on; there is that bike that was somewhere else before. Stitched-together memories, of spaces begin to seep into my dream. Familiar scenery flashes by in an unfamiliar sequence as I try to figure out what is happening. I lose track of my destination. I head back and find myself watching an execution; the prisoner is "I," but simultaneously not I. "I" ask to speak to myself, my last words. "I" say to I, "There must be something you can do!" I am confused, desperate for a way out.

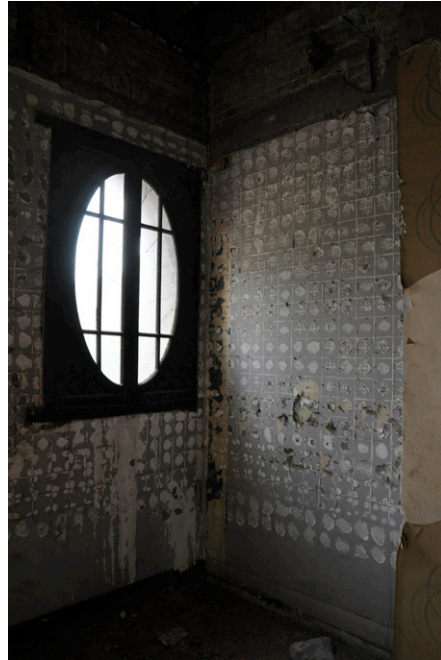
Thoughts of this and that run quickly through my head; the conditions blur and I'm already dreaming another dream.



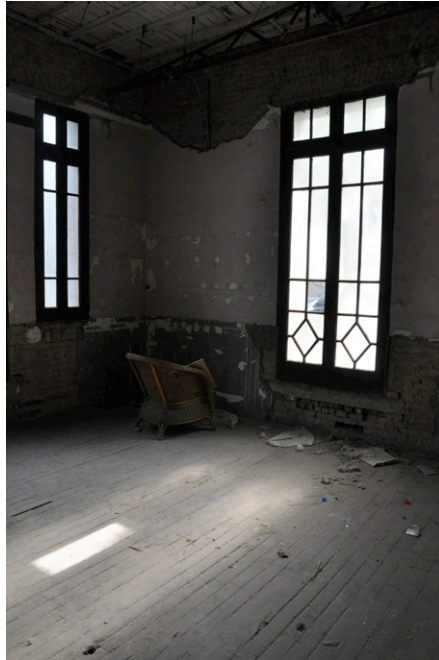




14.05.01-16.59.00.JPG



14.05.01-16.58.00.JPG



14.05.01-16.54.01.JPG



14.05.01-16.02.01.JPG



14.05.01-15.54.00.JPG



14.05.01-16.54.00.JPG



14.05.01-16.53.01.JPG



14.05.01-15.45.00.JPG



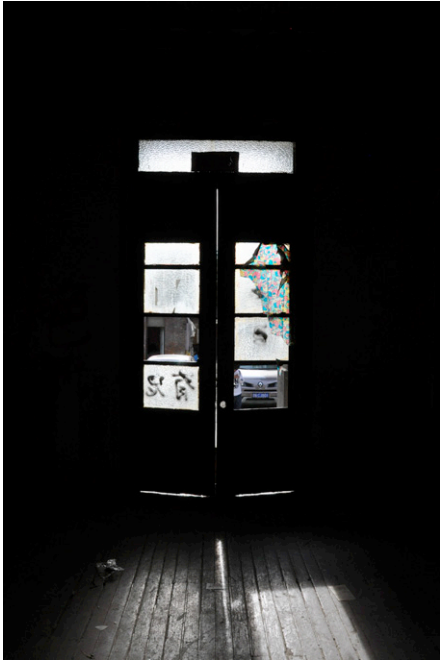
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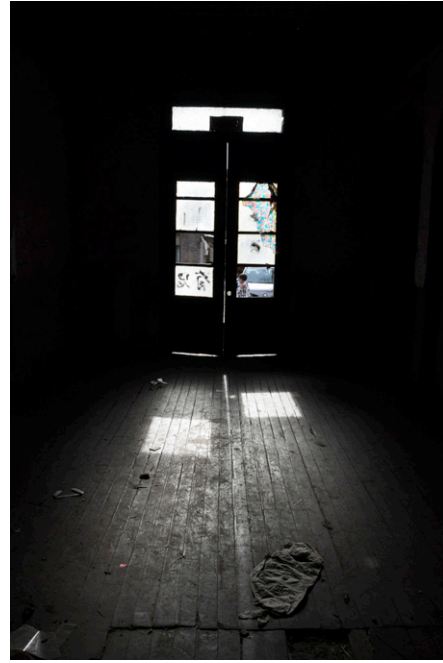
14.01.10-16.15.JPG



13.12.27-15.20.JPG



14.05.01-16.52.00.JPG



14.05.01-16.53.00.JPG



14.05.01-16.55.01.JPG



exhibit 13.04.17-14.07.00.txt

STEP on a crack and it'll open up to eat you. Every time you step on a shadow, a monster invades you.

I hold still, try not to move, when you turn and gaze at me, inspecting me for the smallest movements. I try to keep myself from falling apart. That is all I can manage; that is all I can promise. Every time you turn away, time, which I had dammed, breaks through my barricade and flows again. I cannot help but erode. Fissures appear and I disintegrate.



Small, illegible text block, possibly a label or a stamp, located in the upper right corner of the page. The text is too small and faint to be read accurately.

Text block containing several paragraphs of text, likely a description or introduction to the exhibit.



Large central text block containing multiple columns of text, likely the main body of the exhibit's content.





14.04.23-14.32.00.JPG

MR. YI is Australian-born and an old-Beijinger – old not in age but in ancestry. Descendant from a long lineage of Beijinger, an old-Beijinger is characterized by an air of pride and habit of being rough-around-the-edges in a way that is unique to the area. In our initial conversations, Mr. Yi's Australian accent was immediately apparent. What surprised me was the strong Beijing accent with which he spoke Mandarin, even though he didn't read or write a word of it.

When Mr. Yi decided to come to Beijing for the first time, he didn't have to pay rent. Many years ago, his family had been allotted one bay of a courtyard just one or two Beijing-sized blocks northeast of Tiananmen Square. In the summer, we used to sit in his communal courtyard under a tree, drink tea, and build a small barbeque out of found bricks and tiles; the only additional material we needed was mesh. In the winter, Mr. Yi had to take extra care with the pipes that provided water to his home; some of them were exposed to the exterior. These pipes were the government's temporary means to provide additional water supply when his family first moved in. At certain times in the winter, the night temperature dropped below zero. On those days, we would expect a call from Mr. Yi to use our shower. When his pipes froze, unless a strange heat wave were to hit in the middle of winter to thaw the pipes, his home would have no water for the rest of that winter.

Over the years, Mr. Yi made small changes to his family's home whenever he could manage. However, this summer, when I went to see Mr. Yi again, he had decided to quit his job in order to focus on the renovation of his home. The goal of the project, an extension of the side of his existing courtyard bay, was to form a smaller private courtyard within the main courtyard. Mr. Yi's courtyard is one of the few remaining close to Jin Bao Street, beside Wang Fu Jing and north of Chang An Street. He began this project in the fall, and it extended into the winter, when the harsh weather forced all task forces to hibernate, to begin again when spring finally came along. I saw Mr. Yi regularly during the eight months I was in

Mr. Yi says to me one day, I think today I will begin to build a study.

I passed by the next day to see how it was going. Again and again I came; bit by bit the studio took form. Using materials inspired by the hutong itself, slate and wood, this new enclosure was constructed.

Beijing, and every time we met he told me stories about the construction staff he had met—the routines they followed, the food they ate, the anecdotes they shared. He would tell me the fascinating techniques they had to use due to limited space. Everything was done in-situ, and with handheld tools. Occasionally, conflicts arose between Mr. Yi and his neighbors. Before he even started this project, his neighbor had planted a tree in front of his door in order to mark his territory. Mr. Yi was a friendly and gentle person, so for years, he found non-

confrontational ways to deal with these conflicts; Mr. Yi dealt with the incident of the tree by repaving the ground in front of his home.

The addition of the studio was met, intentionally or not, with resistance and with destruction. The neighbors complained, threatening to report him to the Neighborhood Watch; some would come by and steal material or become a nuisance whenever the workers were trying to move equipment in and out. Children, out of curiosity and lack of respect, kicked down tiles that had just been secured. Anything that was not durable was destroyed; it was a game for them. In those instances, Mr. Yi found himself turning into an old grumpy grandpa. I can imagine he would have liked to wave a broom while chasing the children away down the streets.

Mr. Yi dealt with his neighbors by turning to the power of his family and their connections, for Beijing was a city of power. I couldn't offer much. It was very difficult to decide whether to get involved in a situation such as this, but I did put in a call to tell him if he needed to assemble en masse just to intimidate his neighbors, we were there for him. That was all we could offer. I later received a call from his aunt, inviting us over for dinner as a token of appreciation for our help, and for acting as his "family," since the rest of his family were too far away to help. She had flown from Australia to help settle this issue. An immigration lawyer, she had her own web of connections, and the problems went away quickly. I imagine that carefully chosen words, gifts, and other forms of persuasion were used. Mostly, she must have been able to convince them that their protests would not be worthwhile.

When all of this was over and the studio was finished, we celebrated with another barbeque. The activities didn't seem to have changed, but the environment had. The barbeque played out in a style befitting the hutongs—a cat in the neighborhood visited us; the space was quiet and quaint amid six-lane traffic, high-rises, and Chang An Street. If we stepped out of the courtyard and into the alleyway, we could spot the monstrous spaceship-like Galaxy SOHO with its white and black horizontal bands, standing, gleaming in all its glory beyond the shadows of the towering tree in our foreground.

The immediate shifts in scale can be alarming, but interesting. Interesting in the juxtaposition of materials and scale, in such adjacency, abruptness not gradual, not gradual, subtle or gentle at all.

The new studio addition was scheduled for demolition shortly after our small celebration. People were jealous of the beautiful space and said it was disrespectful of the original form. They lodged complaints and the neighborhood authorities had no choice but to give notification of demolition.



14.04.23-14.33.00.JPG



14.05.01-16.02.00.JPG



14.04.21-18.15.00.JPG



13.10.06-14.45.JPG



14.05.01-15.56.00.JPG



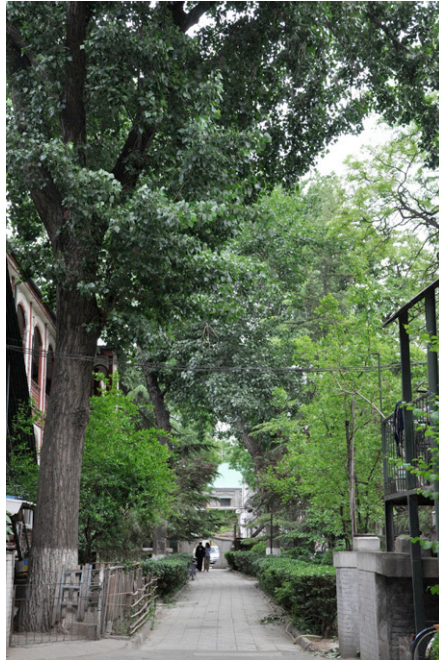
14.05.01-16.14.00.JPG



14.05.01-16.01.01.JPG



14.05.01-15.48.00.JPG



14.05.01-16.07.00.JPG



14.05.01-16.23.02.JPG



14.04.21-17.47.01.JPG



13.12.26-18.28.JPG



14.03.21-17.18.JPG

“There are so many obstructions, it’s like a maze.” She began weaving among the cables. Beneath her flowed along the pavements. Little streams divered from these rivers and trickled into the lighted canves of all-night stories.

– MIKHAIL BULGAKOV, *MASTER & MARGARITA*

exhibit 14.04.05-13.41.txt

UNTOLD stories await. Some collect souvenirs from their travels, groom succulents, and brew artisanal coffees, dreaming of a particular kind of life—quiet, secluded, serene. They are here so that their lives can be lived in protest of the unthinking and the inconsiderate.

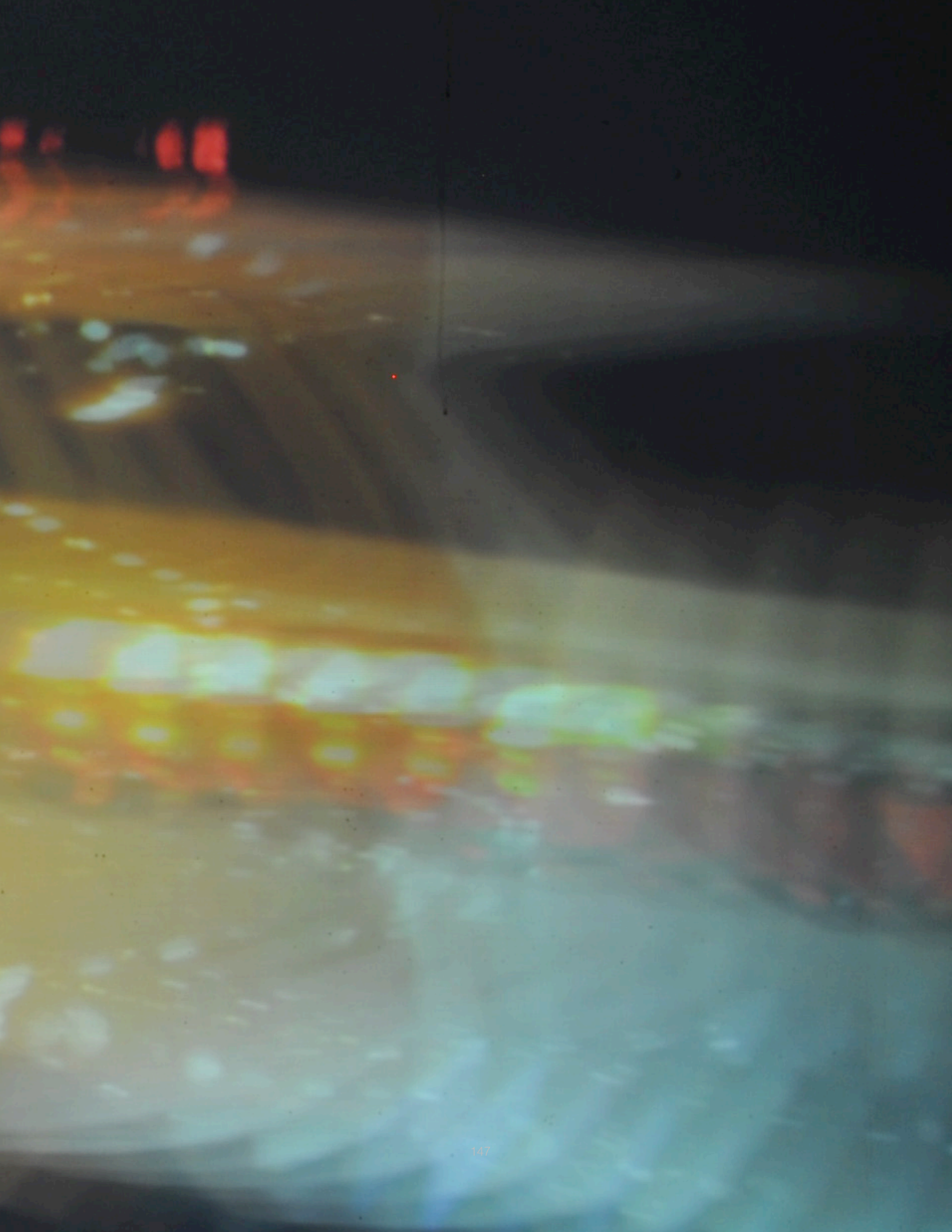
Nurture those who've succumbed to the manufactured landscape. Build friendliness and familiarity; build manageable nature, for those who still desire the missing touch. Why be a well-paid, successful consultant when you could own a small, intimate restaurant? No one needs to know; working away, the same hours everyday; no one would ever notice.

Crossing the boundary, entering the mystical land. Here resides the calligraphy pen grandpa, the pursuant reporter, the adventurous editor, the hopeful publisher, the travelling graphic designer, and the wandering, wondering architect—agents for desires.

Then there was the incident of the dented car door. Tuesday afternoon, two heads poke in. "Did you see a white truck drive down the alleyway this morning?"

The displaced artist says, "A word of concern and heaps of food after the tiniest accident: That is how the neighbor's relationships should be."







12.08.26-22.01.JPG

exhibit 14.00.00-00.00.00.txt

RAIN has a paralyzing effect.

Fall is beautiful but short-lived. Autumn blankets the entire hutsongscape in gold. Stroll on this soft carpet in the glistening, drizzling light.

Autumn doesn't linger, and winter is already announcing its arrival. The remaining leaves fall, dry, crunch in protest on the ground as feet walk briskly through them. Its sound muffled only by our own layers of clothing.

Snow is shy, making it spectacular when the veil of white finally falls. In the depths of winter the sun shines brightest. Sometimes the warmth induces temporary amnesia, and we are able to forget winter for a moment.

Spring slips into summer, filling the city with activity. Moths flutter, cicadas buzz, committing mass suicide against bulbs.



13.09.13-21.04.JPG



13.11.12-14.14.JPG



13.11.11-12.26.JPG



14.04.21-17.03.00.JPG



14.04.21-17.33.00.JPG



14.04.21-17.25.00.JPG



14.04.21-17.05.01.JPG



13.12.26-18.57.JPG

SITTING in a west-facing space. Wait. Shadows dance in front of me; arms of golden weeds, left over from autumn, wave from the opposite roof. The wind has blown away the grey to reveal the most consistent shade of natural blue, untainted by clouds.

It is the hour before sun sets.

The light shifts, creeping steadily across surfaces: the white-painted brick, glass jars of different shapes and sizes, the clean, polished wood of the table, the brown cover of my sketchbook, my steel ring, my silver pen. The light penetrates my hand and the warmth seeps through one last time before the night.

I anticipate the coming beauty of the sunset and the darkness following. But it is not complete darkness that awaits me. A different light will give a different life to this place. The ominous grey suites will break away from his mundane life and come alive with the neon signs and flickering lights of hutong life.





14.03.23-16.11.JPG



14.04.21-17.30.01.JPG



14.05.01-17.04.00.JPG



14.01.12-13.18.JPG



14.02.19-14.31.00.JPG



14.05.01-15.58.00.JPG



14.01.05-14.14.JPG



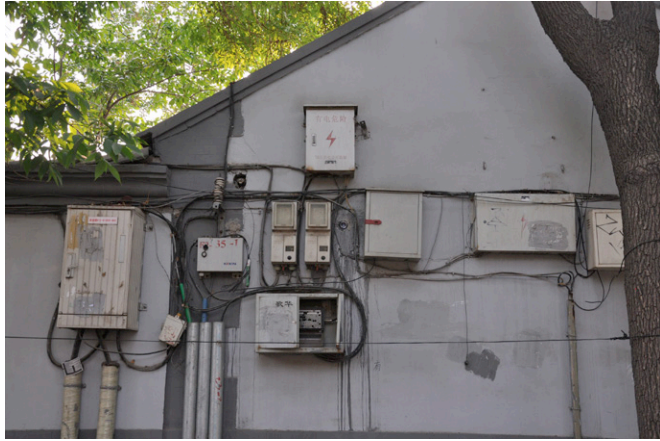




12.10.03-16.55.JPG



14.04.21-17.07.01.JPG



14.04.21-17.29.00.JPG



14.04.21-17.24.00.JPG



14.04.21-17.32.01.JPG



14.01.03-09.58.JPG



14.03.14-18.29.JPG



14.05.01-16.16.00.JPG





12.10.03-17.07.JPG



14.01.04-11.38.JPG



14.04.21-17.12.00.JPG



14.04.21-17.08.00.JPG

exhibit 13.01.07-15.08.00.txt

PICK a spot with the best vantage point. Take a seat. Order a cup of tea. Open a book you don't read. The scenery around you is moving, fluid as water, captivating; details swarm in front of you. Short Girl is holding up her rumpled white dress, displaying bright red Converse sneakers. She dashes by as others chase after her, equipment in hand. Wedding photos. Usually hidden by the heavy grey smog, clear blue sky emerges. Out of the corner of your eye, the wind gushes by, flitters jet-black hair at the next table. What a beauty! You forget the running crowd. A new story unfolds.

I go into hiding, I escape the world.

I become the background, I observe.

Waiting waiting waiting, I emerge.



14.05.01-16.10.02.JPG



14.01.14-12.59.JPG



14.04.21-17.19.00.JPG



14.04.21-17.49.00.JPG



14.04.21-17.34.02.JPG



14.04.21-17.32.02.JPG



14.05.01-17.16.01.JPG



14.05.01-16.14.01.JPG



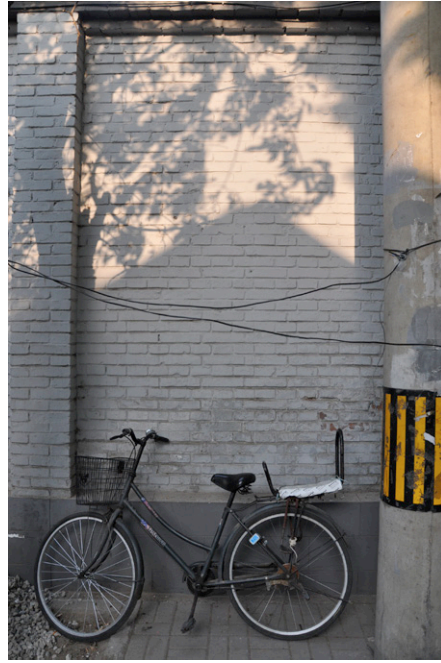
14.05.01-16.08.00.JPG



14.05.01-16.09.00.JPG



14.04.21-17.31.03.JPG



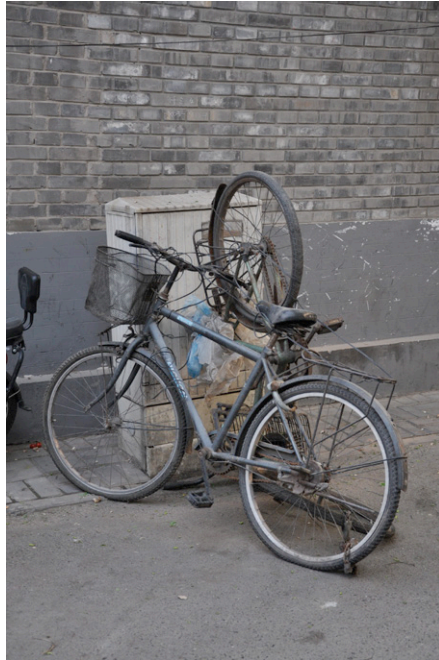
14.04.21-17.29.01.JPG



14.04.21-17.17.00.JPG



14.04.21-17.54.00.JPG



14.04.21-18.00.01.JPG



14.05.01-16.15.01.JPG



14.04.21-17.40.00.JPG



14.04.21-17.57.00.JPG



14.05.01-15.57.01.JPG



14.05.01-15.57.00.JPG



14.03.10-13.31.JPG



14.01.05-14.13.JPG



14.05.01-15.59.01.JPG



14.04.21-18.12.00.JPG

time(lessness)

season

infinity

Celebration

food

ornaments

culture

objects

traditions

rituals

Material/Matter

symbols

exhibit 13.07.16-09.13.00.txt

THE DAY BEGINS, a gathering of friends and family, a day of joy and celebration; of gongs, drums, trumpets, dragon dancing, and food; of ribbons and red characters of blessing covering every surface.

In another place, far away or close-by, preparations – blessings, a fluttering heart covered by a red veil – awaits the approaching hour.



14.04.21-17.56.00.JPG

The night before, red papers were placed on all the blemishes in the road. The path having been mapped out before, the journey back would be different from the journey there; a one-way journey, a journey of no return.

When the time comes, a time carefully chosen in accordance with the proper alignment of the stars, the groom sets out on a journey to retrieve his bride. He brings a procession of friends, and is blessed by neighbors and bystanders on his journey.

The bride waits in anticipation; her friends prepare mischievous barricades. The groom will be tried.

On arrival, a series of obstacles await him. Overcoming the first obstacles — only the beginning of their life together— he must prove himself worthy of his bride. He must be strong enough to carry her across the threshold of her home, along the path to their new home, and into their new home. This is the end of their life as separate beings and the beginning of their life together as a family.

Paying respects and seeking blessings from the elders in the family, the sky, and the earth, they are united. Loved ones witness this union with food, gifts, greetings, and blessings.

This is not yet the end of the celebrations. They greet each family member now as an extension of their own kin, a bond. They consume sweet, sour, bitter, and spicy foods as a representation of all that they will endure together.

Thus concludes the ceremonies of marriage.







14.04.21-17.06.00.JPG



14.04.21-17.03.01.JPG



14.04.21-17.48.01.JPG



14.04.21-17.05.00.JPG



14.04.21-15.32.00.JPG

...the people who move through the streets are all strangers. At each encounter, they imagine a thousand things about one another; meetings which could take place between them, conversations, surprises, caresses, bites. But no one greets anyone; eyes lock for a second, then dart away, seeking other eyes, never stopping... something runs among them, an exchange of glances like lines that connect one figure with another and draw arrows, stars, triangles, until all combinations are used up in a moment, and other characters come on to the scene...

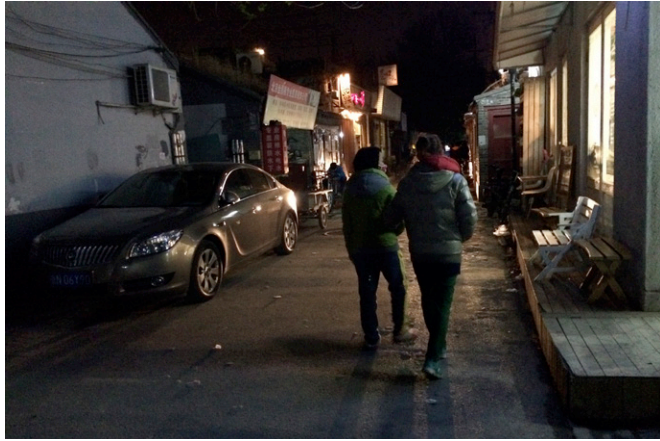
– ITALO CALVINO, *INVISIBLE CITIES*



14.05.01-16.23.00.JPG



14.04.21-17.34.00.JPG



14.04.03-19.43.JPG



14.05.01-16.21.00.JPG



14.05.01-16.19.00.JPG



14.04.21-17.31.01.JPG



14.01.03-19.53.JPG



13.12.27-15.55.01.JPG



14.05.01-16.30.00.JPG



14.03.13-13.21.JPG

exhibit 13.03.16-15.15.00.txt

HEY, GRANDMA. Hey, Grandpa. Where will you go today? What will you see? Rolling through the city in your carriage, with one another as companions.

Two chairs, side by side, placed along the wall facing the street, remnants of an old couple sitting here during the day. Watering plants, greeting friends, meeting strangers. Grandmothers always wear a smile, toothless grins on their faces.

This is their calm life. No ripples, no river, but calm, calm, calm.

Toward the north end of the alleyway, at the entrance of a school is a girl in a white dress, red belt, with a small camera, holding hands with a boy in a light blue-checkered shirt. They stand together on the side of the alleyway looking in. Where did they come from? Where will they venture? The imaginary path weaves invisible threads before them.

Turn toward the lake. A new excitement looms. Passing by: an elderly man rides at a leisurely pace, a woman with a dog in her basket. Stop at the light together. They turn different corner, taking different routes, on their own adventures.

One night, many years ago, stays with me in my memory, in flashes of images. Wandering through the alleyways, sometimes in darkness, sometimes in light, I arrive at the lake, accompanied by friends, wandering down the south side first, stillness in that summer night. Food for the spirit does not quench the midsummer-night's thirst, instead creates filters for my eyes; colors softened in my vision and sounds blended together into the background. That was my first time here. I don't remember what we talked about; I don't think we talked much at all. That first summer in the hutongs was supposed to be my farewell to Beijing. But like every goodbye, it actually made room for a new beginning, a new adventure.

Pirated music vendors still play classics, this city's soundtrack. Young lovers still sit on benches under tree canopies, whispering in each other's ears as small smiles creep across their faces. Still, willow trees sway and the surface of the lake ripples slightly with the breeze. I remember Grandpa and Grandma.

Much like before.



14.03.14-14.25.JPG





The fold,... is actually an elaborate mutual figuration of mind and matter. The fold holds the elastic texture of moving pictures, and thus unfolding is a material expression of our moving inner world. It is the “fabric” of our inner landscape, ...

– GIULIANA BRUNO, *LOG | FALL 2003:*
PLEATS OF MATTER, FOLDS OF THE SOUL



14.02.19-14.38.00.JPG



14.01.01-15.14.JPG



14.04.21-17.33.02.JPG



14.04.21-18.19.00.JPG

LATE SUMMER EVENING, tiptoeing into fall: the in-between weather simultaneously holds on to the warmth and hints at the approaching autumnal beauty. An afternoon spent frolicking on the golden carpet of fallen gingko leaves. As the sun set blood-red on the horizon, friends populated the small courtyard; our remaining outdoor meals were numbered.

Weekends are bustling; the alleyways crawl with tourists, local and foreign. Weekdays are a little better, but in the afternoon, the place is still charged with activity. The serenity of the courtyard is in stark contrast to the noise outside, much like the slowness in the courtyard is in contrast to the speed outside.

We gathered. The sky, framed by terracotta roofs, spilled down on us. We made fire, we talked, we sang, and we cooked, with old friends, new acquaintances, new encounters, old stories exchanged, all within the makeshift outdoor living room. Contentment rippling out by osmosis. Someone told a story of a mysterious man, a story that resonated with me more than with others. It was a story of the wanderer who left his family behind in a faraway city, a man who was “just wandering the alleyways, lost in modern society.”



14.03.23-16.56.JPG



13.12.11-22.03.00.JPG



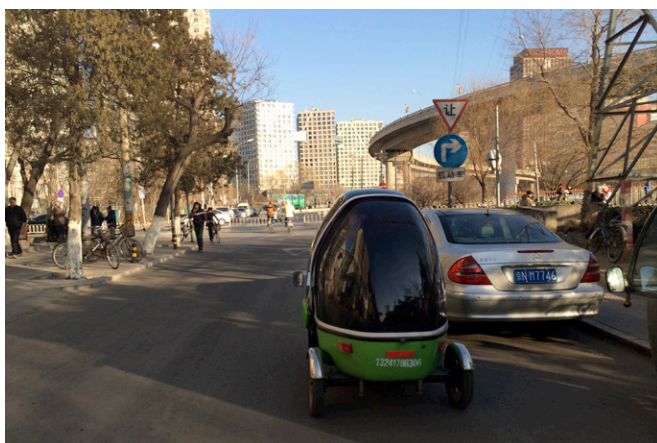
13.12.07-11.49.00.JPG



13.12.07-11.54.00.JPG



13.12.07-13.46.00.JPG



14.01.05-14.12.JPG



14.04.21-18.09.00.JPG



14.01.01-15.01.JPG



14.04.21-17.59.01.JPG



14.04.21-17.21.01.JPG



14.04.21-17.38.00.JPG



14.04.21-17.51.01.JPG



14.04.21-17.36.01.JPG









14.04.21-17.32.00.JPG



14.04.21-17.34.03.JPG



14.04.21-17.07.00.JPG



14.05.01-16.49.00.JPG



14.04.21-17.58.00.JPG



14.04.21-17.33.01.JPG

RETURN. Depart and arrive.

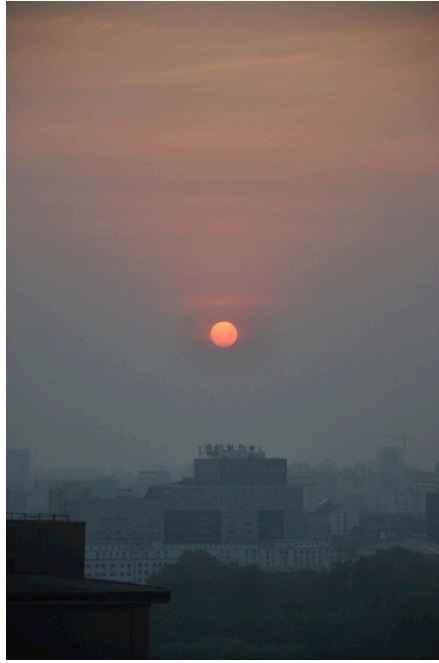
Every time I re-enter the city, I notice the presence of change. I hadn't been gone long — months only, not even years— and I have to reacquaint myself with it, as if greeting an old friend.

The hutongs seemed constant. In those preserved areas change moves more slowly than the rest of the city, with towering high-rises erected all around. Until I ventured deeper into its fabric, I did not realize that change could go unnoticed by those who merely pass by. That store I sometimes wander into is no longer there. No matter, I will find her elsewhere.

Nothing hurrys me except the need to move, to grow, to change. The greatest change occurs internally when I finally manage to stand still.

Uneasiness vibrates through my entire body when I enter an unfamiliar place. My pores open and my hair stands on end as the environment seeps into my skin, establishing that first impression. I steel my identity, place, and stance against unacquainted territory. The churning in my stomach — butterflies, flip-flop, upside down— prevents me from moving. Overcoming this, I feel triumph, and that one moment of glory motivates me to keep conquering new ground.

Sometimes I arrive too early and find it all empty.



14.04.26-18.52.00.JPG

Despite all the changes, some things do remain the same. In the beginning of summer, as night arrives, old residents bring out stools and sit under the shade of the ash trees. They tell stories that unite us despite our geographical differences. Principles, morals, symbols, familial ideals, and respect for elders are reinforced through the exploration and acceptance of unfamiliar things.



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Attributes such as spirit and feeling do not lend themselves easily to practical applications of the conditions of authenticity, but nevertheless are important indicators of character and sense of place, for example, in communities maintaining tradition and cultural continuity.

#83, SEC. II.E INTEGRITY AND/OR AUTHENTICITY,
*OPERATIONAL GUIDELINES FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION
OF THE WORLD HERITAGE CONVENTION*

THE ESSENCE of a place lies not in its buildings but in people's interaction with, and interpretation of, that place. Our past is an integral part of us, yet it is inevitable that, attitudes, ideas, and design must evolve. Destruction is a vital part of renewal. We often talk about preservation in the most physical sense: this ornament should be kept, this brick wall should be kept, and this window should be kept. But there is more.

The hutongs are a network of historical alleyways in the center of Beijing, the political and imperial heart of China. The ancient alleyways lie in the immediate surroundings of the imperial palace, the Forbidden City, and speak to power and development. The hutong fabric is still prominent in the areas within the original gates of the city. The city rapidly modernizes outward in concentric circles. As one leaves the ancient core, the urban fabric quickly transforms itself into towering high-rises and nearly one-kilometer street blocks.

The hutongs exist in a temporary state, in the tension between historic value and modernization. This tension is shaped by transitions in the political system and by the development of the economy. Unable to keep up with our modern-day comforts, the hutongs were left abandoned by their original residents. They became low-income housing overtaken by migrant workers. It is always easier to build anew than to maintain what already exists. The hutongs have deteriorated with time and the transformation of the city.

The hutongs were a secret garden, both alluring and alarming, an alternate universe, suspended moments that provided an escape from the city, an enigma in a time of rapid development.

The hutongs are an unsettling sight, with their history, scale, intricate materials, fine-woven urban fabric, and hidden gems. Standing among the hutongs, time seems to hesitate, to hang, a moment suspended between the past and the future.

On the bridge that crosses the ringed road, I gaze at the streams of light flowing below me. What is the best way to capture the moment hanging in this place? Photographs are too still; words blur. Between the words and images are realities that are neither constant nor singular.

Photographs would warp this place: in them, time flows instead of pauses; light paints a picture of movement rather than of detail. Hovering voices, clattering bike chains, rustling leaves, still echo in my head. I wish I could attach this soundscape to an image. The texture of a wall emerges under the surface; a stain on the photograph's top right corner speaks of a different place and time. Is this an altered image? No. Nothing has been altered. This is the same reality, filtered through a different lens.

I originally thought that I should gain knowledge in order to manifest change. Yet in the current world, isn't a simple pause also an intervention into the constantly flowing stream?

In mythos and fairy tales, deities and other great spirits test the hearts of humans by showing up in various forms that disguise their divinity. They show up in robes, rags, silver sashes, or with muddy feet. They show up with skin dark as old wood, or in scales made of rose petal, as a frail child, as a lime-yellow old woman, as a man who cannot speak, or as an animal who can. The great powers are testing to see if humans have yet learned to recognize the greatness of soul in all its varying forms.

CLARISSA PINKOLA ESTÉS,

*WOMEN WHO RUN WITH THE WOLVES: MYTHS
AND STORIES OF THE WILD WOMAN ARCHETYPE*

THE “LADY IN RED” is my guide, my muse, my inspiration. She is my subconscious. Both “the Lady” and “Red” have connotations embedded in texts, movies, and cultures. This “Lady in Red” resides in the ancient alleyways of Beijing. She embodies love, seduction, anger, and power, a feminine power against masculine authority. A *Situationist*, her ideals arise from dissatisfaction with the current conditions of the alleyways. She guides me through the *psychogeography* of the hutongs. *The Lady in Red* is an *atlas of emotion*, a constructed geography as described by Giuliana Bruno, developed from explorations of the hutongs.¹ It is a map woven from the threads of Love, Terror and Celebration, distilled from within the hutongs.

The “Lady in Red” is a fictional character. This alternate identity liberated me to speak of desires rather than of thoughts. She embodies the feminine attitude toward change – of nurture, of protection, of growth. She represents the opportunity for a different perspective. She became “the voice or character that presents a center to this story,” the same way that Orhan Pamuk describes his own process of character creation². She is an explorer, a *voyeur*, a *flaneur*. Hers is not an aimless exploration. She is guided by knowledge, by observations and encounters in the subconscious, in search of the essence of this place.

The hutongs are elusive and tumultuous. Their energy is a conversation between the space and the person, the material and the person, the movement and the person. *The Lady in Red* resides between thresholds, between materials, but also between people, the observed and the observer, the subject and the photographer, and finally here, between me-the-presenter and you-the-audience. The ambition here is to draw

1. Giuliana Bruno, “An Atlas of Emotions”, *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture, and Film* (New York: Verso, 2002), 207.

2. Orhan Pamuk, *The Naïve and Sentimental Novelist*, (Random House, 2011), 85.



14.03.23-16.52.JPG

out the dormant forces within the hutong and its alleyways, to re-present its energies and desires in the face of the forces transforming this place: the residents, the architects, the designers, the powers. It aims to awaken the senses and arouse a deeper understanding of connections with “site.” These observations, photographs, and stories create an alternate frame for understanding.

The Lady in Red is an embodiment of the forgotten forces within the hutongs. She is in the fabric of the alleyways. She lives in the chance encounters of strangers; in the moments when familiar neighbors pull up stools to sit under the shade of a tree; in the decaying brick walls. She is there among the running kids; on the tip of your tongue as you bite into the sandwich made on the streets; within the relationship between what has passed and what will come to be. Her existence is not only in the memories of previous generations. She can also be found submerged in physical matter.

On the return journey, once again with a place by the window, I had a camera ready: how do you free yourself from an obsession, when you are a photographer, if not by photographing the object of the obsession? And so, at a five-hundredth of a second, hidden behind my camera, I saw...

JEAN MOHR

"BEYOND MY CAMERA" ANOTHER WAY OF TELLING

JEAN MOHR speaks of taking photographs as “curbing an obsession” with a thing or a place, an object or a person.³ This is how I think of my desire to photograph. The process allowed me to discard preconceived ideas of architecture, place, and history, and be in the moment. It has been a backward journey at times, but it has taught me a profound lesson.

In the process of walking and observing, John Szarkowski has likened photography to “pointing [at a] conceptual center on which the mind’s eye focuses”.⁴ Each day, I set out on this journey in search of the “lure,” the repetitive motion, like that of a craftsman. Photography was not a means of conscious documentation but a flexing of my subconscious. I recorded the things that caught my eye. As the camera became an increasingly familiar extension of my body, I lost my awareness of the process, a continuous play between conscious thought and subconscious gaze.

The photographs are not art, but a record of what has captured my attention. With “The Lady in Red” as my guide, I journey. The camera exorcised my obsessions. The image became a trigger for the memory.

3. Jean Mohr, “Beyond My Camera”, *Another Way of Telling*, (New York: Pantheon, Books, 1982), 73.

4. John Szarkowski, “Atget and the Art of Photography”, *The Work of Atget: Volume I Old France*, (New York: The Museum of Modern Art), 12.

Creative activity and deep thinking surely call for an unfocused, undifferentiated, and subconscious mode of vision which is fused with integrating tactile experiences and embodied identification.

JUHANI PALLASMAA,

ENCOUNTERS 2

IN JANET CARDIFF'S guided walks, her audience is asked to hold a device playing a video-guide. She introduces herself. "I am ... with you" she says, "move along with me" she commands.⁵ Her flow of consciousness overtakes yours as you sink deeper and deeper into her journey. Her observations, her thoughts become her audience's. Pausing, the viewer is released, floating between the two worlds, yours and hers, present and the past, pulled back and forth. This journey is no longer hers, but not quite the audience's, either. Each moment is filled with surprise. In a similar way, through stories and photographs that embody the in-between, the latent desires of the hutong is mapped.

Like Orhan Pamuk, I write to construct a story: describing a landscape⁶; wandering, discovering – not site documentation in a traditional sense, but a record of a place and the experiences it contains . By describing the objects, the light, the scenery, I construct a version of this place. *The Lady in Red* has emerged as a document both personal and participatory.

5. Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller, "Alter Bahnhof Video Walk", *dOCUMENTA*, (Kassel: The Kassel Program, 2012).

6. Orhan Pamuk, *The Naive and Sentimental Novelist*, (Random House, 2011), 85.

And then I realized that you can't truly be on both sides of the fence at the same time. ... This time it was better to live totally on their side, so that the experience should be indelibly printed, not on film, but in my memory.

JEAN MOHR

"BEYOND MY CAMERA" IN ANOTHER WAY OF TELLING

Inside, light is coming through hidden openings, creating ring after ring of portals. A spiral of light appears enclosed by the walls of the hallway, a vortex in space.

Where did I come from? Where will I go next? The scenery before me makes me pause, makes me stand still, makes me look. I record the image between breaths, when my body becomes tranquil. In the millisecond it takes for my shutter to collapse, everything goes still.

Narcissus,
in his immobility,
absorbed by his reflection with the digestive slowness of carnivorous
plants,
becomes invisible.
There remains of him only the hallucinating white oval of his head,
his head again more tender,
his head, chrysalis of hidden biological designs,
his head held up by the tips of the water's fingers,
at the tips of the fingers
of the insensate hand,
of the terrible hand,
of the mortal hand
of his own reflection.
When that head slits
when that head splits
when that head bursts,
it will be the flower,
the new Narcissus,
Gala - my Narcissus

SALVADOR DALI,

METAMORPHOSIS OF NARCISSUS (1937)

LIKE THE MASQUES created by John Hejduk, I used photographs to represent the core of my ideas, along with stories, memories, moments, conversations, observations.⁷ Using these records and conscious conversations, I represent the atmosphere of the hutongs as I experienced it. People speak about key pieces of architecture that form the structure of the city, but no one ever talks about the filling, the stuffing, the feelings it contains.

The process of categorizing and sequencing two hundred and ninety photographs and nineteen pieces of text formed a parallel to the experience taking the photographs and walking among the hutongs. I didn't set any clear perimeters or methods prior to the documentation. I didn't realize the photographs formed the core of this thesis until after I finished the explorations.

During a review of my work post-travels, Donald, who was not yet my supervisor, set down the writing I had presented and disregarded the structure I was trying so hard to prescribe. He picked up a stack of unorganized, roughly filtered photographs that was laying to the side and told me, "This is where your thesis lies."

Throughout this process of constant re-visitation, I became aware of what stimulates my creativity. Nothing is designed with a blank slate. Every place has its own invisible parameters alongside the defined ones. Yet we often rationalize and filter information after and not before an idea has already been formed.

7. John Hejduk, *Mask of Medusa: Works, 1947-1983*, (Rizzoli Intl. Pubns., 1985).

Through the process of observation and presentation, I became increasingly conscious of the connections that drew my attention. It was here that I learned to discard my preconceptions. When I became vulnerable to the environment, I allowed myself to have a more personal relationship with the place. My experiences became more than a record of what I saw. They became a part of me, a part of a pool of knowledge that I can continuously draw from, as a designer and as a thinker. This awareness will continue to fuel me.

WORKING THIS WAY, I felt myself transforming ordinary objects into extraordinary ones. It also transformed my experiences into extraordinary ones. The images in my mind became different from the images I captured. In her work, Sophie Calle invites you to fill in blanks that she provides. Deborah Irmas introduces Calle's work as "neither reportage nor concerned with perfecting images and texts on their own terms. Instead she fuses words and pictures in order to mine a different dimension between them, one that cannot be explained by either on its own."⁸

Though most of her work involves others, she is alone. She is both director and audience. Although she is alone, she is involved, stepping inside of the frame, distant but present in the space. In one piece, Calle documented empty beds after they've been slept in. Absent of their occupants, the images hold the ghosts of the people who were in them just moments before. "Her subjects only becoming alluring due to the attention she gives them."⁹ The photographs, though devoid of subjects, clearly radiate residual shadows of their former occupants, evidence of the motions and emotions of those who once resided

Both Calle and Cardiff have authoritative voices. The experiences they present are orchestrated by intention. I am experiencing and therefore presenting this place with much gentler guidance. I have a stance, but I am not forcing it on you. My intention is to allow the viewer to distill her own opinion and her own experience based on the prompts presented. The image that you see acts as a trigger for alternate memories.

8. Deborah Irmas. "The Camouflage of Desire" *Sophie Calle: A Survey*. (California: Fred Hoffman Gallery, 1989), 6

9. Deborah Irmas. "The Camouflage of Desire" *Sophie Calle: A Survey*. (California: Fred Hoffman Gallery, 1989), 6

I was a listener, curious but polite.

I did not have to explain myself, because people were accustomed to having outsiders around. I distanced myself so I would not disrupt their lives.

Accepting the experience as an immersive one, I realize it is deeply rooted in who I am, in my unique opinion. When you have to explain what you see to someone else, you become conscious of who you are. Viewing, as well as describing what you are viewing, is a very personal experience. In this way, the bond between my conscious and subconscious was strengthened. My perspective is constantly changing, shifting, growing, adapting.

I drew on memories, transcribing thoughts, dreams, feelings, images — the objects of my imagination. These were records of my exploration of the alleyways: light, nature, openings, materials, thresholds, histories, activities, encounters. All this, stitched together, began to inform the atmosphere of the hutongs. I represent a place. Parallel to these outward explorations is an internal exploration of myself as an architect— my thoughts on my approach, my stance. These photographs resulted from a compulsion to “point” at moments that should be considered.

The image is a trigger to the memories. As I presented this layout over and over again, I shifted from the role of creator to the role of experiencer. Observing the reactions of others, I built my understanding of the impact of the image.

The image is like a spring board.

JEAN MOHR

"BEYOND MY CAMERA" IN ANOTHER WAY OF TELLING

It is a "means of expression"

JOHN BERGER

"APPEARANCES" IN ANOTHER WAY OF TELLING

On a good day, I am confident. I will give a viewer prints and tell them this is my thesis. This is significantly different from showing them the framed and ordered version of the set. I enjoy watching them piece things together in their own mind.

I needed to revisit the set in order to discard my thoughts and focus on my experiences. In truth, I think nothing. I thought nothing. That was the goal.

Over and over again, I watched as I cycled through the unsorted set of photographs. I noted where longer pauses occurred; what reactions and connections were made; how subtle differences in the order resulted in different observations. In this, I shifted my perspective from that of the presenter to that of the viewer. I began to recognize the power of each image.

I discovered images that were shifting along with my thoughts. The same image contained a different vision every time I looked, depending on the setting, the timing, the thoughts, the sequence. Reflecting on others' reactions, I was able to determine the sequence—based on content, light, and tone. The book itself became the design, my thesis, rather than a record or a representation.

Because reading a novel involves entering a landscape and missing
the general picture.

ORHAN PAMUK,

THE NAÏVE AND SENTIMENTAL NOVELIST

SINCE I did not set any clear boundaries, compiling the content became an exercise in analysis: I had to represent the ideas through my selection and ordering of the photographs. It became a process of analyzing unselfconscious connections, discarding thoughts and surrendering to experiences.

In the beginning, I could only sort through the photographs based on physical elements—doorways, hallways, windows, objects, etc. This was what I was familiar with and comfortable with: the architectonics. Yet there were latent patterns and relationships that did not fit neatly into these prescribed categories, moments when I wanted to break convention. I moved beyond immediately apparent topics and created a rhythm, interweaving different sequences of objects, movements, and even emotions. I did not keep any of the titles I had initially assigned to the photographs in order to allow the entire document to flow in and out of the same state of semi-consciousness. Instead, I date- and time-stamped the photos, to making them “exhibits,” collected evidences with which to solve a mystery.

Love, Terror, and Celebration, threaded together, guide the explorations. Originally, I attached them to physical places, real characters, and historical events. Later, they became moments during which I discovered love, terror, and celebration within this space, the way a detective gathers evidence. I experienced love in everyday rituals, in companionship, in nature; terror in demolitions, in the tension of decisions made, in the instability of many people’s homes, in destruction and deterioration; I found celebration in leftover traditions, in rituals and festivals from ancient history. Like myths, they signified lessons and hopes that could exist in any era, elements that defy the progression of time.

In my years of architectural education and practice, it has occurred to me that presentation is key to a piece of work. I put the same care you would in detailing a building into making this book. It is deliberate. I was meticulous in the position and sequence of the photos, left to right, before to after. White space surrounds each photograph, the blankness charged with words unspoken. It is the content in a way that is appropriate to the format of the book. Exploring the position, size, and bleed of the photograph, I realize that each distinction spoke of a different attitude. The centered, framed position offers the content a level of seriousness. It begs you to look at it. If the image were located closer to the edge of the page, you would be encouraged to flip through a little more quickly. The photographs, centered in pairs, have a relationship to one another that is not always immediately apparent. When a photograph bleeds off the page, it generates a sense of the space beyond the page. The broadness of the frame denotes completeness, everything that needs to be shown; nothing more, nothing less. Fluctuations in the format set a pace; the speed of the set leaves “an impression” of the place.

The final sequence invites the viewer to reconstruct an experience through ambiguous imagery. Juhani Pallasmaa writes, “we perceive a world that surrounds us.”¹⁰ Photographs of details convey experiences. This act of “pointing” relies on us seeing not just with our eyes but with all of our senses. As our eyes focus on an image, our other sense fuses with “experiences” and “memories.” Navigating between enough and too much, ambiguity is an underlying guide. This transcendence is the power of the image.

10. Juhani Pallasmaa, “In Praise of Vagueness”, *Encounters 2: Architectural Essays*, (Finland: Rakennustieto Publishing, 2012), 233

Photographed architectural images are centralized and precise pictures of focused percepts. Yet, the quality of a lived architectural reality seems to depend fundamentally on the nature of peripheral vision, and a deliberate suppression of sharpness that enfolds the subject in the space. Photographed imagery, particularly ones taken with wide angle and deep focus, are alien to the fundamental faculties of vision. Consequently, there is an evident discrepancy between architecture as experienced through photographs and a real lived experience, to the degree that imposing images of architecture in photographs often prove to be decisively less impressive when experienced live.

JUHANI PALLASMAA,

THE POOL OF VAGUENESS

THE QUALITIES of the hutongs are created in the conversation between the book and its viewer. The curation could be translated into architecture: The deliberateness of the placement and the size of the photographs on the page, on the wall — as it does in the design of details, the light, the shadow, the materials, the sequence — seduces¹¹ the viewer. We draw lessons. Take the door slightly ajar — we speak about thresholds all the time, but the door ajar invokes a feeling of mystery. Isn't that secret passageway so much more enticing than a straight forward door?

In “the house without drawings,” Peter Zumthor spoke of different ways to represent architecture, with different media linking different senses. “You can experience a piece of art and it gets to you, without words;” “within matters of seconds, I was into this piece, music has this capacity to go directly to your heart.”¹² Architecture has this capacity. Zumthor calls this “atmosphere.” You experience a building and it “sticks” to you. Looking at the image is a way of fostering those feelings. Photographs have the capacity to represent “space.” If the power of music is to reverberate within the heart, the power of the image is to engage our most immediate sense, our sense of sight.

11. Peter Zumthor, “Between Composure and Seduction”, *Atmospheres*, (Basel: Birkhauser, 2006), 41,43.

12. Peter Zumthor, “Presence in Architecture, Seven Personal Observations”, *RIBA 2013 Royal Gold Medal Lecture*, (3 Sept, 2014) Video Lecture.

Our contemporary world thrives on sensory overload. The blankness that borders the images in the thesis invites us instead to address our immediate instincts.

“You read a person, the first impression, this is a beautiful human capability, to, in a fragment of a second, to get the right impression of a lot of things, of things you know of, or things you don’t know, of things you don’t know that you know them, of things you once knew but you don’t know them anymore, conscious, unconscious thing in the fragment of a second. Rooted in our need for survival, didn’t have to write a paper on whether I should run away or stay.”¹³

The possibility in an image links ephemeral experiences to memories, to imagination. The sequence of images allows the viewer to move into and beyond each static image, to construct a place that holds memories, a narrative space. The power in the image lies in the viewer’s underlying ideas, beliefs, and sensitivities. Separate from the viewer, from the photographer, the image is reality.

Sun tickles my skin. I watch as a passerby watches that sparrow hop around with a crumb of bread. I remember familiar places in this new and unfamiliar image.

13. Peter Zumthor, “Presence in Architecture, Seven Personal Observations”, *RIBA 2013 Royal Gold Medal Lecture*, (3 Sept, 2014) Video Lecture.

However, exactly this undefined, formless, and involuntarily interacting medley of images, associations, and recollections seems to be the necessary mental ground for creative insight, as well as for the richness and plasticity of artistic expression, the 'shock of life' and the 'sensation of breathing', that Constantin Brancusi requires from a profound work of art.

JUHANI PALLASMAA, *IN PRAISE OF VAGUENESS*

DEAR FRIEND,

This is a document of stillness as motion. It has been about the importance of transitions between experience and thought and vice versa. You did not need prior knowledge of the hutongs. Instead, drawing on places in your memory or even your imagination, you have reconstructed your own versions of the hutongs: a reality and perception beyond these pages.

As I sit here preparing to conclude my thesis, I must move once more away from the role of a *flaneur*. In the end, like Pallasmaa, I feel that “only after having learned to confront my tasks as open-ended explorations without any preconceived ideas of the entity, or its essence and boundaries, have I felt capable of working in a manner that can lead to new grounds of vision and thought.”¹⁴

Thank you for coming.

Temporary farewell,

FERNIE

14. Juhani Pallasmaa, “In Praise of Vagueness”, *Encounters 2: Architectural Essays*, (Finland: Rakennustieto Publishing, 2012), 236.

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