THE SEEDS
OF URBAN
VERNACULAR

POSSIBLE EVOLUTION AND SPREAD OF SEL-BUILT ARCHITECTURE IN METROPOLITAN ENVIRONMENTS

ABSTRACT

Architecture without Architects is a book published by Bernard Rudofsky in 1964 and it is the first architectural book to categorize Anonymous building as architecture. I went trough this book at the very beginning of my architectural path and since then it has always been a referring guidance that allows me to go back to the roots of architecture whenever I feel lost in the contemporary design's panorama. Out of this book I learned that China is probably the country whit the most extraordinary presence of vernacular architecture in the world, considering that a great part of the pictures selected by the author to represent vernacular architecture in its absolute terms have been taken in China. When I moved to China I had few chances to get in contact with traditional architecture of the rural areas and I spent most of my time In Shanghai. Although I realized by impact the strong international influences on this city, I've also been struck very soon by the feeling of a still very strong linkage with the roots of its civilization that is revealed trough glimpses of vernacular behaviours in between frenzy streets and skyscrapers: a quality that worth to be passed on. Shanghai is totally different from what it used to be and even though it is clear and positive what it gained in the last decades, what has it left behind that would still be fundamental and useful in a future that is threatened by the issues of over-population, sustainability and social alienation? This research aims to give relevance back to vernacular architecture of Shanghai, considered as a great potential for Urban development of one of the most fast growing city in the world. It starts with a research that moves from a general and personal overview on the urban environment of contemporary Shanghai to a semantic study around vernacular and its modern values. A historical digression describes the traditional features and generative dynamics of vernacular architecture in Shanghai up to disclosing contemporary form of it and the categories of people behind it. The research part is followed by an introductory chapter that explains metaphorically the method I proposed to tackle the issue of promoting a new form of urban vernacular, a method that I later try to apply on the particular case of the old informal settlement of block 167 in Youdian Xincun, Shanghai. The final part of the paper presents considerations on the role of the architect facing urban vernacular situations and the preliminary outcomes of the application of the method. It moves from different ways of surveying the case study to proposing an architectural intervention that is featured with potential information and suggestions for a vernacular renaissance that has to be considered a counter-solution to go beyond the limits of the official city. A series of four different scenarios are presented to open up innovative solutions that go trough upgrading process to redeem vernacular Shanghai from neglect.

The proximity of a body of water, whether a river, a lake, or the sea, has always been of great consideration in the choice of a community. In the Orient, millions of people live much like waterfowl, more or less permanently on the water. Aside, a sampling of house-boats in Shanghai's Soochow Creek near its junction with the Whangpoo river. The advantages of the site are evident: the waterways never need be torn up costly repairs, drains suffer no stoppage, a a bath is ready at all hours. Besides, the expanse of water functions as a cooling plant during hot season.

Architecture without Architects:
a short introduction to non-pedigreed architecture
Bernard Rudofsky, 1964

In every city there are qualities that worth to be lived.
These are qualities that the urban design must not steal.

Wim Wenders

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INTRODUCTION

Of all the inventions of last century, the Modern City, in its architectural terms, is the only one that haven't evolved. Aerial vehicles had moved from the Wright's brothers flights to the moon landing, digital technologies led to the global communication, electrical resources went up to nuclear power and renewable forms. But the Modern City is yet conceived in the same way of the early theorist: multi-story buildings, top-down planning, mega-blocks and mega-infrastructures. Is it because we found a perfect solution to our urban living? Or maybe we just got spoiled by a very convenient model which originates from constant economical growth? It is indeed true that country like China are right now going trough the same situational conditions of the early modern cities, but is it necessary to adapt the exact same model of urban construction?

Architects, planners and decision-makers may have been short-sighted by the necessities of fast development forgetting (or avoiding) to notice that parts of the cities are resistant to the modern model and are eager to move forward with an eye on the past. Those few exceptions are the legacy of pre-modern forms of architecture inscribed on the traditions of local vernacular and the keepers of collective values that have been neglected by the Modern City.

In order to constitute a significant reading on the topic and to answer to the above opened questions, this chapter presents a particular point of view on the city of Shanghai, taken as a prototype because of its relatively recent status of Modern City. Although it tries to be absolute in its definitions, the reader have to consider that this point of view is the result of a personal exercise that helped to focus and collect thoughts on the metropolis of Shanghai, avoiding to refer to the realm of contemporary architecture and how it encompasses the issue of modernity because of its limited results.

In a world that is not approved to be modern anymore (in architectural meaning), where to look for possible alternatives? If found, how to elevate them to paradigms and models for future forms of the cities?

Possible solutions have inevitably to be found in the fundamentals of urban living still existing in context of necessity, informality and precariousness. The Modern City marked a disruption from those qualities and it is now time to reconnect to them with new approaches to Cities development.

1.1 CITY, OTHER CITY

Cities are made of different layers and subgroups. It is not enough to define the city with just one name since it doesn't present itself as a continuous, coherent and organic arte-fact like towns and villages of past times or remote area, but rather as the result accumulations trough time and space (historical, demographical, ethnic, political, technological, infrastructural). I here try to build up a simple theoretical matrix able to support a transverse reading of Shanghai's complexity. This point of view will be a reference along my research to designate what aspects of the city I'm investigating and what is its counter-part.

1.1.1 RESEARCH CONDUCTED

Throughout my staying in Shanghai I went trough a series of personal and collective researches on the issues I've been interested mainly exploring them via the medium of a video-camera. The outcomes have been a series of video-documentaries and short video-artworks that tackle the urban environment in a empirical way that have been later collected on-line in order to be shared and to receive feedback. What has been explored is a side of Shanghai which is not visible to public opinion and concealed to the eyes of practitioners. A few video-fragments show what is happening in the folds of the metropolis where the tight pattern of planning are looser. This preliminary work allowed me to create a general overview from which has derived a simple mind-map showing the geographies of paradigmatic situations of Shanghai. Later, it has helped me in choosing the right spot to focus in and to build up a methodology that take his move from a double-reading of Shanghai as City and Other City. Trough video-fragments I here try to get a deductive picture of the city I will speak of.

(see APPENDIX for a directory of the videos)

1.1.2 THE CITY

The origin of the term urban comes from the Latin root Urbs which means walled town. To build a city-wall has always been a defensive act but has also implied the principle of urban organization by defining a tangible, formal limit. The wall has been a first approach to urban planning which had later defined two different faces of a same city: the defined and organized city inside the wall and the loose and spontaneous city outside the wall. Up to nowadays this two cities had come to blend together in an unbalanced mixture that accommodates more the needs of that official city that has historically raised within the wall. The generative force of our modern cities has been defined by Foucault as the "political economy", a fundamental tool to structure cities that follows rules of the advanced capitalism (neoliberal politics, financial capital, privatization of public space), weakening the urban planners positions and placing the urban drift into a cage of self-referential rules. The City is the everyday environment surrounding us, made out of traffic, subways, shopping malls, museums, tourist attractions, schools, hospitals, coffee shop, restaurants, supermarkets, high-rise buildings, monuments. It is formal in is morphology and organization, visible trough the media and sometimes it's a media itself, it is legal, formal and over-ruled in his governance. Referring to a text by Italian Philosopher Massimo Cacciari on Heidegger's writings, we could state that - *the contemporary City is constructed not trough dwelling but trough desertion: a desolation that in some sense constitutes the ground or root of the metropolitan condition. Our Metropolitan dwelling is split, diversified, subject to absence more than to presence […] it is the experience of absence, in other words, that draws the contours of the metropolitan subject* -. Modern cities are often cases of a specific illness: the Social Amnesia. Our grounded roots are being eradicated and like it happens in the utopian society of George Orwell in "1984", our risk is to become subjective to any kind of external vacuous impulse which could be imposed directly or indirectly on our mindsets. The reasons for it are easy to be indicated on new-medias communication, globalization, standardization and so on, but relevantly among these we cannot avoid to take care of our endogenous architectures, the ordinary ones, the most diffused and simple who are keeper of a great potential social cohesion deriving from tight connections to our cultures and histories.

1.1.3 THE OTHER CITY

It is the leftover of the City. The unconsidered city made out of self-built settlements, abandoned areas, construction sites, uncertain zone of development, interstitial spaces. It is dissolving with great loss of culture, social platforms, living systems behind it. The Other City could be featured with three main characteristics representative of its status. It is **informal** in the organization and spontaneously generated by chance and with no intention; it is not aware of existing. It is **invisible**, latent, forced to hide from the City and obscured by media, government and public opinion. It is sometimes **illegal** because of the necessity to satisfy primary needs (food, shelter, income). Those who live in it are often to be categorized as urban poors, which in Shanghai especially are regarded as floating population and laid-off workers. Poverty is a social condition that is hard to outclass for those who moves to the city because the accessibility to social privileges is strongly related to the place of origin, implying an unbalanced distinction between two categories of citizens of Shanghai, where those living in the Other City are affected by social and economical inequalities relatively to those living in the City.

"The serious problems of urban unemployment and slums resulting from rural-urban migration have not become overt in China" as it was already pointed out by scholar Sun Changmin in 1997 in one of his essay (*Floating population in Shanghai, a perspective of social transformation in China, 1997*) and right to nowadays still migrating population is the main unbalancing event concerning Shanghai urban studies. Considering the great multitude of those who move from rural areas to the big city in search of better incomes (a dynamic of great importance for the economic development of the places of origin) and for supply of urban labour, it is rather important to consider them as an influential category of workers to be regarded with more attention. Well hidden from the City to which it is ashamed, the Other City has to be found beyond the façade of ordinary streets and the fences of construction sites, between the rubble of demolished sites, on the forgotten rooftops of high-rise buildings and the surrounding of big industrial ensemble. It survive to the City just because it works for it, cleaning, cooking, building, manufacturing and recycling its goods. The City doesn't really need the Other City but just its inhabitants, so it comes the disrespects for it. But what if the Other City starts to be not a desperate leftover but a solid, smaller alternative to the City?
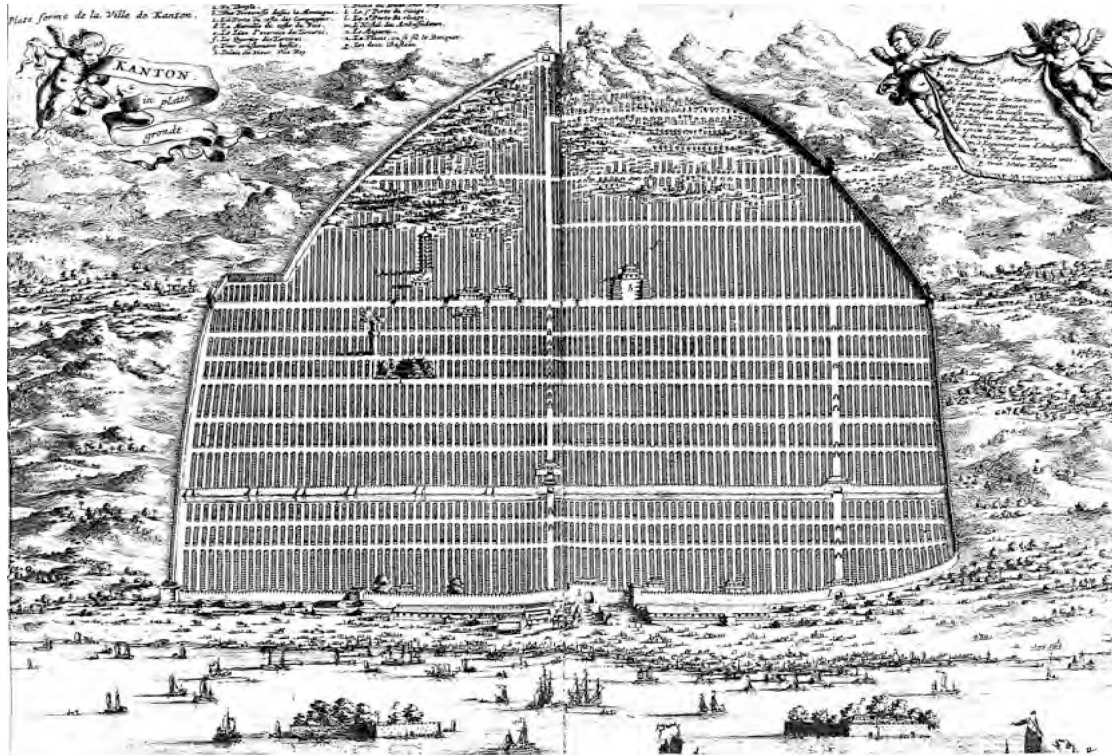
THE WALLED CITY. Town plan of Canton, China. Ambassade de la Compagnie Orientale. 1665
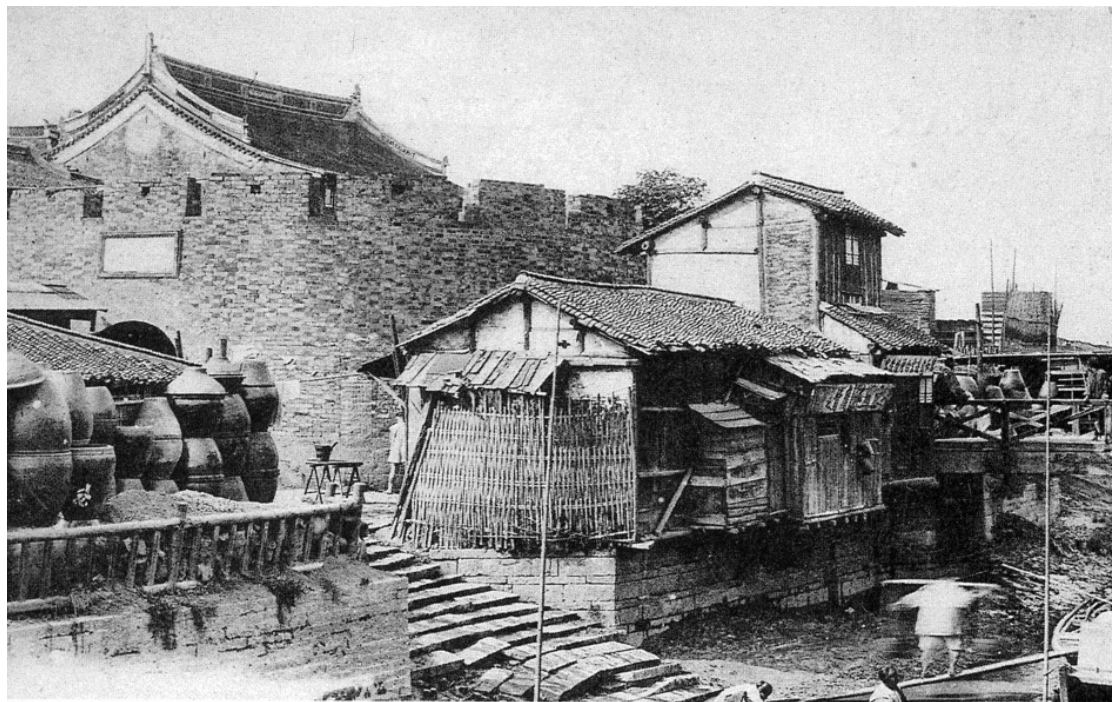
OUTSIDE THE WALL. Shanghai old town's wall. Photo's courtesy of virtualshanghai.com. 1880-1912

1.1.4 THE ALTERNATIVE CITY

It is the creative city, the city of memory, sustainable and cooperative, the city for those who are not satisfied of the City and that come across the need for a different lifestyle based on the consideration that a change can be pursue trough small metamorphosis carried by small groups of people working with grassroots approaches. With the condition of small scale operations is possible to generate an alternative picture of urbanity. When this happen, a new paradigmatic example is created with the feature of being a prototype. Therefore a chance is given to allow the successful paradigm to give a break trough in determining a new line to follow.

My work intends to investigate possible cases in which the Other City could be upgraded to Alternative City. The metamorphosis is possible only trough the addition of some requiring features to the three different city layers of informal, invisible and illegal to turn them into active urban forms instead of passive ones. The Informal City needs **awareness**, because by having no consciousness of existing as a well working urban event, the individuals cannot stand to defend their own place and are restrained to connect themselves in a community. The Invisible City has to be rendered real by the finding of it's own **identity** in order to gain a sense of belonging to the place for the inhabitants that have settled in that, even if they did it temporary. Identity could be created or unveiled by the medium of Architecture in the definition of the spatial features of a place and by Arts when it comes to give cultural acknowledgement. To the Illegal City, instead, is required to get political and economical **consistency**, which mean to promote and improve local economies and markets made of street vendors, builders, recyclers, artisans, drivers. Cultural consistency could also be a solid stronghold against possible attacks on legitimacy.

Each of these additional features are not to be considered as a singular healing potion for a specific case, but instead they are just the theoretical guidelines toward the process of building a series of possible methods able to act on specific cases.

1.1.5 MEDIUMS

In order to achieve any urban upgrade which could lead from an Other City to an Alternative City it is needed to interact trough three main mediums which are capable to catalyse the tangible and intangible values of a place in order to meet the above mentioned needs expressed by the Other City. To build up awareness, media work is fundamental: photography, video-documentation, web communication. Identity of a place seek for a cultural generative process, made of flashing shots able to spoil up forgotten traditions or latent communitarian features which are lying in the collective memories, material culture. Arts can provide this, together with a intermediate work of social sciences for the involvement of the communities. Some options: painting, mural, photography, dance, music. Consistency has to be constructed on the solidity of architecture: give tangible space for shared activity, for commerce, for craftsmanship work, to host events and to promote cultural activities, but also provide new unexplored forms of dwelling introduced within the metropolitan dynamics. Those three defined medium are not so fixed in their goals since the boundaries of interactions between these different fields are often very thin it is expected for example for architecture to generate identity, for art to rise awareness, and to the media to spread news on the work for consistency.
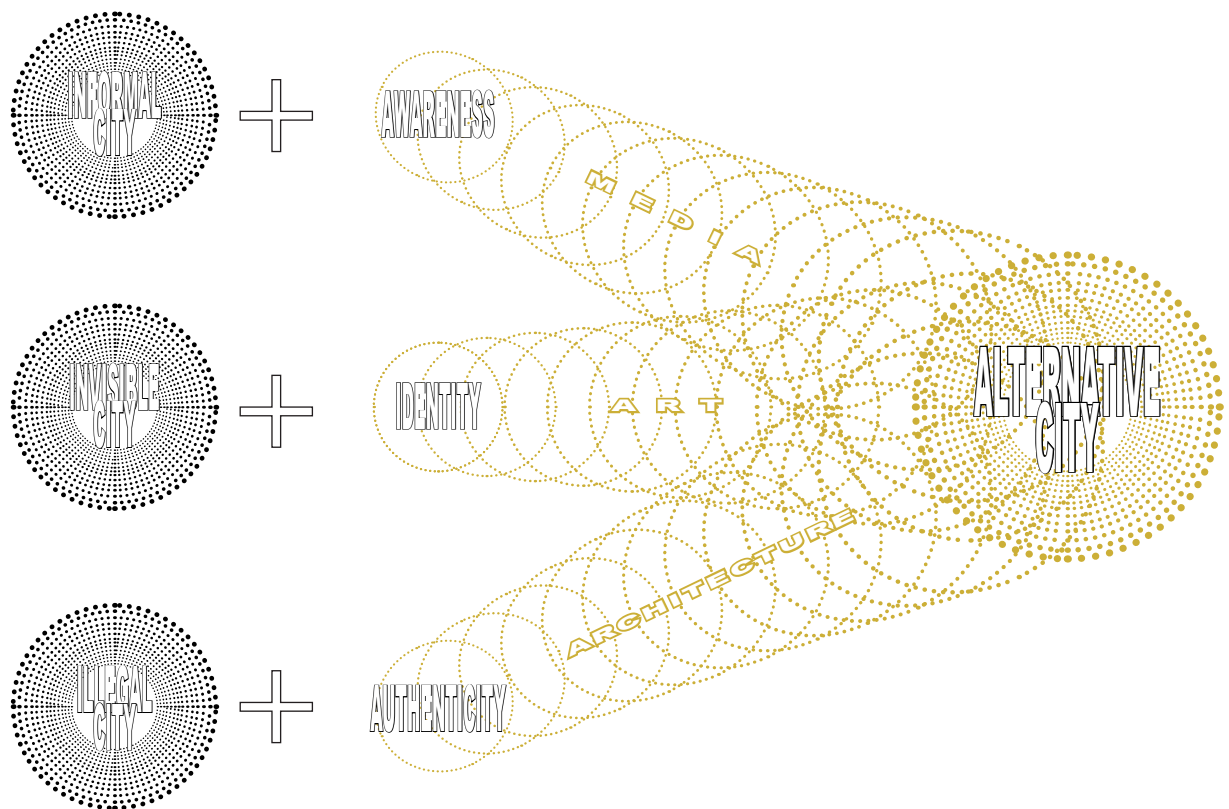
1.1.6 THE NEED FOR AN URBAN VERNACULAR

Basing its considerations on this double-sided reading of cities, architecture has to play an important role in the challenge for an upgrade. What is potentially latent in the Other City is a form of radical architecture, generated by primary needs of sheltering, working, selling. This kind of architecture has the property of being elemental in its morphology, purified by the over-use of industrial components, liberated from normative schemes, essential in its environmental impact and strongly site-specific and cultured

It is useless to discuss of any form of physical conservation of the Other City since it lacks of attraction for possible economical investments from the free market. What we can do with this few in Shanghai is to learn from them how to develop city not only trough formal ways dictated by planning departments, urban bureau and top-down architectural choices, but in a rather softer and more liquid way that leave space for individual entrepreneurship, self-construction and grassroots movements. We reached a point in our civilization where we are potentially able to slow down some processes because of the average diffusion of social wealth, at this point we reckon with a general state of living standards and a lower sub-division of the urban population that has to daily deal with poverty. For those who can't afford to live in a City without following its rules because of necessity, there is only the way that clash against the dense meshes of the legal structures that are everywhere too tight and strict to allow individual initiatives. If the urban policies on the city would loose a little bit its control over every decision and if the free market would make a step back in the voracious search for capital asset, there would be possible to see a tiny interstitial space with the qualities of a blank page in a rich book that could be filled by uncopyrighted hands. This potential release valve could be treated as a buffer zone creating a crevice in the Modern City which can welcome autonomous and spontaneous forms of architecture. These gaps can be realistically found in the abandoned neighbourhood of the outskirts, in the construction sites of the city centre, in the skeletons of obsolete high-rise buildings. The sort of architecture that is needed to lead to the upgrade of these places has to look back to archaic forms of building: the Urban Vernacular.

VERNACULAR ARCHITECTURE

A building designed by an amateur without any training in design; the individual will have been guided by a series of conventions built up in his locality, paying little attention to what may be fashionable. The function of the building would be the dominant factor, aesthetic considerations, though present to some small degree, being quite minimal. Local materials would be used as a matter of course, other materials being chosen and imported quite exceptionally.

Ronald Brunskill

1.2 VERNACULAR AND VERNACULARISM
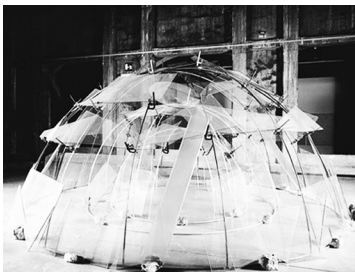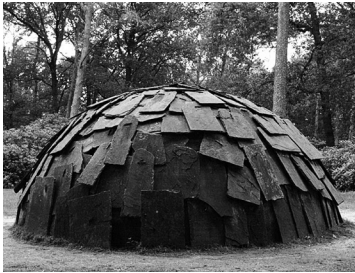
The beauty of the vernacular is its basic freedom from any kind of formal rule and when it comes to architecture, it is incredible how do you see this immense freedom to not degenerate into chaos but instead in crystalline forms of powerful cohesion. It has to be related to the inner nature of human being to be a social animal that the outcomes of different work of constructions in the same scope, at the end, always come to be strongly similar and related to each other, but yet still very singular and individual until the point that a certain typology of vernacular architecture can be categorized in the same way as an animal species, where the individual of the same species all present coherence in their aspect, but yet singular individual are distinguishable within it. To define vernacular, and vernacular architecture within it (an appellative to architecture that I felt authorized by Bernard Rudofsky's book Architecture without Architects), a very comprehensible comparison can be done with traditional works of craftsmanship, since a building has never been more than an artefact, a work of men, and like many other hand-made artefacts, in modern times, they undergone a process of standardization.

1.2.1 THE ARCHITECTURE OF A BOAT

A small boat is an artefact very to the nature of a building, the manufacturing and especially the use of it vary so little if we either look to a Chinese Wū peng chuán or to a Canadian canoe. The construction technique of traditional boats have always been the result of overlapping layers of knowledge passed down and improved from generation to generation till reaching a level of perfect efficiency relatively to the resources of a certain location. There's no more effective way to build a Canadian canoe than the traditional one where the only tools needed are an axe and a knife since the whole canoe is made of local woods, manufactured and assembled by those that will later make use of it entirely by hand from the ribs to the hull, with no need of screws or ruler. This way of constructing resulting from a deeper level of understanding of natural properties made possible by a collective intelli-

HOUSE ARCHETYPE.
Igloos, Mario Merz

gence which no longer exist, that, for instance, was able to build pre-shaped components just by laminating wood by hand picking the right tree and following the fibres direction of different species of plant. At the end every boat built in this way was looking very similar to the other and yet very individual because designed upon the singularity of the body that would have been hosted in: so the height of a rub rail was set out of the user arm's length in order to paddle comfortably and the width would also fit it's final use, either it was for trade, transport or fishing.

Very similar to this is vernacular architecture, where every building of a typology is definitely original in its own way but also imbued of an holistic beauty in its overall grouping which is the reason for the incomparable fascination toward old ordinary towns all over the world. At the of the 60's in Italy has formed an current known as "Arte Povera", a movement that aimed to re-evoke the original mindsets that have extinguished in the turn to contemporary societies of consumption and conformism. Its theorist Gennaro Celant as defined Arte Povera as a form of art that manifest itslef in reducing to minimal terms, simplifying its signs, in order to reduce them to their archetypes. Within this movement, artist Mario Merz have realized a series of artworks known as the "Igloos" (*see pictures left page*), an interpretation of the archetypical form of human dwelling: the dome (or igloo). The power of the work of Merz consisted in building igloos similar in sizes and appearance but made out of different materials, clay, wood, metal tubes and urban leftovers in order to shed light on the different approaches of different cultures and populations to adapt to different environments, resulting in a multitude of possible solutions applied to a basic elemental typology of house.

SIMILARITIES OF A TYPOLOGY. Wū peng chuán, Dali, China. 2014

1.2.2 VERNACULAR

Vernacular is not an architectural style and it is not conceived by the single but by a collective intelligence. An incredibly long history, a vast territory, varied topography and diversified climate, together with its different kinds of nationalities and cultures, have enriched China trough centuries with a great variety of vernacular settlements and buildings. Of this enormous heritage, a great part is still very intact and lively scattered around the rural territories, where, unlike western countries, population is still capable and allowed to build its own dwellings.

The value of such heritage is expressed by two factors: aesthetics and vernacularism. About aesthetic: the great fascination emanated by vernacular architecture lies in its relevant aesthetic coherence of material and form that make of it what can be called a huge work of art produced by a multitude of hands. It is out of discussion that vernacular architecture is always subject to attraction by everyone, its appearance it is always related to a state of beauty that influence our senses above any criteria of judgement, which together with its anachronism and lack of progressive nature, make of it a pure object of contemplation and no actual usefulness and when beauty and uselessness come together in modern terms it is often convenient to shift to another form of usefulness: tourism. Even though tourism is a great benefit to the conservation of a vernacular heritage, it is also a double-edged sword that threatens the originality of it.

An example: I had the chance to visit the city of Lijiang in Yunnan province, a city where its historical centre had become a quite famous tourist destination and therefore preserved and extended. The old town of Lijiang has no actual standing buildings that can be correlated to the period of its foundation 800 years ago, it is the morphology that has remained, a maze of streets an canals organized by the principles of Feng Shui during Ming dynasty. Thus most of the buildings have been recently rebuild and new ones are coming in order to expand the old town on another side of the hill where it lays. This trend appears to some as a fundamental betrayal of its old nature and the reason is not because of the physical reconstruction, but instead it is the essence to be gone with all the original inhabitants, driven out by a hundred of commercial activities selling prepared food and souvenirs and dozens of hotel and other accommodation. Lijiang is not an isolated case for China and what's lost in it is the practice of vernacularism.

1.2.3 VERNACULARISM

Vernacularism is a way of being related to vernacular urban environments, it affects every aspect of everyday life conditioning social interaction and community policies in a positive way. A community where people are able to build and repair their own houses is a community with a great regenerative potential which acts in a resilient way toward continuous adaptation to the changing conditions. Vernacularism is not the consequence but the principle of collective habits, ceremonials, believes, customs, traditions, a great condition of bottom-up decisions and a scope of precious freedom within the constrains of institutional structures and law's framework. It is the most valuable aspect to be preserved of vernacular architecture in spite of the materiality of it since it can't just be replaced, rebuilt, photographed, drawn or written down; once it is removed it can't be regained because it lays in the collective memories and once these memories are forgotten there will be nobody to recall them back.

Therefore vernacularism should be taken as a real matter of a conservation theory and its influences on the contemporary city might be studied in the scope of Chinese ordinary and traditional architecture. Those that aims to focus upon these studies should take in serious consideration the builders beyond the buildings and the collective knowledge beyond the styles, whereas the qualities of Chinese heritage differs totally to those of the Western countries like Italy where I come from. In Italy, after world war II, we did had a overwhelming status of conservation policies that assured the preservation of our vernacular in a physical way, but the reason for this resides on the particular nature of our buildings that are highly correlated with the concept of permanence and therefore built out mainly of stones and bricks. But regarding China the matter is slightly different since most of the Chinese vernacular heritage has been built out of wood and mud in a state of temporariness related to the philosophical ideas on the temporariness of life itself. Doesn't really matter if Lijiang has been rebuilt anew recently, but it is very important that those reasons that moved the original dwellers to build there their houses can still be present in order to not transform what can be called original and authentic, into a synthetic surrogate of a beauty of which nature we risk forgetting the generative forces. By copying and replacing or preserving and renovating the empirical appearance of a vernacular building we don't save it from its disappearing, but by catching and carrying trough the vernacularism soaked in it, it's possible to forward it to the future with no need of mummification, impairment, corruption. Traditional Lilongs of Shanghai, for instance, are an interesting case where the original forms of architecture devel-

oped at the end of 19th century (the Shikumen) have changed and mutated in many cases in order to fit to the construction market but still maintaining the morphology of the implant, its narrow lane and proportions of the buildings, a condition that had permitted to the social structures to not change abruptly, maintaining the vernacularism of this urban typology.

VERNACULAR AS AN ARTIFACT. Sassi di Matera, iItaly. 2012

VERNACULARISM STAYS. Xingping lane demolished Lilong, Shanghai. 2014

1.2.4 HISTORICAL CONDITIONS OF SHANGHAI

The history of vernacular in Shanghai is originally related to historical forms of precarious villages of huts and shaks called penghu (棚戶) and translated as hutments by historicist Christian Henriot (*Slums, Squats, or Hutments? Constructing and Deconstructing an In-Between Space in Modern Shanghai (1926–65), 2012*), referring to an expression appeared originally in 1938 on a newspaper article in Shanghai. According to what said by prof. Li Zhen (*supervisor of this research*), Penghu have been subjected to negligence by Chinese academical environment, both from a historical and architectural point of view. Nevertheless the presence of this typology has been so intense in Shanghai before 1949 that has conditioned morphologically a great part of the City.

Hutments started to arise during the 20's in Shanghai as an architecture of emergency resulting from chaotic situations of warfare with Japan first and Civil War later and of natural disaster along the Yangtze delta. Many people immigrated to Shanghai to fill the urban voids left behind by war destruction and underdevelopment and were moved by two main factor: opportunity for a job in the growing industrial power of the city and in search for safety from warfare in an international terrain. They first moved via water from nearby provinces making use of the rich water system of the Yangtze delta and started filling the water channels of Shanghai with Wū peng chuán boats that were used as a first sheltering habitat settling down around factories and on the fringes of the territory of the foreign settlements in the city. Soon the water system around the industrial hotspot started to saturate with boats and consequently migrants started to move to land building shacks and huts importing in the city what was dominant rural typology of housing made out of wooden structures and thatched roofs. From its early period these settlement were perceived as slums from the Shanghai Municipal Council which, concerned with the issue of public health and decency, has bestowed several evictions or relocation plans that have been however counterbalanced by an intense negotiation path carried out by a self-organized association of the hut-dwellers called Kiangpeh. The enormous damages to large part of the city during the Sino-Japanese war led to a serious moment of house shortage, so that many more people found themselves in the necessity of building huts from the rubble of the war so that "in April 1938, there were 1,800 huts south of Suzhou Creek and more than 4,300 in the Northern and Eastern Districts" (Christian Henriot, 2012). The following Civil War gave a final hit in the definition of the informal Shanghai, with streams of refugees seeking for protection that increased the population of the city from 3.8 millions to 5 millions. A step forward for

dealing with this issue has been taken by CCP after 1949, when, however informal construction were not admitted any more, it has been taken the decision to let the existing ones to be an autonomous branches of the housing market, promoting self-construction for their renewal because of the financial impossibility to rehabilitate the great amount of built environment. Small actions had been pursued by the government to obtain infrastructure improvements by providing drains, sewers, running water, electricity and water hydrants to face the great problem of frequent fires in the hutments, a problem that has later be reduced by the conversion of most of the thatched-roofs into tiled ones an by the disposition of new wider lanes in the dens villages improving circulation and accessibility to medical and fire aid. Henriot furthermore explains the level of awareness of this relevant part of the city depicting it within the category of the Other City: "The housing of the laboring poor and refugees was for decades social "non-places" in that apart from cursory notations in official reports and, more rarely, travel accounts, they barely came to the surface of the urban fabric."

FANGUANONG HUTMENT, Shanghai

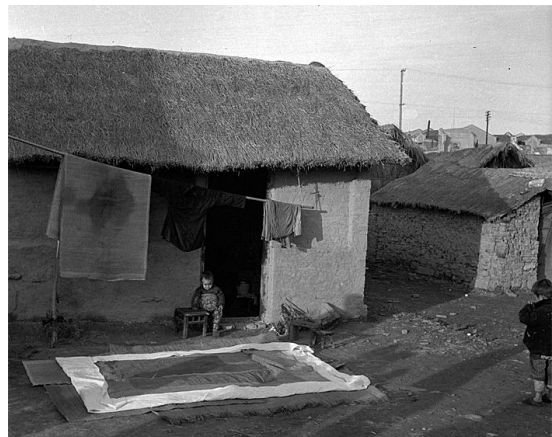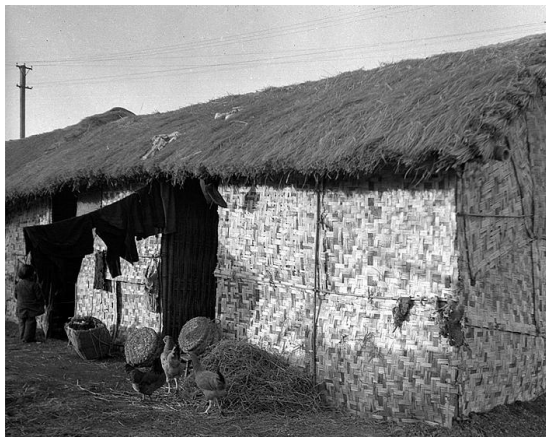*EARLIEST FORM OF VERNACULAR. House-boats along the water-ways of Shanghai*

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PENGHU HOUSES.

Hutments distribution, 1930

PENGHU VILLAGES.

POST-VERNACULAR

The presence of vernacular in contemporary Shanghai is determined by real-estate market dynamics of capital growth. If it stays or not, if it rise or disappear it is a market decision and the market has no interest in its staying or rising. There's no attention for a building typology which doesn't fit in the race to development. Above all it is a cultural problem of disclaiming and misunderstanding a heritage that ask to be discussed by the institutions (scholastics included). If the trends go on in this way, the only destination is total extinction. There's no reason to be maniacally afraid of this possible loss since nostalgia and retrospection lead to stagnation and Chinese cities are evolving organisms which had always gone trough total resets of their natures during the incredibly long history of Chinese civilization. Rather than being stuck in a former mindset I'd suggest to be progressive without getting rid of roots and memories. As contemporary architecture in China has already dealt with the great tradition of its history, sooner or later, somebody will have to take responsibility also for re-elaborating the shorter tradition of metropolitan history and its ordinary architecture.

On the other hand there are non-native vernacular events that are currently going on in the city and these have found the right conditions of growth exactly in the places touched by capital development.

Demolished site, Tiantong road, Shanghai.

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BRITTLE LANDSCAPES

You-Ren Yang and Chih-hui Chang and Lior Paritzky (*An Urban Regeneration Regime in China, 2007*) explain the steps of the process of relocation that follows the demolishing plan of old neighbourhood of Shanghai in this order:

1- District governments issue construction permit to external investment companies

2- District governments and foreign investors negotiate a detailed planning process of the extent of infrastructure and property development.

3- Contracts include land acquisition fee compensating for relocation and infrastructure expenditure.

4- Approval by the city government and permit for construction and land certificate, with leasing contracts are signed.

5- Establishment of a "removal team" in the neighborhood as a direct contact to residents, discussing the advantages of relocation.

6- The word chai "to be demolished" is sprayed or written on walls of buildings which will be destroyed soon. Often a complete street or neighborhood at once.

7- Negotiations of compensation between developers and residents start.

8- After being successful, a relocation process starts, if no matters are taken to court

9- At the end no choice but relocation and demolition will take place for the redevelopment of the area.

When parts of the old neighbourhood of Shanghai are torn down, a struggle for survival is often carried out during the time span that goes from the beginning of the demolishing work till the new buildings are built. The dynamics of relocation always have differential responses from the inhabitants whereas according to the negotiated amount of money for the compensations, people may decide to leave their houses at first or stay and strengthen as long as they can. What interested me about demolition sites in China are the peculiar characteristics of demolishing procedures in China. To present the general procedures of a urban development in Shanghai it is sufficient to described it trough 5 different phases:

1- As soon as the first buildings on the perimeter of the neighbourhood had been demolished, a boundary wall is built around the area to prepare the future construction site and to screen the streets from the squalor of the rubble.

2- Most of the inhabitants leave very early in order to get higher compensations and therefore the majority of buildings get torn down by demolishing companies.

3- A new category of dwellers come to settle down in this very temporary landscape

made of rubble and few still standing houses: the recyclers and the migrant demolisher. They built up shacks and houses on site made out of the dismantled components of the demolished houses, a very local material for another kind of spontaneous vernacular which can be addressed as resilient, fragile, temporary and reversible.

4- A new construction site sets up to transform this piece of city to be in accordance with the rest of it. Other kinds of migrant workers come in and this time they settle in different houses made of prefabricated materials but yet temporary and reversible.

5- New buildings will rise up to giant heights and a totally different class of people will now inhabit there.

There is just a moment, right before the starting of the new construction site, when the rubble of the demolished houses are got piled up, that a particular landscape made of ruins and colored hills of leftovers come to life, and, within this exceptional post-vernacular condition, there is still space and time for a temporary form of vernacular.

INSTANT VERNACULAR

During the above mentioned phase 3 it is not rare to witness other phenomena of a very singular form of Vernacular. There are small settlements in the city which grow up temporarily in order to exploit beneficial situations, these settlements are constructed by a very recently originated class of workers. Those who are unemployed or rural migrants often move to the places where the city is decayed in order to

make use of the leftovers of the past urban population living in there like historically happened to those nomads populations to move in foreign countries at the end of every great civilization to make use of its remains. As last of the pioneers of a fading nomad world, these people come to settle down in a in-between part of the Modern City and they build up their houses with materials recycled from demolished buildings as it happened in the case of Tai'anli block in Tiantong lu where few shacks and shelters were built out of the doors of the former houses. By usually being about 210x90cm, the door size allows a very convenient and fast way of constructing with a modular material which can be used to make perimeter walls for enclosure by simply attaching the doors beside a wooden structure made of old beams and columns of the traditional houses, to be closed at the end with a pitched roof mainly made of metal sheets. These people decided to stay to work on the ultimate demolishing phase and to collect the leftovers of the constructions in order to transform them in smaller and easy-to-carry component that can be sold and reused or recycled. So this is a form of vernacular that can exist just in the time-lapse between the disappearing of a native plant and the following introduction of an introduced one, it is a light form of architecture that can grow only on the soil of a construction site and can sprout only once, like some particular kind of spontaneous flowers grows on the soil of a field between an harvest and the following one. Construction sites are indeed the fertile lands to be settled temporarily by a particular minority of the contemporary society: the urban nomads.

URBAN NOMADS

In 2013 China counted 263 million people to work as migrant coming mainly from rural districts of east China and moving to the main urban hubs in search of higher profits to maintain their families. This is the Floating Population of China, a new category of people that came back to a nomad state of life in order to increase the low incomes and few chances on the countryside that are hard to leave permanently because of the Hukou, China's household registration system which doesn't allow access to social privileges for those that leave their hometowns in the countryside to move to the City. Migration to the city is seen by many scholars as a fundamental factor to compensate poverty in rural areas and while some of those that move to Shanghai as contracted workers are house-provided by the work-unit, many others are either renting or living in self-built shags, additional to this there is also a substantial number of unemployed people that have similar living conditions. Construction is the second most important sector of employment for migrant workers after the manufacturing sector, so thousands

of people live in the construction site where they work, either in dormitory provided by the employing companies or in self-built shelters, these last are almost 10% of the total floating population of China. Urban nomads are considered a fundamental force to the economical development of a city because of the cheapness of their labor and their creative potential in self-providing houses must be seen as honorable point to their social situation, but yet their living conditions stand below any acceptable level of decency, for which reason would be very important to provide them with basic infrastructural services such as temporary toilets and lavatories or electricity supply stations, conceptually interpreted as movable platform to serve the nomads letting them free to self-build their own accommodations.

chapter
II
METHOD

INTRODUCTION

Cities, like plants, grow, evolve, adapt; or at least they should be like plants. Indeed the Modern City never evolves but still grows, and adapt the context to itself instead of adapting to the context. This chapter tries to read metropolitan environments as ecosystems and the different cities in it (City, Other City), as plants. More comprehensible are then the dynamics of how the Modern City colonized new habitats in the past decades , but it also suggests the need for evolution and balance of the system. Shanghai is a newborn metropolis but already obsolete in its aspect: hundreds of skyscrapers doesn't make of it an up-to-date city but just a direct inherit of the conservative oligarchy of the Modern Cities of the 20th century, an alien typology to China till the 80's. Still Shanghai, because of its incredibly fast development, is keeping traces of the local typologies with their secular qualities and advantages. So the question: is it possible to have a future where local and transplanted species of architecture come to live together in equilibrium? Who better than Shanghai, a city that has been already able in the past to hybridize vernacular and imported typologies, can take the lead for the re-elaboration of the urban theories on the metropolis with one eye on its local history and one on the globalized future? What methods of analysing, researching, building can be applied to pursue new approaches to architecture in the metropolis?

I went looking for answers by focusing on a particular case-study, a place at the centre of Shanghai where the marks of rural architecture and historical morphologies are still visible. The legacy of local and vernacular architecture hasn't yet been explored in Shanghai as much as it has been, for instance, in the cases of *urban villages* of Shen Zhen or Guanzhou and the occasion for further readings and debates has to be opened. The method presented is not aiming to offer a solid architectural solution but I'd rather prefer to attract academical interest on the potential of informal and self-generated architecture in urban environments. Different forms of documentation and recording lead to an ideal evolution of the vernacular typology of the studied area expecting as outcomes to have a simple and reproducible method to disseminate a new Urban Vernacular in the future Shanghai.

2.1 METAPHOR

native plant

A speculative metaphor to better define my personal opinion on the evolution process of contemporary Shanghai:

X is a species of plant which is native and indigenous in a specific territory and correlated to an ecosystem of networking relationships. Within the same territory a new species Y is introduced. The introduced species has revealed to be invasive and trough pioneers individual plants start spreading scattered on the whole territory. The new plant fit perfectly the ecological conditions and reproduce itself very quickly at the expense of the native species, which is slowly decreasing in number of population until it is forced to survive in small isolated groups. The native species is on the way of extinction when all of a sudden an unexpected event occurs: a genetic mutation. One of the individuals changes radically it's features and turns out to be better competitive towards the invasive plant. Natural selection carries out this particular features trough reproduction, in this case implemented trough bees pollination. Bees spread the seeds around the other left communities and evolution come trough carried by the reproduction of the successful mutation. The mutated plant population increases until reaching a state of balanced cohabitation with the introduced plant.

invasive introduced plants

pollination

succesful evoultion and co-habitation

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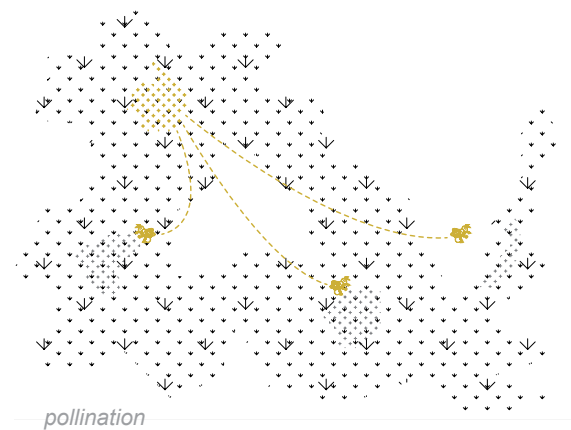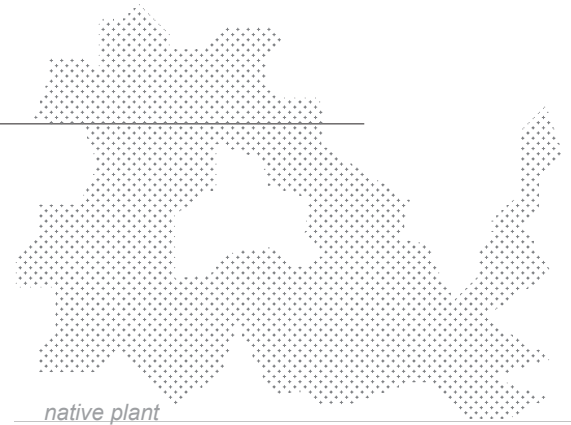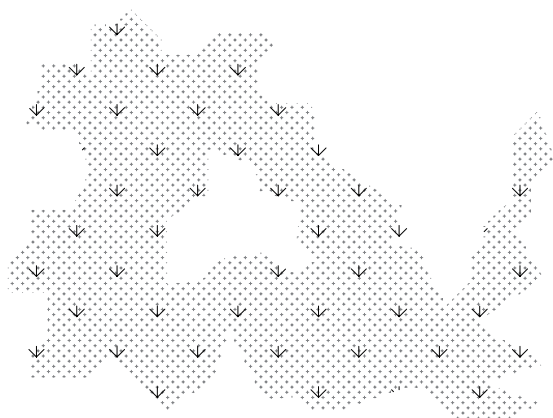
pioneers introduced plants
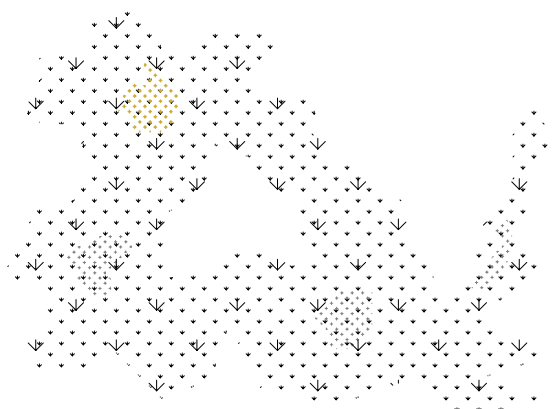
mutation of the native group

reproduction

INTRODUCTIVE DICTIONARY

NATIVE PLANT

Native plants form a part of a cooperative environment, or plant community, where several species or environments have developed to support them. This could be a case where a plant exists because a certain animal pollinates the plant and that animal exists because it relies on the pollen as a source of food.
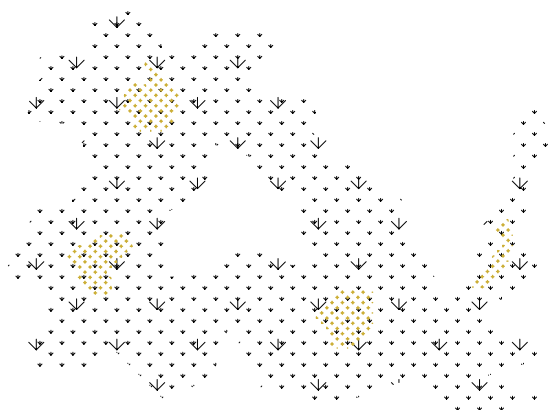
INVASIVE PLANT

An introduced species might become invasive if it can compete with native species for such resources as nutrients, light, physical space, water, or food. If these species evolved under great competition or predation, then the new environment may host fewer able competitors, allowing the invader to quickly proliferate. Ecosystems wherein native species fully use all available resources can be modelled as zero-sum systems wherein any gain for the invader is a loss for the native. Common invasive species traits include: fast growth, rapid reproduction, high dispersal ability, tolerance of a wide range of environmental conditions.

NATURAL SELECTION

Natural selection is the gradual process by which biological traits become either more or less common in a population as a function of the effect of inherited traits on the differential reproductive success of organisms interacting with their environment.

CO-EXTINCTION

Co-extinction can occur when a flowering plant loses its pollinator, or through the disruption of a food chain.

DARWINISM

Darwinism is a theory of biological evolution developed by Charles Darwin and others, stating that all species of organisms arise and develop through the natural selection of small, inherited variations that increase the individual's ability to compete, survive, and reproduce.

GENOTYPE – FENOTYPE DISTINCTION

The genotype–phenotype distinction is drawn in genetics. "Genotype" is an organism's full hereditary information. "Phenotype" is an organism's actual observed properties, such as morphology, development, or behavior. This distinction is fundamental in the study of inheritance of traits and their evolution.

2.1.1 ECOLOGY OF A VERNACULAR CITY

Even though Shanghai has had elements of vernacular in the past such as the Penghu, up to nowadays it is difficult to define what is left in the city that can be addressed as vernacular. For instance, in the case of Shikumen architecture, it is possible to name it as traditional but not vernacular since it is not the result of local resources but of imported knowledges and unusual materials. Lilong are instead more local-based results of necessitated conditions of warfare periods (second sino-japanese war 1937-45) in order to build with the maximum density within the safe borders of the western concessions. However the best example of Vernacular within Shanghai in terms of corresponding to the definition given by Brunskill, can be found in the few informal settlements still standing within the modern urban tissue. These are mostly the legacy of the precarious Penghu, of which they kept morphologies and households. There are other cases of informal architecture with vernacular characteristics within the Other City, such as areas of demolition, development zone (*see video-documentary Shipping Out in Appendix*), rooftops (*see video-documentary Room with view and The rooftop and The crane in Appendix*). All of these places that entirely fulfil the required features to be vernacular I want to address with the name of **Vernacular City**: a sub-layered city of the Other City described before. Informal settlements, or slums in their poorest version, are great lesson for architects and urban planners about flexibility, negotiation, self-sufficiency and fertile wombs of social interaction; such should be the reasons to promote its independence in order to render it - *subaltern to the City and not subordinated* - (*Ananya Roya, Slumdog Cities: Rethinking Subaltern Urbanism. 2012*). We can have consider the native plant of the metaphor presented before as a simulacrum of the Vernacular City. It is easy to relate then the invasive plant as the Modern City. The scenario is very similar and it is a story told over and over worldwide during last century. However China is one of the few places where the knowledge to self-build a house is still resistant and as long as the ability is kept alive, the Vernacular City can potentially grow. The dynamic of fading of this architectural typology are very similar to the metaphor explained: before it was a mainly self-built city generated by users themselves, but after the changing of economical and political conditions the modern city was introduced within the same territory and has soon proved to be very competitive and able to adapt to every kind of geo-socio-economical conditions, replacing secular forms of dwelling. The Modern City expanded and spread at incredible speed and Self-built settlements survived only in little urban pockets isolated and hidden.
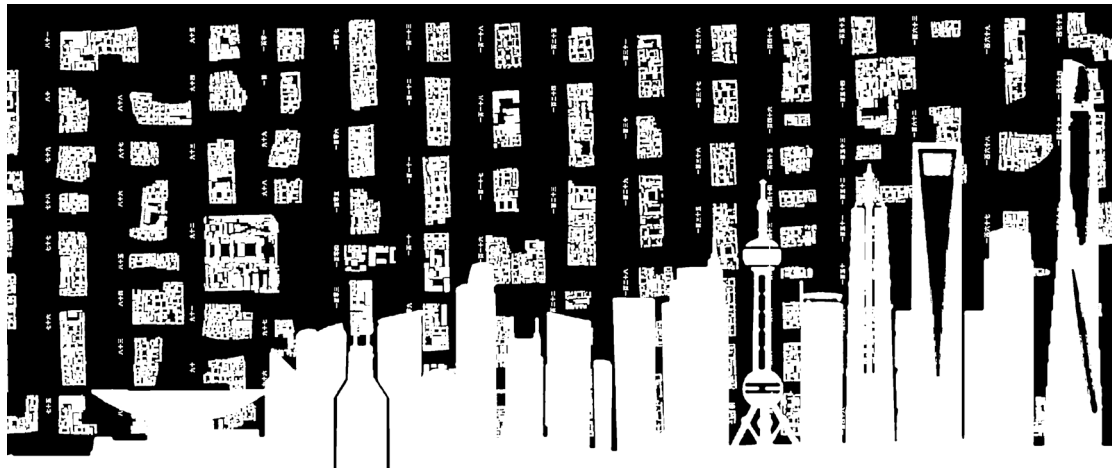
2.1.2 URBAN DARWINISM

The narrative on plants I presented hypothesised an accidental mutation of an individual and it's resulting successful reproduction, an event which decoded from its metaphorical state it is the main goal of my research.

How to actuate an architectural mutation from within in order to turn the Vernacular City into an evolved system able to compete with the City, to fit into modern contexts and to grasp the current Zeitgeist? Such a mutation is meant to be an architectural upgrade led by Urban Vernacular's principles and relying on the regenerating power of Chinese people. The mutation process has to be carried out both from architects and users moving from an accurate study on available resources and leading to the development of a construction method which could stimulate individual households to build and repair their houses by themselves relying on local materials, found within the scope of a neighbourhood. There's a lesson that can be taken from the Urban Nomads in their way of searching for local resources in a metropolitan context, undertaken by looking at leftovers as resources: garbage collectors, dumps, demolition sites, industrial waste. First, an economically sustainable way need to be found so to rehabilitate the unfit fabric. Secondly architects must take charge of researching the possible applications of the available resources. Third, reproduction and dissemination of the results of a successful mutation is required to have a break trough. The Vernacular City is dissolving because it's weaker in a Darwinian evolutionary process carried on by economical laws or top-down decisions, where few consideration are taken about the transmission of the cultural heritage of a city. Moreover, weakness is not to be considered as a limiting factor. In the words of Marco Casagrande - *Weak architecture is a new name for the citizen's right to express himself trough architecture. These guys don't need architects, they are more resourceful and creative than the official architects corrupted by the university teaching,*

building industry and laws and codes of construction.- (Casagrande, Marco. Article in "Illegal architecture, Wang Shu Hsieh Ying-Chun". 2012.)

2.1.3 ON MONUMENTALITY AND AUTHENTICITY

"The monumentality of weak architecture is not continuous with monuments of classical age in either geometric or ideological value, but only in what remains within the present context of that condition of the root term "monitu"; that is to say, of recollection" (*K. Michael Hays, Architecture Theory since 1968, 2000*). Monumentality is needed in vernacular architecture not as an expression of solemnity or extraordinariness. It has instead to empower its representative nature to sublime ordinary life. A monument to ordinariness is a celebration of the vernacularism of a certain group of people, a mile-stone that marks the point reached in the historical path of this group, a urban symbol to counter-weight to the icons of modernity represented by the world-known landmarks of Shanghai, magnificent towers which go above the land in order to be seen and remembered by everyone in their wonderful appearance. Vernacular Architecture can be considered as a monument to ordinariness in the way it collects material and immaterial properties and crystallizes those into a tangible memory of what is the essence of a place, its genius loci, the cultural features and the everyday rituals within it. Bernard rudofsky, in his book Architecture without architects (1964), speaking about granaries and storehouses as communal vernacular states: "although small in scale, storehouses achieve monumentality,[...] in view of their great stylistic purity and precious content, we have termed the quasi-sacral."

Although we usually spoke of authenticity as a mere western-related concept it is anyway important to explain the importance of understanding the origins of a vernacular typology with meaningful relationships to its morphology and common knowledge. I already pointed out that in the case of China it is wrong to look for authenticity within the materiality and physicality of the vernacular but rather within its essence: the vernacularism, a genetic code that can be encoded by a monument to ordinariness.

2.1.4 URBAN ANTHECOLOGY

Anthecology is the study of pollination in nature. Urban Anthecology refers to it in the way it studies the possibility to "pollinate" certain urban spot (stigmas) to stimulate their blossoming and spreading. Urban Anthecology aims to be a method for architects and urban planners to organize and "urban bees" are those who make themselves responsible for transmitting the legacy of the Vernacular City as well as bees transmit the

genetic heritage of plants. Like natural Anthecology, this is a way to preserve trough constant renewal, as plants species are preserved trough pollination and reproduction.

Urban Anthecology is an approach based on bottom-up processes, community participation, small scale intervention, it acts punctually aiming to improve, regenerate and highlight certain spots of the city, a strategy inspired by Marco Casagrande's *Urban Acupuncture* and the *Minimal devices for colonization* by Davide Pagliarini (*Pagliarini, Davide. Il paesaggio invisibile, Dispositivi minimi di neo-colonizzazione, Librìa editore. 2008.*) . A fundamental condition to any achievement trough Urban Anthecology is the concept of *critical group* developed by Yona Friedman (*Friedman, Yona. Realizable utopias. 1974*), the limiting size where growth stops and beyond which, if a community continues to grow, it will suffers important qualitative changes. Urban Anthecology moves toward the construction of a city which is Alternative and parallel to that which is considered the official one, that move slower, that stimulate social interaction and self-organization. It is a strategy and a movement at the same, organizing and re-arranging undetermined spaces and mobilizing people to work cooperatively. The Alternative City has to be rendered in order to not let the Other City disappear besides the leading process that turns cities into metropolis. Therefore the condition for the survival of the Vernacular City is to make it necessary to the City itself in order to establish a bi-unique relationship between this two poles trough art, media and architecture. I imagine the future of Vernacular City as that of the creative opportunity, where is convenient to go for those who are not able to find their own comfort zone for working or a dynamic network of exchanges in the City. As the city of memory, where old local traditions manage to survive in the folds of a human-scaled space without becoming surrogate. As the city of bottom-up democracies and local-based governance. As the city of ecological sustainability.
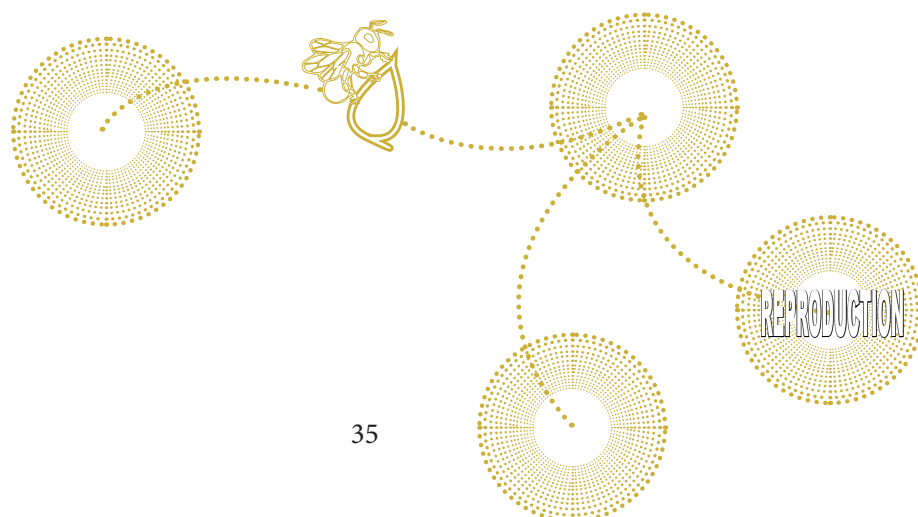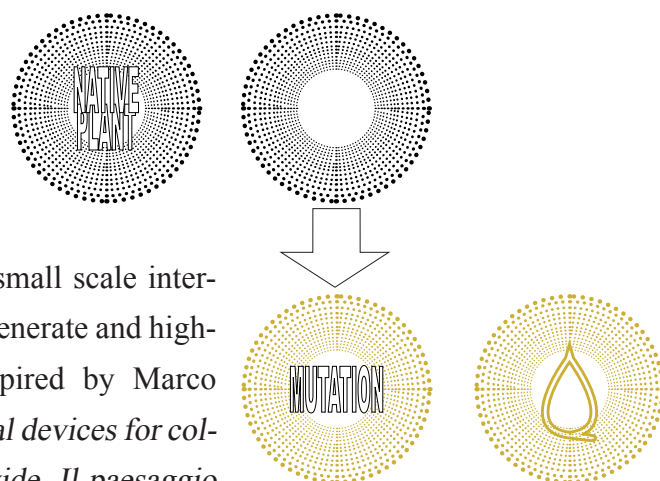
2.2 NATIVE PLANT (case-study)

The Block 167 is the case I decided to study, it is next to Youdian Xincun metro stop of line 10 in Shanghai, is one of the few informal settlements left by chance since the real-estate company which owned the land went bankrupt in 2010, for which reason it was not possible to carry forward the standard demolition and relocation processes. Most of the inhabitants are although looking forward to it to since the living standards are definitely low.

2.2.1 HISTORY

The settlement of Block 167 is reckon by locals to be built before the coming of communist republican China. Very few information had been possible to be collected about its historical origins and most of them are based on old local people's narration. An historical survey on Shanghai's hutments dated at the end of the 40's points the

House in a boat. Shanghai.

area as one of the several villages built by migrants, who very likely moved there to work in the nearby, by now dismissed, steel factory. The canal running by the south side could have been the first place where migrants from nearby provinces came to settle down turning their boats into floating houses. Most of the people I spoke with recalled handed-down memories up to 70 years ago, making possible to have an approximate date of foundation around the early 40's. From 1949 till 2000 not much changed in the neighbourhood and its surroundings, apart from some architectural updates of the fabrics, that had been turned from huts made of straw and wood into solid masonry houses with tiled roofs. From 2000 onwards, substantial changes have affected the surrounding, where similar settlement and neighbourhood were torn down one after the other and new high-rise building arose from their rubble. The last of those neighbouring towns had been demolished just by 2013, making of block 167 a lonely survivor of a forgotten urban typology that marked significantly the structure of the city.

◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇ creek-side public space
●●●●●● market street

10 YEARS OF TRANSFORMATION. Block 167, Siping lu, Shanghai.

A VERNACULAR VILLAGE IS AN HAND-CRAFTED ARTEFACT

2.2.2 SLUMS?

The buildings of Block 167, that are for a great part self-built and self-maintained along with the particular feature of Chinese rural population to build houses by themselves up to nowadays, lacks of solid and safe structures, insulation, toilets, sewage system, electricity, air-conditioning, heating system. Although its destitute nature, it is arguable if can consider the settlement as a slum. Following urban theorist Mike Davis opinion, "China has never created slums" (*Davis, Mike. Planet of slums. 2007*), but, at the same time, if we submit the case to UN definition of slum this assertion would become very relative. Slums, according to UN Habitat, should fit to the following criteria: inadequate access to safe water, inadequate access to sanitation and other infrastructure, poor structural quality of housing, overcrowding, insecure residential status; in the case of Youdian Xincun's most of the requirements match. Nonetheless the whole fabric works as a single living organism able to regenerates itself that could be seen as an amorphous unique building made out of the same low-tech material, engraved with streets, powered by small infrastructures and sustainable in its compactness.

2.2.3 PEOPLE

The neighbourhood has 3500 people, most of them over 40 years old with an average level of education ranking Junior High School. A charge percentage are immigrants from the nearby provinces of Jiangsu and Anhui. The average living space per person is 8-9 sq.m and 1500 houses are privately owned and rented rooms have an account of around 500 RMB per month (*data source: Anke von der Heide. Shanghai true stories. Master Thesis Dissertation. 2013*). The unemployment rate is extremely high and the loss of a job placement is quite a frequent event so dwellers have to find themselves multiple informal jobs such as: construction worker, cleaning lady, waiter, garbage recycler, street vendor and market vendor, while a few are employed in the nearby manufacturing factories. The community has a precious richness of lively public activities: a local market is set every morning at 6 AM along the eastern street with a multitude of stalls for selling food and local grown vegetables and small restaurants for local people. Barbers, tiny stationary shops and repairing shops are some of the activities which generate a complete economical network of small-scale commerce redistributing the global capital of the whole community. During summer an open-air cinema is installed in one of the broader streets, in winter the street along the canal is crowded with many old people sitting, chatting and playing cards or chess in the warmth of the sunlight.

2.2.4 CO-EXTINCTION

The warning level of extinction for these native plants is quite high. The dynamics have been clear since long: the city is growing, its central parts have a high land value on the real-estate market, the Lilongs and other traditional neighbourhoods of Shanghai are mostly in the city centre and not effective within the mainstream framework of profit and development. So they get demolished, its inhabitants relocated with resulting loss of jobs and new high-rise buildings are rising up in the same place. This trend has consequences not just in the permanent loss of historical testimonials of a different Shanghai that had flourished more than a century ago but also in the loss of all those collective memories and social habits that are the foundations of Vernacularism, unable to be relocated and recreated in any other environment of the modern city. It is indeed a clear scenario of co-extinction of two species that have been living for long time in a perfect symbiosis: the Vernacular City and its inhabitants.

2.2.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Because of the exclusive vernacular nature of this settlement within the formality of the urban environment I raise a few questions on the future of it according to a solid, pragmatical survey. My whole mind process orbited around the necessity to give identification and distinctiveness to a urban typology which is doomed to extinction although its position in the metropolitan hierarchies it is a delicate matter to speculate on. The following are few questions I've been asking myself.

Is it possible to include this case in the Vernacular City? How can a design proposal be accepted and appreciated by the people living in there? How to improve social interactions and security trough architecture? If this is a silent, hidden, forgotten spot in the city, what will be the consequences of a mediatic act that reveal it to the world? Would it work toward the rise of an awareness on those places, turning it into responsibility? Or will it just speed up the degenerative process on going?

2.3 MUTATION

The mutation is intended to be carried out by an architectural event which aims to strike the traditional concept of Vernacular so to turn it into a new one which may better fit contemporary metropolitan environments: the Urban Vernacular. As Bill Hillier suggests in his book *Space is the machine* a vernacular typology can be considered as a genotype conveying all hereditary information into a defined code which generate buildings and not architecture. These buildings are therefore defined as phenotypes generated by individual production, which means that they are all permutations of an established prototype, a clear consequence of efficiency and functionality of a typology. However more possibilities to permute are open and potentially innovative, it is so the architect himself that has to face the challenge of discovering them till the point to produce a phenotype which is not mere building but also uploaded with architectural features. It is an abstract exception which may produce a significant change in the genotype code, a successful mutation.

2.3.1 DESIGN INTENTIONS

The aim of this research is to speculate about consistent possible resolutions to engage an urban development program trough the principles of urban vernacular and urban anthecology. The architectural approach claimed to reach effectiveness and social feedback on the dwellers is nor the design of a single house, neither an urban renewal project. As a matter of fact, it is unnatural to rule trough planning and design what is meant to be spontaneous and self-generative. The challenge I propose is to coordinate the work of an architect with the basic building skills of the local people who are also going to be users, trough different participatory stages of design. The basic principle is to act in the most delicate way so to not corrupt the inner energies of this urban organism which is featured with great potential of public life and architectural effectiveness, but yet improving living conditions and architectural quality. The architectural outcomes are meant to be impacting on the community and over its borderline in order to rise social awareness on the issue of Informality in over-planned cities by leveraging on the resonance of the web-media. Right now ppt-architecture and impressive models or renderings in the mighty halls of cities urban centres are the main architectural trends of the major cities in China. This project wants to bring attention back on small-scale possibility and shed a light on the great potential of Chinese craftsmanship. My theoretical basics follow the precepts of "Weak Architecture" pointed out in China by archi-

tects Marco Casagrande and Hsieh Ying-Chun and are inspired by Joseph Beuys art-work "7 000 oaks" at the Documenta7 of Kassel in 1982, where he managed to have a global effect on the city trough a local act on a spot of it.

The first step toward a urban vernacular resolution is to propose a physical construction on a defined spot of the settlement to act punctually but with wide resonance, that has to be designed by an architect and, after its recognition and approval from local people, meant to be built by the locals themselves, providing a small surplus in employment and involving their knowledge and capacities. The second step is to discuss and approve a single renovation plan or multiple plans to be realized following a hierarchical predefined time-line in a fixed time-span. The plan has to be chosen out of a series of scenarios proposed by the architect or urban planner, all forecasting affordable situations providing the chance for local people to become more economically independent, to increase their living standards and to maintain and improve social cohesion.

2.3.2 DESIGN METHOD

To design a punctual architectural intervention it is necessary to go trough three different phases:

1- accurate analysis of the local building technique and survey the existing building in order to find out typological data like proportions, scale, morphologies, materials.

2- develop possible new building technologies made out of in-site resources and make 1:1 scale models to test their effectiveness.

3- Building of The Seed: a low cost building which is able to welcome public social activities of the neighborhood with cultural features (i.e. theater, music hall, dancing room, small cinema).

The idea behind The Seed is to have something that will survive even to the future demolition, when everything will be gone it will stand remarking the memory of a past which has extinguished. Within the logic of Urban Anthecology, I've chosen to call it The Seed because of its potential to be conceptually transmitted trough "urban pollination" to other spots in the city and beyond it in order to reproduce a successful and fertile prototype standing as a sample proposal for a new way of building informally and cheap on the way to develop a new kind of architectural typology strictly local. It aims to be considered as an evolution of the traditional vernacular to be found between a short range of possibility marked by the constrains of the necessity of being low-cost and low-tech in order to make it affordable to the low-income category of people.

2.3.3 DESIGN TECHNOLOGY

Vernacular architecture, according to Brunskill definition, is self-built by amateur and made out of local resources and artisans knowledge. So what can be considered as a no-cost local resource for building the Shanghai of 2014? Of course we cannot think of buildings made out of bamboo and stones, but I'd rather go looking in the wastes of the Official City. The technological solutions to be used have to be arranged out of plastic bottles, aluminium cans, demolishing sites rubble, local ordinary joint component, metal and wood from local workshops and so to see. Since the assembling phase of the construction is supposed to be held by local labour, it is fundamental to approach executive decisions and designing of joints and components in a rather simple way to allow even those with no experience to play an active role. Of course this is not the case where architecture adapt totally to an existent typology by turning itself into a replicant copy of what surrounds it but it's rather important for The Seed to be empowered with progressive features which determine a step forward on the way to build vernacular. For instance it is not necessary for a new house to be rectangular shaped in plan, it does not make any extra-effort and create no inconvenience to have a more context-adapting plan that makes better use of interstitial spaces or that generates niches to host intimacy and unexpected forms of spatial-use undertaken differently according to the categories of people that use it.

2.3.4 SCENARIOS

The scenarios to be proposed consist mainly on creative solutions that have to deal with actual and specific contingency to activate self-carried renewal processes carried out by the inhabitants themselves. ETH Zurich, in its publication *Informalize!*, recognizes in informal practices of subaltern urbanism a "counter strategy against dominant modes of production, referencing research that responds to the global failure of the free market economy", a vivid alternative of collective urbanization made out of "indigenous resources, family ownership of enterprises, labor-intensive and adapted technology, skills outside the formal school system, and unregulated and competitive markets". It is important to raise questions on how subliminal spaces of improvisation, informality and self-organization could work politically, logistically, economically and socially, and to do so is necessary to shift continuously between local and global scales of engagement on planning decisions and to incorporate lower construction models into the presets dynamics of the wider standard construction market. The targets are to promote and liberalize self-built solutions and individual instances in a policy of "fewer rules and

more individual freedom" (*Carl Weeber, Het Wilde Wonen, 1998*) under the overlooking guidance of architects and urbanists in order to reach balanced achievements addressing the problem of dissolving practices, knowledge and lifestyle by upgrading them to another level of the urban planning debate.

2.4 REPRODUCTION (outcomes)

An inspiring case in Shanghai that has managed to survive trough reproduction and evolution but still keeping its original urban pattern is the Lilong, "a neighbourhood of lanes populated by houses which had evolved since its creation from 1842 to about 1949, coinciding with the Western presence in this port city. They have evolved into 5 types: the old shikumen longtangs, the new shikumen longtangs, the new-type longtangs, the garden longtangs, and the apartment longtangs" (*http://shanghaistreetstories. com/*). To prevent total extinction and memory annulment by following the principles of Urban Anthecology, the reproduction phase concerns the level of diffusion that could be reach by innovative architectural solutions in order to be repeated over time and space with similar genotype approaches but different phenotypes adapting to context and resources. The debate around the role of the self-organized city and its properties of looseness, temporariness, sustainability, organic adaptation and social capital needs to be extended from scholar's discourse to a more universal one around cross-disciplinary fields, capable of influencing higher governance levels.

2.4.1 RECOGNITION
It is primal necessity to develop a design solution that can be easily accepted by the final users. In order to reach recognition by the inhabitants of Block 167, The Seed will have to be useful to everybody, easy to access, totally public, fast to be build, economically sustainable. It has to be representative of a milieu and to be a set for social behaviours and habits. The appearance and function have to be decided after a detailed survey has to be directed trough interview, questionnaires, public debates to get feedback and opinions from locals on the design proposal. The Seed has to be representative of a milieu and to be a set for social behaviours. It is a memory collector refocusing blurred identities of places directly involving local people to strengthen their habits. Very important is to inspire them in practicing self-construction as a way to face poverty, given

that there is a consistent convenience in the rise of a self-regulated local construction practice. Those who build for themselves can later be hired to build for someone else in a process that lead to an alternative market that can be inquired in case of need, definitely cheaper than the official one.

2.4.2 ECONOMIC FEASIBILITY

Fran Tonkiss states in his essay *Informality an its discontents: "economic strategies of self-help frequently rely on social networks to access resources, including credit, information, land, physical capital, protection, labour, or work opportunities. The informal mobilization of social capital allows people to find work, make space, borrow money, stay safe and acquire goods in a way that would not be possible if individuals had to rely on such formal networks as credit unions, consumer and labour markets, formal private and public housing and police and welfare systems."*

The Seed can't be self-developed by the community capital, it instead aims to be a chance of employment for those people who don't have a steady job. It is indeed necessary to find an external investor willing to invest in a cheap project so to carry trough the idea of a new Vernacular City. The possible scenarios are many. The local district government could use the cultural funds to invest in the promotion of local Architecture or the future real-estate company which will buy the land could think of investing on a typology of housing which will demonstrate to be alternative to the canonical high-rise building and so to later improve the neighbourhood investing on rehabilitation plan of the whole settlement, which could be easily carried out by demolishing the most ineffective buildings (going trough a standard relocation process) in order to rebuild, enlarge and provide with better services the left buildings.

2.4.3 OTHER WORLDS

The expected effects have to reach two different scales: the local one of the neighbourhood and global one of the communication media. On the local scale the project reaches the users by providing services and spaces that were lacking before. On the global scale it becomes a good example of a contemporary method of building in Vernacular terms, giving a guidance both to architects who seek for social responsibilities on their work and poor people who can't provide a house for themselves by buying or renting. Considering that 1/3 of the whole world's built environment is informally built and that the issues of overcrowded cities are far from being tackle toward a solution, it is necessary to broadcast globally positive solutions that are happening locally and to start

drawing up an Urban Vernacular theory that can be generated just by constant comparison of feedback all over the globe to be collected and retained trough international platforms for debating. This will act toward a new awareness that can be influential on a cultural level in order to convince masses of people that there are other convenient ways to dwell the metropolis than the conventional one. Shanghai, as world-city, has the fertile soil to grow the seeds of the Urban Vernacular.

2.5 UNDERSTANDING

To survey is a way to get a deeper understanding of an object or a situation. In this case I felt the need to go trough several different analysis to have a complete comprehension of the singularities of the case of Block 167.

2.5.1 VIDEO-DOCUMENTATION

When first I went to the Block 167 I felt very uncomfortable, totally alien to the place, a Laowai incapable of speaking Chinese, considered just a curious tourist in a place impossible for him to grasp entirely. After that I kept going regularly every week for almost 4 months and realized little by little that a way of interaction and empathy can be achieved trough simple gestures, that I started to feel allowed to take pictures of houses and people, and when I began to shoot with a video-camera, more and more people wanted to tell their stories and their desires for the place. I collected most of the takes in a single video-documentary which intends to be a overall portrait of the place itself, avoiding additional interviews to people that have been instead transcribed into texts.

1st Scene: sets by the canal, with water flowing in the foreground and the village in the back, the weather is quite greyish and the sound of fireworks in the background. It's taken during Chinese New Year and shows how ceremonials and practices related to this event are performed in there.

2nd Scene: moves drastically to a sunny joyful atmosphere of children playing with the camera in the narrow lanes revealing the intensity and richness of the interactions between young population in a place where the streets, archaic place for playing, are directly accessible from every house. It comes then a series of local-based crafts, hair-dresser, tailor and an ink-painting artist's workshop.

3rd Scene: shows a series of still images of small commercial activities in the east street

and is accompanied by a narrating voice of a 26 years old local girl which introduces on the most commons job of the area and their precarious legal consistency until the moving-picture shifts to show illegal street vendor, trash recyclers and collectors.

4th Scene: a direct interview to the girl which shortly explain her life in the circumstances of the village since her birth, ending by pointing out the intense decrease in urban decency of the area after the other similar settlements surrounding the neighbourhood had been demolished in the past recent years.

5th Scene: the camera is now set in front of a small trash dump in one of the lanes that used to be the place for water supply just ten years earlier, a group of local people are boldly discussing of the issue while standing in front of the trashes pile. Right after I've been invited to give a look to her house, while other people were gathering around us, moved by the curiosity of a foreign with a camera. The scene reveals the interior of the tiny house while the woman explain in a smiling appearance that such an amount of space on two floors is barely enough to just eat and sleep.

6th Scene: last series of pictures are taken in another day of celebration: the Qingming festival. We're back to the street by the canal, where now plenty of people are lighting spiritual fires to send gifts to their passed-away relatives and ancestors. Last of the pictures moves from one of this fire to the canal again in the exact position of the opening scene, remarking the cyclical and regenerative nature of human beings, who even are capable to carry on their cultures even after the demolitions of the traditional places of their ordinary secular living.

2.5.2 TAXONOMY OF MATERIAL AND TECHNOLOGIES

In this section I seek to build a palette of the few fundamental materials who have been used to build up and repair the whole fabric of the settlement. The task aims to describe and understand the multiple ways those materials have been used and arranged trough the conceiving of original technological solutions. Using this as a starting point I want to point out the importance of the under-

standing of local resources in order to achieve innovative architectural technological solutions for those architects that want to deal with existing terrains and local conditions.

BRICKS   *CONCRETE*   *WOOD*   *METAL*
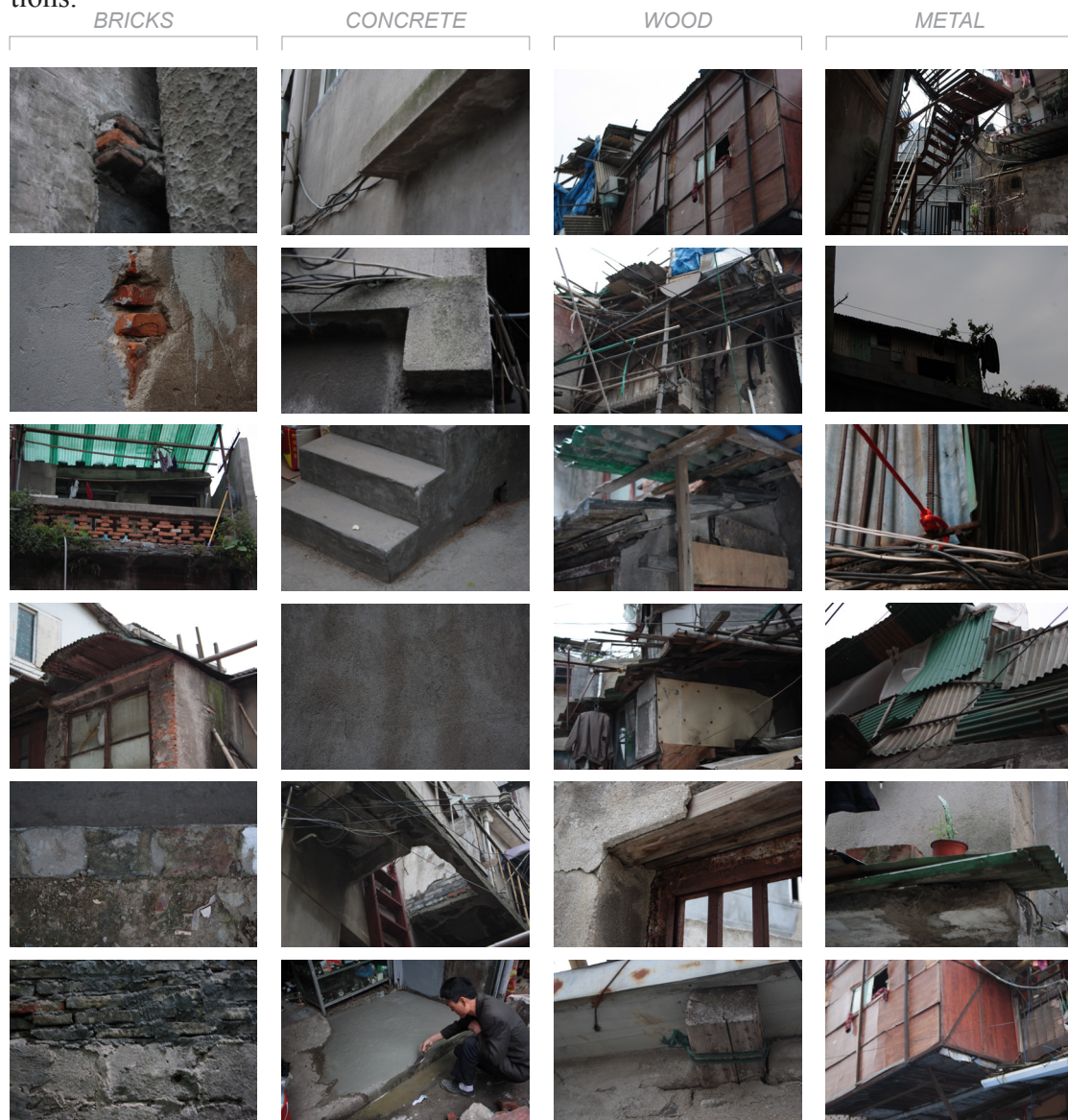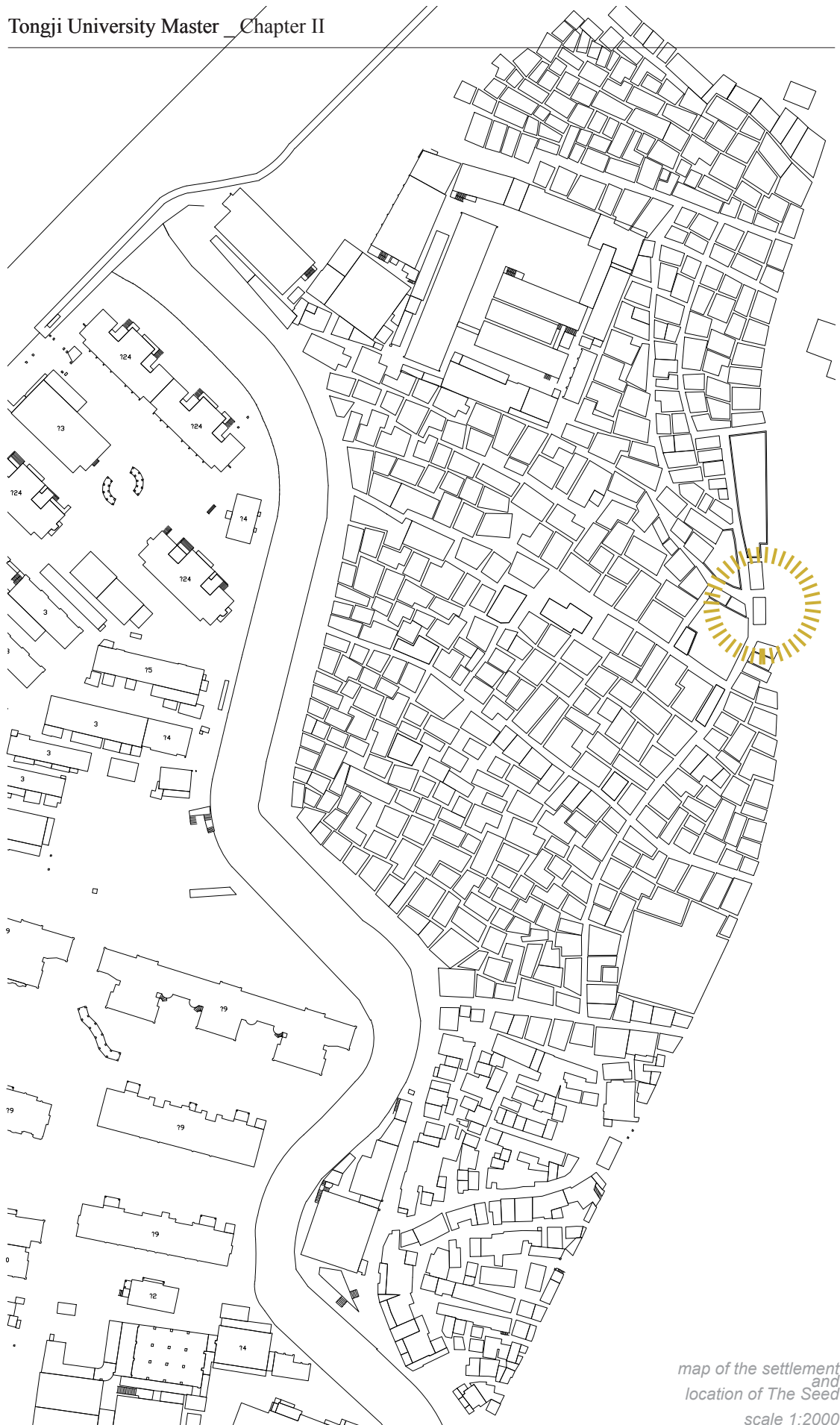
map of the settlement
and
location of The Seed
scale 1:2000

2.5.3 MAPPING

Block 167 is an unsurveyed spot of the city of Shanghai, the complexity and fast changing features of the settlement would require a very accurate drawing of the whole complex of buildings which could be accomplished just trough in-site surveys and monitoring. I tried to make an approximate map trough the not-detailed satellite pictures available on-line in order to have overview on the rich and elaborated spacial configuration of the village. The sketchy outcome allowed me to understand few fundamental things: mobility and hierarchy of streets, convergence points and social hubs and moreover, historical traces of the generative patterns of a spontaneous and unplanned settlement. To be more accurate in deeper defining of the study of this project I felt the necessity to directly survey this small part by measuring the outdoor space in order to reconstruct trough trigonometry a more definite plan that could work on researches until scale 1 to 100.

2.5.4 MODELLING

I built a physical model in scale 1:300 of a portion of the settlement around the site where The Seed is meant to be designed. I chose to use only clay as material for it since it is the closest relation I could get to the handy-crafted nature of the whole. It is an inaccurate technique which allows imperfections, giving an overall sense of empirical aesthetic which contrasts the standardized and prefabricated appearance of modern architecture. The use of just one material, that can be modelled by hands trough addictions and subtractions, render the real materiality of the settlement which can be considered as whole unique collective artefact where streets and shared spaces have been carved in like in a single mass of clay. Clay is moreover a material whit no will to last, it is reversible by just pouring water on it and then adapted to be used again to build a new object, recalling to the practice of reconstruction and recycle of vernacular architecture. Such a representation clearly highlight the rich and complex morphology of spontaneous architecture, showing off the potentials of organization and understanding of space in unplanned situations. The representation trough modelling, over drawing and taking picture, becomes indeed a precious lesson of composition, hierarchy, interaction, spatial configuration.
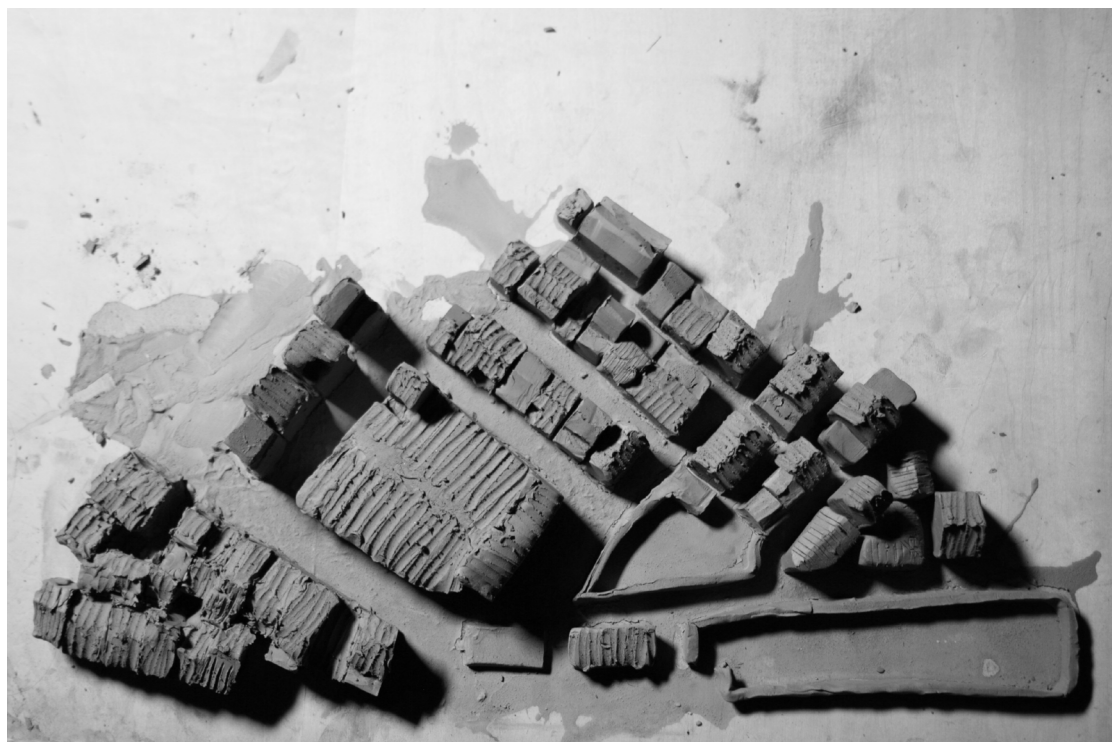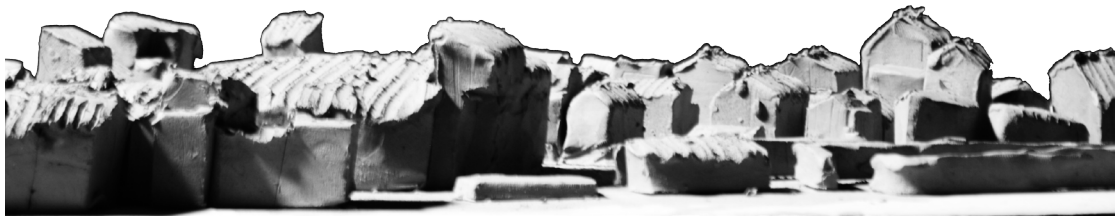
two photo-graphical reconstruction of the east side and the west side of the settlement

chapter
III
APPLICATION

INTRODUCTION

After the achievement of a tangible method it is further explanatory to go for a direct application of such approach to the studied case of block 167. In order to be as much pragmatical and realistic as possible I made myself responsible of designing a light architectural intervention, not to give a certain example of possible applications but more to challenge the solidity of the theoretical framework built up previously. It naturally follows that the proposed architecture doesn't have to be considered as a decisive solution since it hasn't been realized and never will be thus to receive feedbacks and critiques. Although not determined in its details this proposal rather prefer to be conceived as an open-ended architectural device that is able to catalyse, re-elaborate and re-arrange tangible and intangible ideas of the existing Vernacularism still present in block 167. To turn such a potential into architecture it is though needed to resort to different fields of studies over the ones related with architecture and construction. Beside building architecture it is needed to build up cooperative governances, awareness in the political spheres, attention from the social studies and attraction for external investments. All of these points couldn't be touched under this research for time and competence reasons, thus I went superficially trough different possibilities by introducing three plausible scenarios.

3.1 THE SEED

The seed is an architect-designed and self-built architecture generated by local people as a paradigmatic example of a new way to self-build by looking back to archetypes and which relate to a wide range of properties such as social anthropology, human geography, environmental psychology, ethnology, material culture. It is just the first phase of a regeneration process on the area and it has the responsibility of carrying all the fundamental virtues of a future plan, in terms of architecture and impact on the stakeholders. To propose an architectural intervention within an old urban tissue it is a rather unexplored practice for China. Three leading Chinese firms on the issue are Urbanus, Standard-architecture and Meta-project (see). Although their accurate researches and intense debating on the topic, informal towns and historical architecture in the Chinese mega-cities have just reached a level of understanding that stops to data collection and overall proposal. The reasons for that lies in two main points: lack of interaction between developers and local communities and lack of interest in promoting economical investments to actually build something new within the old. When I had the opportunity to have a talk with architect Wang Shuo, from Meta-project Beijing-based studio, I learned that even though nobody has already advanced any probable proposition for a single-architecture piece for the Other City, this is not a reason to believe that there are none. Maybe it is just that times have to come to maturation, and the few present firms that are dealing with data collection and population interaction are working on the foundations of a future way of building.

So my intention in proposing The Seed is not to go trough any detailing phase of a design process but rather to give a fair proposition of how this procedure should be tackled since is not up to me to raise definite solution in this scope where no designing ideas has been shared and discussed with local inhabitants.

east elevation

3.1.1 OBJECTILE

The Alphabet and the Algorithm (Earth Moves, 2009), a book written by Mario Carpo presents the concept of objectile, a "*generative scripts that may beget one or more different objects, redesigned, adapted, messed up, and tampered with by a variety of human and technical agents, some of them uncontrollable and unpredictable*" Watching at a building or a city as an objectile can open up an intense discussion about participation processes where "*open-endedness and interactivity create the context for collaborative and social use of the new media[…]But what if the same tools are used to involve, at the opposite end of the chain, the patrons or owners, for example, as well as clients, end users, customers, or citizens? What if some parts of the design process could be made interactive and public?*".

Some Objectiles:

1- An Objectile from the 50s is the Ecochard's grid used to host a customized vernacular version of the traditional patio-house in order to infrastructure new urban requests due to population flow from rural dwellings to the growing urban opportunities. It has been developed for the French protectorate in Morocco from 1953 as a new planning tool that neither idealize nor take the complete control of the modern city.

2- Another Objectile has been proposed by the group AUFO, based in Milano and directed by Lorenzo Degli Esposti. The direction taken by the urbAMO project is again toward people that are living in insufficient dwelling conditions, therefore the choice to work on the biggest favela of São Paulo, Paraisopolis. Instead of a grid they have chosen a field of strategic points in order to encourage locals to use "infra-free inhabited works of art (Advanced Melting Objects AMO) unhooked from water and energy networks, in order to form resistant constellations against profit not-for-profit and private/public".

3- The last reference case I'd like to present is the work by Alejandro Aravena about the issue of providing an affordable house to people that are living in illegal settlement. In Chile, Alejandro Aravena and ELEMENTAL, a for profit company with social interests, have tested a form of participation and DIY process with poor people by providing them with a "half-built" house, with the main structural features, in the way that the other indeterminate half would have been easily realized by the user itself in self-construction. Resultants have been brilliant and intensively low-cost.

The case of The Seed can be charged with the logic of an objectile when it comes to its nature of being an entrusted architectural paradigm to be taken as an example to be reproduced in a open-ended process. It is a catalyst for changing trough upgrading and

not removing and a terrain for learning in both directions between architects and people. It opens up and promote undetermined ways for a rehabilitation process that could be similar to what already happened 60 years ago when Shanghai's municipality, in order to not be charged directly with resolving the problem of hutments, has taken the decision to let those settlement to be regenerated autonomously but yet providing basic infrastructural services.

3.1.2 AUTHORSHIP AND USER MANUAL

When it comes to place the role of the architect in the process which lead to Urban Vernacular, it is meaningful to refer to it not as a designer but as a consultant and strategist. We already pointed out that the authorship of any vernacular typology has to be addressed not to individual genius but to a collective intelligence but, as Paul Memmott and James Davidson state, "Architecture is about the possibility of making choices between different combinations of spaces, artefacts, colours, textures, behaviours, ideas, meanings and identities, and the relatedness of such permutations to surrounding landscapes and different constructs of place and time" (*Exploring a Cross-Cultural Theory of Architecture, TDSR volume XIX number II, 2008*) and the responsibilities to cope with the endless permutations of it have to be taken by architects. In this way I suggest that the role of the architect should not be that of the space resolver by giving per-established solutions generated on paper but that of a guidance that trough a maieutics method opens up alternative ways of doing architecture. To do such a thing, the architect as to go trough a deep research of local properties and characteristics of a typology and just after its acknowledgment he can start building up new progressive variations on the typology in order to improve it according to time and technologies, a path that has to hand up in providing a sort of handbook or user manual for building vernacular in the specific studied area. To not reduce architecture to just a matter of instructions I believe that architects should entrust themselves on building paradigmatic architectures aiming to stand as influential symbols of urban vernacular: the Seeds. These buildings posses potential information to be passed on and transmitted that are way more effective than usual knowledge of architectural literature since those can be red physically by anyone whose not close at all to architecture as a discipline. A seed is a designed building which opens way to future undesigned buildings, it is an act of legitimacy of a typology which wasn't considered in any cultural or political environment but that of architectural insiders and a crystallized user manual of self-building in urban environments.

3.1.3 PLACE AND FUNCTION

In the specific case I'm studying in Youdian Xincun I found meaningful to locate a Seed at the east side of the settlement, a location where three of the main internal streets meet and also the only corner that open directly to The City with a wide road serving gated-community residential compounds that intersect it perpendicular. At the chosen place there's a particular leftover of a building that's highly representative of the contemporary policy on informal settlements and traditional ones. What's left is just the outlines of a small house, marked by the remaining bricks of the rectangular foundations, that had been the first victim of a program of demolition that started three years ago which was then interrupted by the bankruptcy of the real-estate company which engaged in the project of redevelopment. It is indeed a remark of a not so far away future which most of the dwellers are expecting in different manners but also the only opportunity to give alternative paths to the formal way of approaching development's policies. The place provides the widest open terrain in the settlement, it is the nodal point where the main streets converge and is located in the middle of the two wings of the street market (the nearby space was formerly used as a market itself just three months before I'm writing). The elders use to bring out their chairs and sit by the leftovers of the house to enjoy the only spot at east where the sun beats most of the day because of the urban cavity adjacent to it, children find playing opportunities and workers stop and sit by it to eat their meals.

The insufficient attention and disregard from public authorities and institutions on informal cases such as that of Youdian Xincun generate lack of public community buildings, a typology which is very diffuse in every formal neighbourhood and housing compound of Shanghai, where libraries are available, elders are allowed to do activities indoor in winter, children are followed in their educational path and food can be sold for low condition of rental payments for the space. Moreover is also noticeable a fundamental scarcity of open-air public spaces that, where are provided, are frequently used by a large part of Shanghai citizens whenever there is a need for a place to dance collectively, perform theatre acts, play traditional music, do Tai Chi and so on. The Seed has to compensate those gaps by adding any of those functions, a new location for the temporary market that has been banned three months ago and a open-air space to be carved within the high density of the fabrics. The choice become less relevant when the Seed is conceived as a not-constrained architecture which can be adapted for hosting multiple functions.

3.1.4 FORM

Bill Hillier (*Space is the Machine. 1999*) has stated: "*The reproduction of existing forms, vernacular or otherwise, is not architecture because that requires no exercise of abstract comparative thought, but the exploitation of vernacular forms in the creation of new forms can be architecture.*"

To shape The Seed, an architectural phenotype within a typology, as close as possible to the other vernacular phenotypes surrounding it, would definitely be wrong if the aim is to look at new innovative ways to build vernacular. It is therefore necessary to dare as far as a genotype permit in order to recalibrate existing codes into new, more effective ones and still making use of traditional features like pitched roofs, small courtyards, bridging fabrics and plastered facade. In the case of Urban Vernacular would be coherent to state that "form follows resources" and the process of shaping can be very similar to that of an artisan that rely on his capacity to adapt to different commissions. My proposition on the design of The Seed derives from one main condition: the necessity to relate and respect the trace marked by the demolished building which will be turned into a bamboo garden, a plant that with its capacity to grow and reproduce represent the resilient power of Chinese people. The main fabric develops at the ground floor and surrounds the bamboo garden embracing it on three sides and hosting a multifunctional room for the community, it rises then when it meets and bridge over the uninhabited building just next to the garden which will be converted and integrated as restrooms for the new building, above it, a tea room is set in a space that is in between outdoor and indoor, promoting the use of rooftops and terraces as places for meeting and sharing. On the south side a small cell rises up of two stories in order to provide small study-rooms for the younger. The roof is pitching in multiple directions making the building to spread over the street in order to be noticed as an interruption, a place to stop and rest, talk, play. A small patio has been excavated on the north side in order to give a considerable contribution to get diffuse sunlight and leave blinded the two sides of the building on the street to create a space of intimacy and calm detached from the frenzy of the street market. By the blind wall located a bit norther in the street, a new small wing of the street market will be welcomed under a light arcade roofed by tiles made out of recycled cans leaning its structure on the wall itself.

3.1.5 MATERIALS AND TECHNOLOGIES

The choice of technologies and materials to use has to be taken in order to be a didactic opportunity for local people and architects to learn from each other, the first by giving constructional local knowledge and the seconds by giving a wider spectrum of application. Urban Vernacular spring out where the architect meets the local carpenters and this is the case of Fabrizio Carola, an Italian architect that moved to Africa very early in his career during the 70's to be of some help in those regions that were lacking of a fair social wealth. Carola has very much dealt with a very old archetype of Mediterranean architecture: the dome, a typology that he studied deeply and re-adapted to contemporary needs because its belief in its extraordinary simple effectiveness. He built an hospital in Kaedi, Mauritania, together with local people and since Africa has a long architectural tradition to be related with the dome and in the case of Kaedi, Carola has considered it as the ideal solution to build a whole hospital complex out of the dome solution. The basic material had to be chosen out of regional conditions of lack of wood because of the desertification affecting the area and no budget for long transportation supplies. He chose to use bricks, that had to be cooked tough, condition that oriented the first phase of construction toward the building of ten ovens to bake local soil. Wood can neither be used for the ovens to not increase the already progressed desertification, so the fuel used for the ovens was coming from rise's chaff, a leftover of agricultural production that is not used neither for human beings nor for animals to be consumed. After having produced two an a half millions bricks, the construction started involving just local labor, which had no need to be trained for particular tasks because of the simplicity of the assembling mode of a dome by using a dome-compass, a device that facilitate the arrangement of bricks in the way to reach the desired shape.
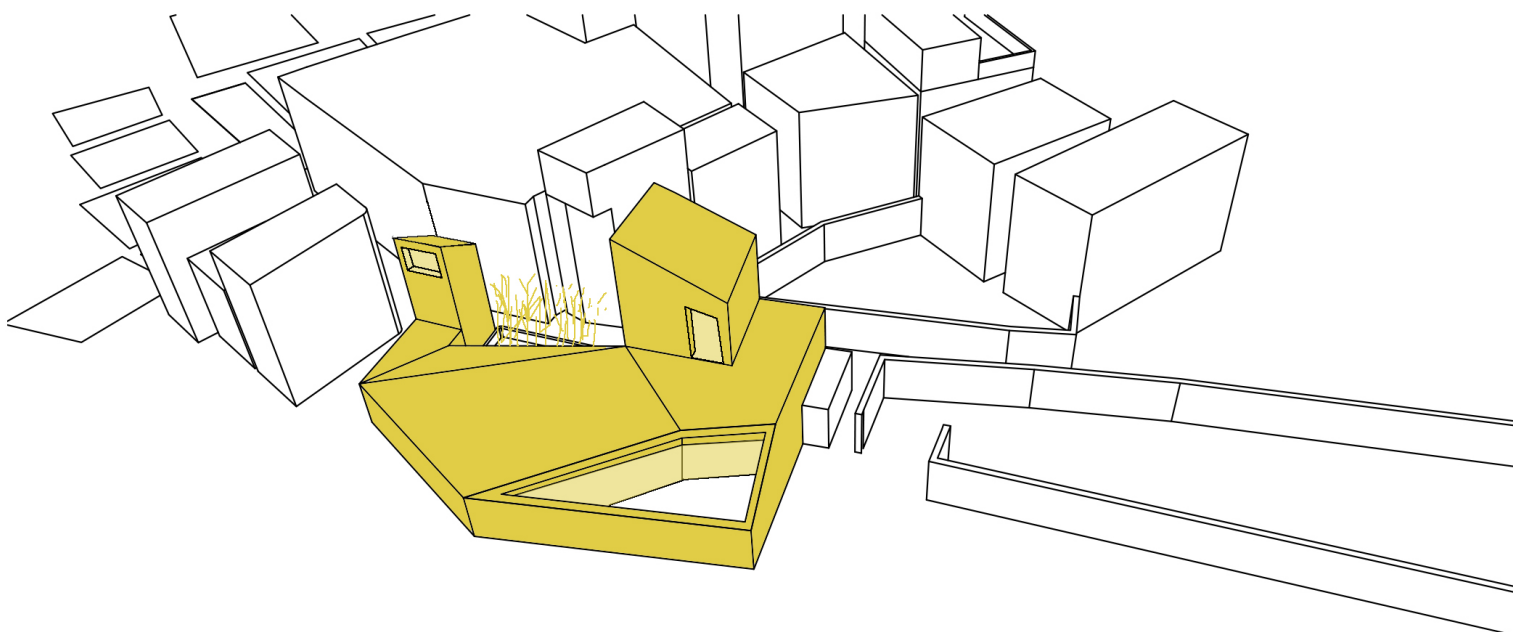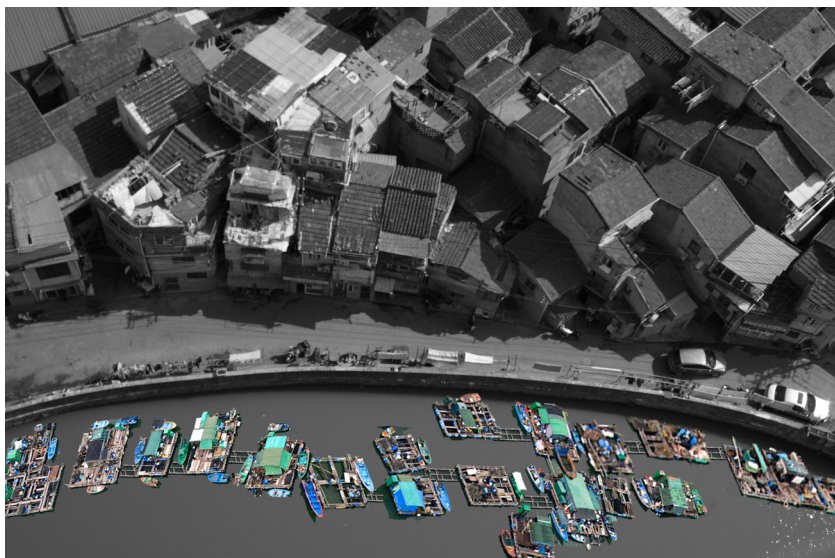
3.2 SCENARIOS

To speculate possibilities and future scenarios is a way to build up evocative situations that aims to stretch usual and standardized mindsets and approaches to the theme of urban development of the Vernacular City. I'd like to provide a series of different possibilities that never move beyond the borderlines of realism, a feasible and effective way to develop the Vernacular City without having to turn it irreversibly into something not recognizable anymore by the original inhabitants.

3.2.1 FLOATING MARKET

A scenario that may affects positively local economies and social wealth would be to give to the inhabitants legal space to sell food and other easy-to-provide goods. The local-vendors economy is the main source of income for most of the family that do not manage to accumulate profit by their official jobs. Trough the interviews it resulted that are mostly male members of a migrant family to be job-provided, while women often have to participate to the family income by working part-time as cleaning ladies or stall-vendors in order to stay close to the small children. Recently the local government has issued a notice which forbid to sell goods and food on the east road of the settlement, dozens of stalls have disappeared and many people have been forced to sell illegally in front of their houses along very narrow streets. The motivation of the prohibition have been moved by neighbouring gated-community compounds that asked for higher level of decency on the nearby street which used to be very crowded and smelly everyday of the week. In order to give renovated job opportunities to those people this scenario suggests to build up a floating market on the water channel by the south side of the area, consisting mainly of multiples decks floating on the calm waters of the channel. Considering the importance of water in Shanghai at the beginning of 20th century when thousands of migrants were moving to the city via water and settling down on floating villages made out of family boats on the channels, it is coherent to believe in a renaissance of Shanghai as a water town and consider its attractive potential of an organic fluid city of which organs are nourished and animated by its relevant network of water veins. The proposed location has been chosen as the place with less influences on neighbouring residential compounds and at the same time provides an extension of the settlement's area which has reached saturation in its elevated density to be uploaded with extra constructions.

It would also be interesting to solve problems related to the food supplying in the centre of one of the most urbanized city in the world in order to cut down transportation costs and promote direct food sale. To do so it is necessary to resort to innovative ways of "urban gardening". The southern street which runs along the channel is the optimal place to start with it since many people already provided themselves with plastic boxes and small vases to cultivate independently and together with the conversion of the elevated rooftops of the nearby former industrial buildings into green-roofs could be taken as two reliable choices, but still is not enough space. The ideal level of vegetable production would that that can cover the total village demand and therefore would be needed a surface equal to a square dimensioned as 250x250 meters. This means a huge land coverage to bear on the settlement, but in the channel there could be space for floating gardens too, with an elevated amount of daily solar radiation and the chance to create winter gardens on the cold season. This solution can easily be applied by using hydroponics techniques for cultivation with no need of massive soil transportation and the rooftops of the old factories can also be turned into elevated gardens to exploit the best amount of sunlight.

mock-up of a floating-market scenario
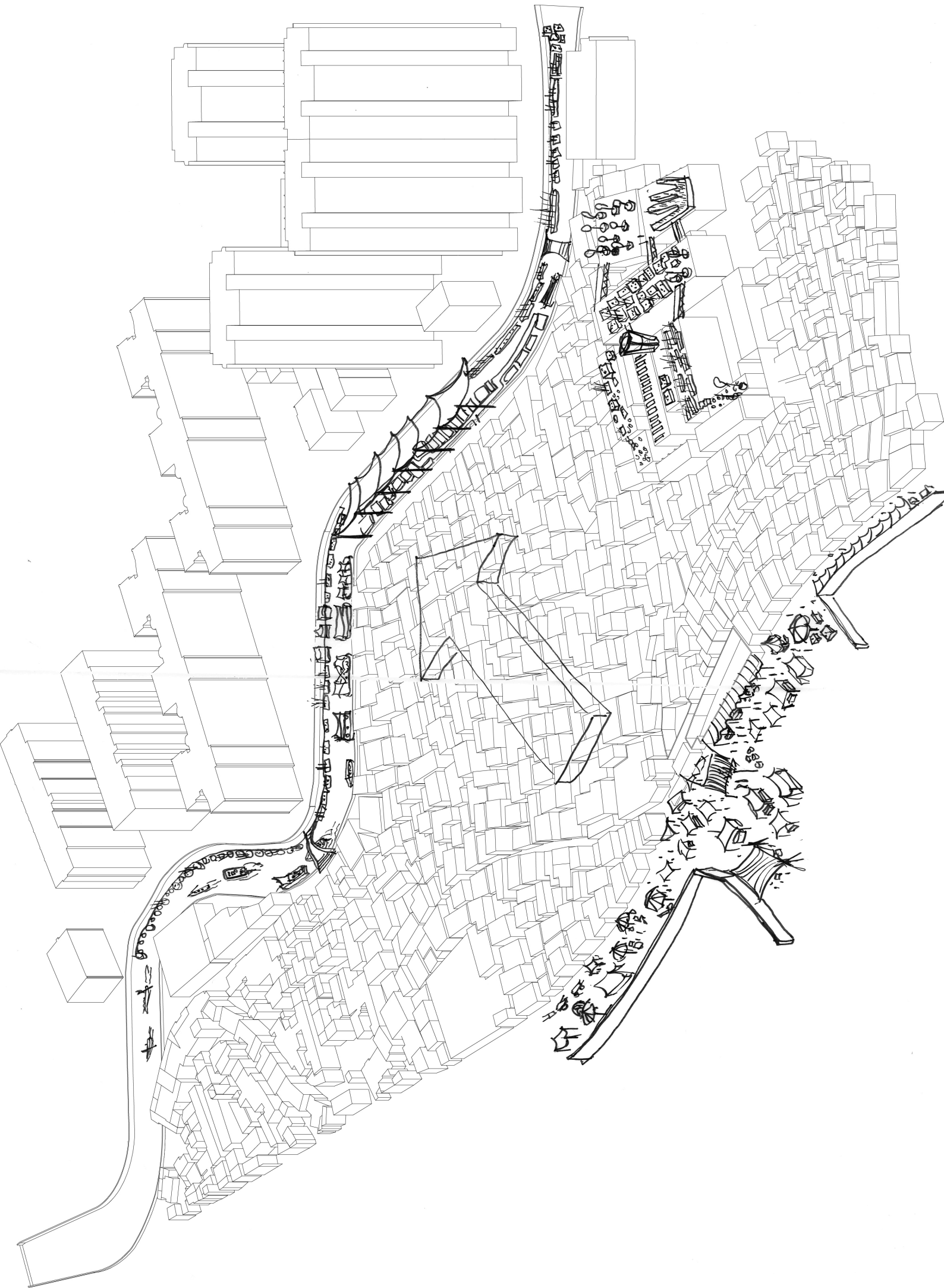
3.2.2 HYBRIDIZATION

Pandering and accommodating future plans of modernization of the area, it is possible to reach trough negotiating an intriguing level of balance between City and Other City. Forecasting a future plan of redevelopment of the area: the plots will be sold by the government to private real-estate companies that will take charge of the development of the it and, as usual procedure, demolish the old fabrics and relocate the dwellers somewhere far out in the outskirts of Shanghai. What if the development plan goes trough a decision of keeping part of the built environment and demolish the other part? In this way it could be possible to relocate those who are really willing to and half of the plan will be dedicated to higher standards buildings that will host residential and offices. A good level of convenience is reached just when the developer is allowed to generate the same amount of profit, so it follow that even the preserved village has to be accounted as beneficial, a state that could easily be reached whenever the government would give a convention by remarking it as "social housing" and therefore going trough a rehabilitation plan on the old fabrics. A renovated Vernacular would be a fascinating attraction for potential tenants and therefore enriching the overall value of the area. The new built part could easily replace most of the area now occupied by the inactive factories in the northern part of the neighbourhood and be designed as a more effective spatial solution in comparison with standard high-rise buildings that would have a tremendous impact on the low-rise patterns of the Vernacular City. Medium-rise/high-density is a solution that could be proved to be a way more effective in similar situations in China and the chance to preserve the vernacularism of the settlement could be taken if the new buildings would follow some of the actual morphological patterns of the village by merging groups of 4/5 old households into a new single, resulting to obtain a morphology and a level of urban porosity which are similar to the original ones but scaled up, so to have an houses size increment on the north side where there is no shadows affection on the existing ones. Regarding the rest of the houses it is necessary to again blend some of the households to pairs in order to enlarge the actual living space of an apartment to make it fit to more upgraded living standards. The government has to invest on a rehabilitation program that would provide sewage system and lacking networks of electricity and water supply and also improve the buildings envelops trough thermal insulation and better sheltering of the roofs. It is also important that a rehabilitation plan must be carried trough by following the principles standing behind the original construction of a vernacular town, like heights, roofs shaping, spatial configuration of courtyards, color tones of the plasters and construction materials.
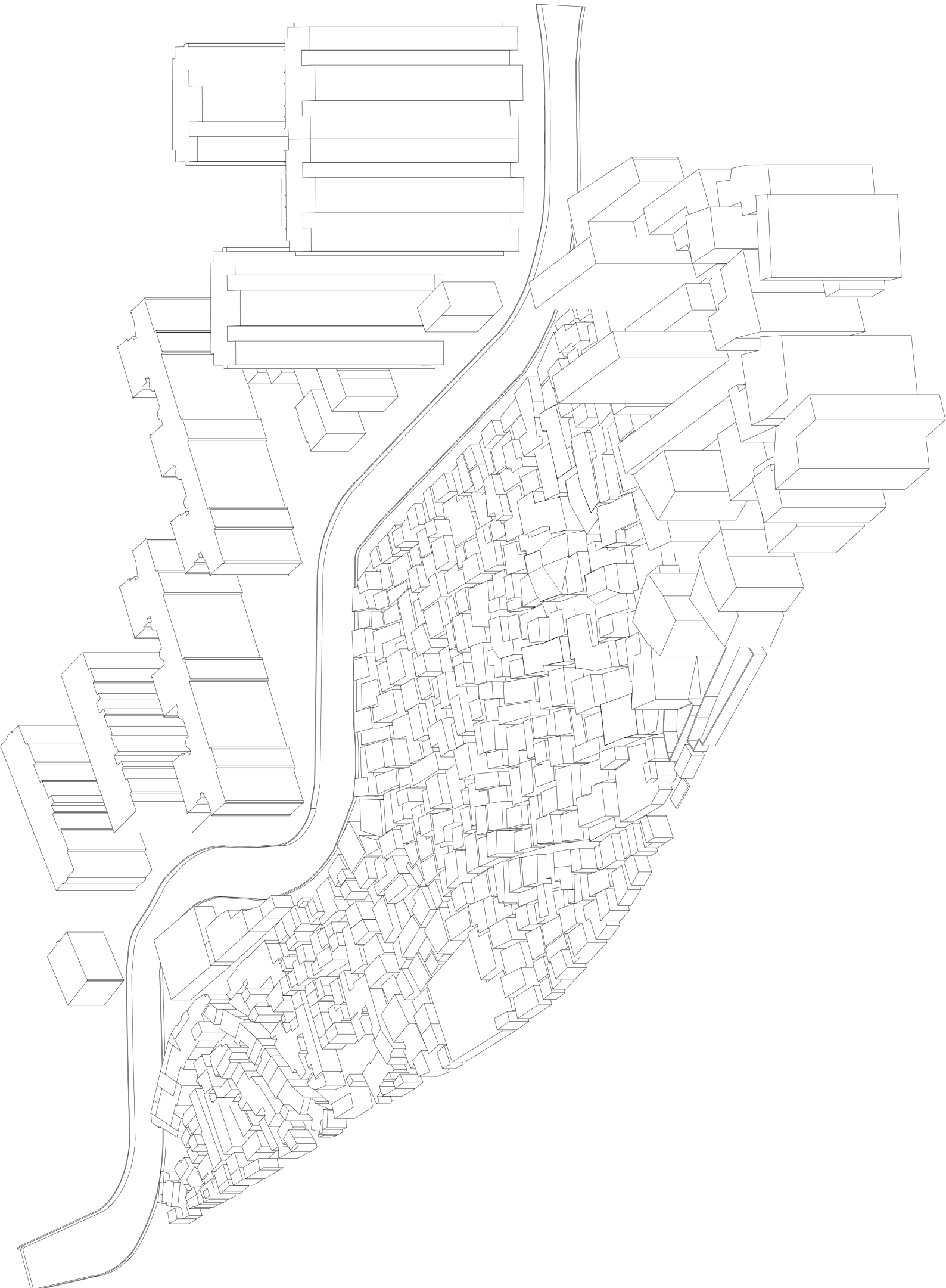
3.2.3 ECO-VILLAGE

The great obstacle to the development of sustainable architecture in China lays in the land rights policy, since the land is owned by the central government that release leasing contracts to different kind of stakeholders, it is never easy to forecast what is going to happen in short time spans (4/5 years), and this make impossible to invest on sustainable devices such solar panels because those are economically compensated for the initial investment only after many years of usage and just later allows to raise a profit after that. To overcome the issues of slowness and uncertainty and propose and eco-renovation for Block 167 it is important to got trough a time planned program to be set in multiple stages related to shorter or longer feasibility of different solutions.
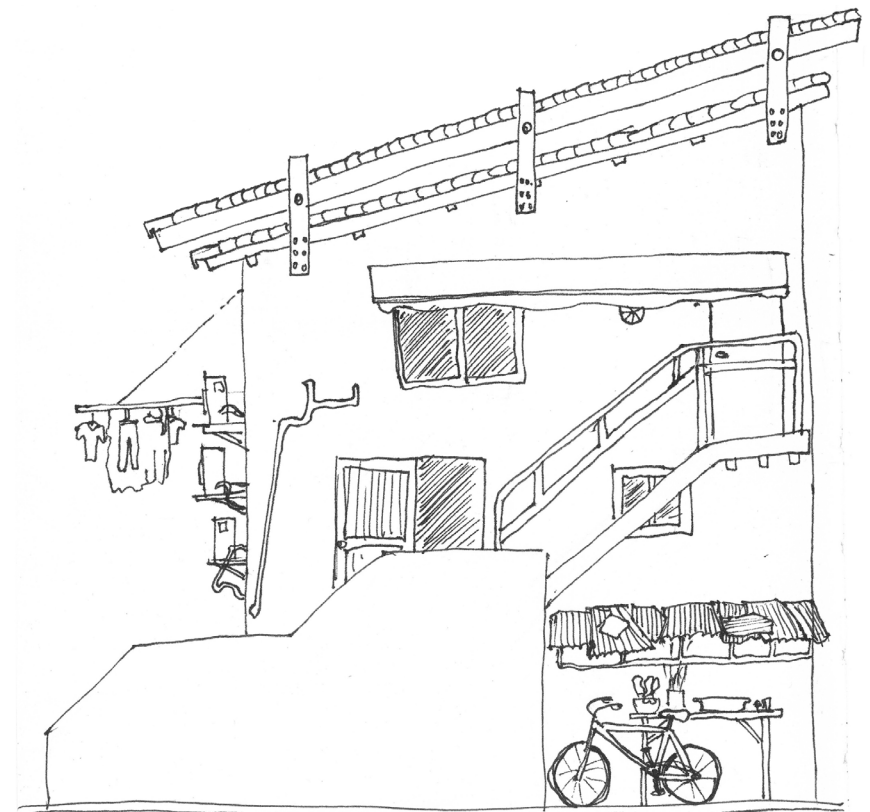
An initial step is to use aluminium cans to make double-roofs. Meaning it as a temporary solution it acts directly on the urban fabric of the settlement, easy to realize and to install, it could be the right approach to improve life quality in the settlement before relocation time will arrive. Double-roofs are effective both from a functional point of view and an aesthetic one. From the functional side these roofs aim first to solve the high presence of water leaks from the old and inefficient roofs and second they would provide a great environmental improvement by solving the issue of over-heating during the very hot shanghainese summer. These double layered coverage allows natural ventilation to take off the heat collected in the apartments whenever the sun hit the metal surface creating a pressure differential by the top and the bottom of the new roof surface. On the aesthetic side instead I imagine this whole forsaken neighbourhood to suddenly change radically in the aspect, a hundred of these roofs installed would mean to shock the attention of everyone who would pass by the elevated bridge of Siping road or lives in the high-rise buildings surround it. The reflected glow of thousand of colourful recycled cans is a light which can't be ignored by public opinion, therefore the Vernacular City will make the City speak about itself leading the general opinion on the relationship between the two cities from subordinate to Subaltern and Alternative. Furthermore in such a dense environment it is very hard to extract public space for the collective and for the individual, but a rooftop is an extra underestimated space for the whole village. Even if it is quite unconventional for Shanghai, speculating of using the not-pitched rooftops as an elevated public platform made
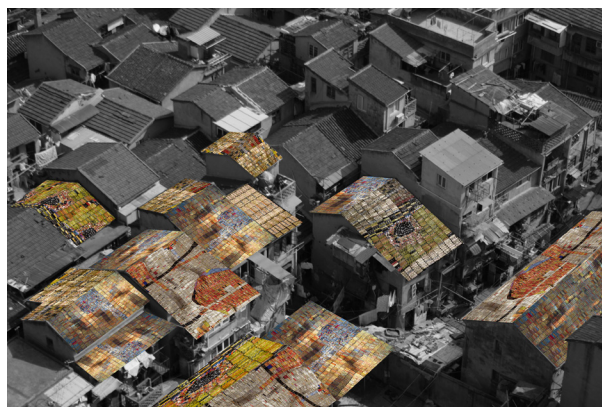
of small gardens, tea houses and plaza-terraces would be a very interesting attempt to upgrade the level of human interaction and will also provide the comfortable place for the youngest to be in their intimacy as some has wished during the interviews.

An alternative way to generate ecological sustainability within the city is to promote and stimulate those who don't have a steady or legal job to develop self-produced creative forms of sustainable design. Devices to produce electrical power or mechanical power such as wind turbines or hydro-turbines can be self-constructed out of low-tech solutions and rough materials as metal, wood and plastics, an approach that still has to be explored in its richness of possibility. Imagine a new kind of employment, the eco-producer; small groups of people could come together to work in this direction and a local government could pay as piecework the amount of energy produced individually or collectively in order to stimulate it as a counter-weight to the fossil fuels energy producers. Block 167 has the advantage and potential of the water canal running next to it, a possible source of energy and also a case of intervention because of the corruption of its waters.

Water supply issues increased enormously in Shanghai during last 20 years because of the pollution of its waters, mostly contaminated with chlorine, heavy metals and bacteria. A solution for that could also come from little interventions on small-scale. For instance phytoremediation water treatments are definitely affordable to be adopted by eco-producers and can easily be applied on the canal via the use of floating platforms to cultivate hyperaccumulating plants which are able to collect and concentrate high amount of certain toxic elements in their above-ground harvestable parts. To create a floating remediation plant is a quite easy task that could be totally self-made by locals with the right support of experts. Floating platforms can be made out of recycled materials such as plastic bottles and tanks and have variable levels of buoyancy allowing also to have floating walkways and decks integrated with the treatment system. Bamboo, for instance, is a very effective plant in filtering out suspended solid and particulate and together with other local species of plants could be the occasion to re-naturalize and partly balance the right now corrupted eco-system as well as improving urban quality with the creation of rich landscape from anew.

In order to reach a considerable level of sustainability on the overall village it is fundamental to work on the reduction of heat loss of the buildings envelops and therefore decrease costs and CO_2 emissions correlated with the air-conditioning systems, the only

device used for heating and cooling in Shanghai. To reach an acceptable level of insulation it is needed to wrap internally the existing houses with an extra layer of thermal insulation, a solution which involves a loss of available floor area, a compromise that can't be sustained by the actual dimensions of the households. A ecological solution on the settlement demands therefore a partial demolition of the fabric in order to extend some households and to improve solar radiation supply, after that the stakeholders would be able to work by themselves on the existing constructions to provide a buffering layer to be positioned indoor. Thermal insulation solutions can be self-built by following the thermodynamical law whereby trapped air is what determine the effectiveness of an insulating material. For instance smashed plastic bottles can be packed together and shaped as modular bricks and plugged to a wall by simply piling them up on each other and putting a final layer to tight them up such as wooden panels on a light structure or plaster boards. An underestimated material for construction that is usually
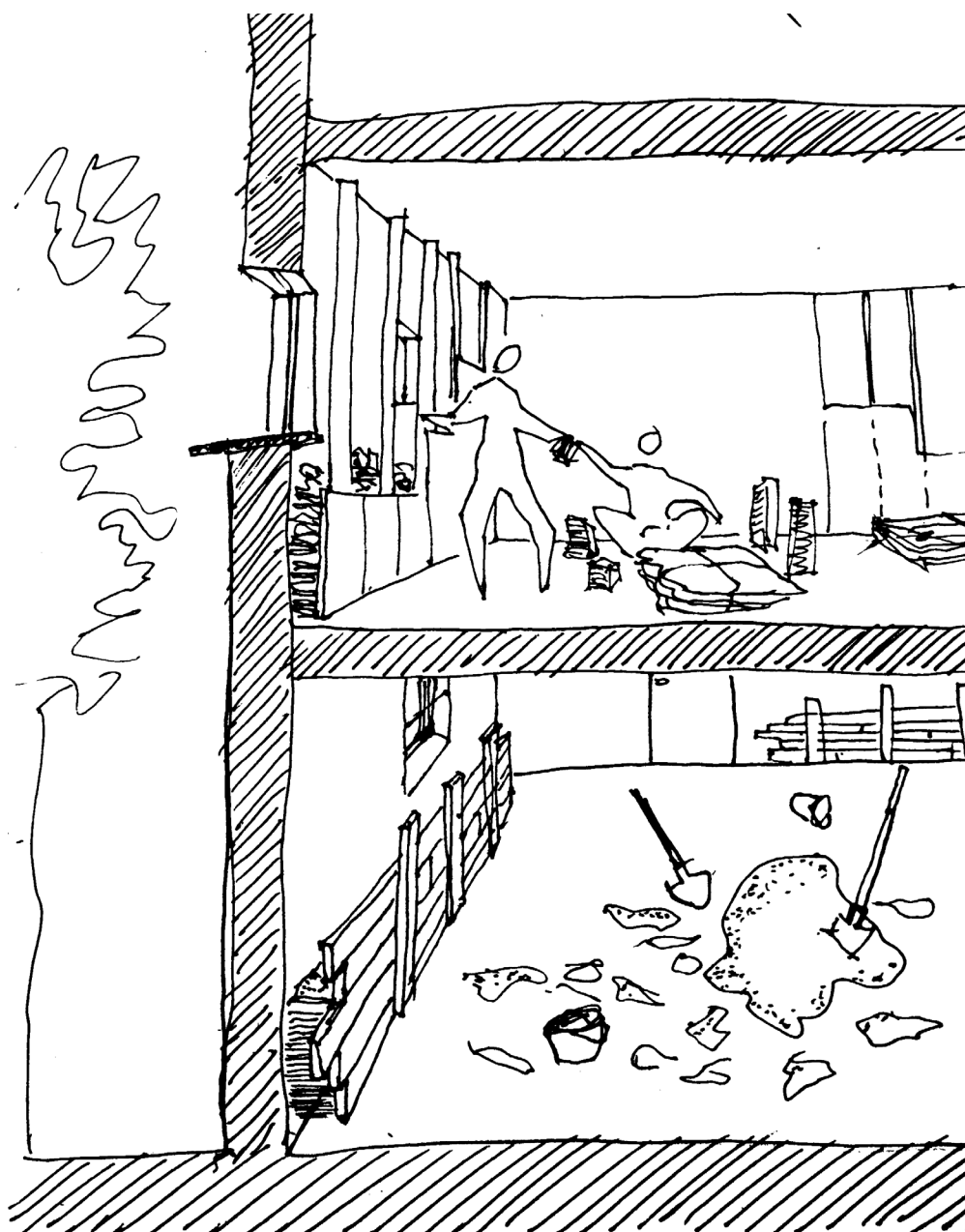
discarded and removed from fast growing cities is the enormous quantity of soil dug out for the excavation needed for the making the foundations of every high-rise building which requires an average depth of excavation that goes down even to 20 meters below ground level. Because of the elevated presence of different forms of clay in the superficial layers of Shanghai's soil, it is possible to turn construction sites excavation into building material manufacturing it into pisè walls by compacting it inside formworks or creating adobe bricks by adding fibers from food discards. Chinese tradition of working with clay and mud for construction has proved to be very effective in region with dry climate, but for Shanghai that would cause several problems because of the high percentage of rainfall unless this technique would be applied for indoor solution to provide thermal mass or any replacement of partition walls underneath a covered space.

On the threshold between real and ideal would be interesting to propose a case of urban vernacular on a high-rise building, following the advices of Yona Friedman in his "Realizable Utopias" and the pragmatic of David tower in Caracas. Starting from a concrete skeleton built from anew or recovered from the dismantling of an obsolete high-rise building that has been despoiled from its envelope it is intriguing to leave it as a space of uncertainty and freedom in which spontaneous forms of architecture can adapt themselves freely within the solidity of a pre-existing structure, opening up an interesting discussion on the re-use of abandoned buildings (in our case the former factories) or of those that have never been completed.
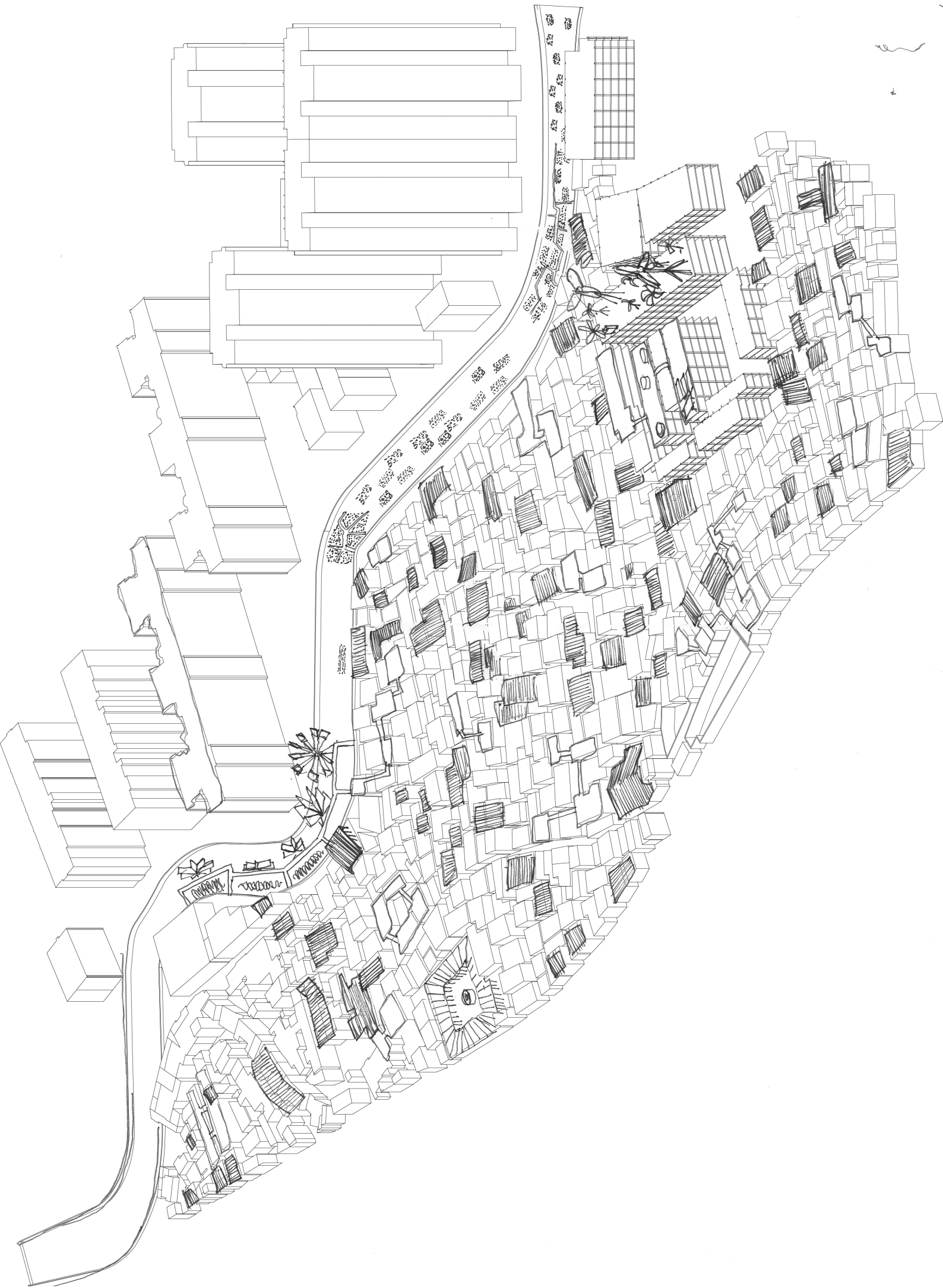
CONCLUSIONS

I don't know if this research has reached any point or not. I tried to picture pragmatical solutions because I believe we must defend what is worth to be defended. The question is: for who it worth? If this is just a personal fascination, then my work is useless and irresponsible. Maybe the real reason why I chose this topic is because I want know whether it is a shared opinion or not that there are simple qualities in this city tragically disappearing. Does somebody acknowledge it? Do the Shanghainese, whether poor or not, native or migrants, are aware of these qualities? The origins of them lie in the secular experience of living in vernacular settlements, small urban entities where people are able to communicate with each other by direct contact and to collaborate in conditions of mutual help that leave nobody alone. Right now, after the age of Modern Cities, we ultimately realized that we don't have time to speak to our neighbour anymore because the globe is calling, and to answer to that call (via new media), we are getting separated from each other. To regain direct influences on each other we need to care of Vernacularism. More than working on this as an architect, I'm convinced I went trough this research rather as the kind of person I am, studying its implications to learn something I need personally. I could have definitely decided to loose creativity a bit more and push my ideas beyond the solutions presented such as roofs made of cans and phyto-remediation, but that way wouldn't have been the way to stay coherent to the real matter of facts or to what I want to defend. To impose designed solutions or planning frameworks and to work on a large scale would have been a way of betraying the nature of vernacular and suppress its capacities. In vernacular terms, beauty lays in the simplicity of objects, gestures, relationships.

Two days ago I bought a knife from a fruit vendor in Shanghai. I really wanted it, something with it attracted me particularly. I paid it just three yuan and it's manufacturing is very simple: a slim steel blade curved at the tip and roughly sharpened and a bamboo handle with Chinese characters engraved on. Still it was beautiful to me, in its proportions, in its material-

ity, in its effectiveness. Even though I noticed these knives are still quite common to be seen in smaller cities I visited, I haven't found many of them around Shanghai and I'm pretty sure there will be no such kind of knives in some years. Already now, if we need to buy a knife, we go to a supermarket and buy an industrial produced blade with a plastic handle. In few years they will all be replaced and we will not be aware of this loss of beauty, everything will just go on normally, but with no more hand-crafted ordinary knives. And if the city's future will just keep on being designed and formalized by single minds, wouldn't there be a loss as well of the same kind of beauty? Would we notice it afterward? Maurilia: one of the cities imagined by Italo Calvino in his book "The invisible cities" has been pictured as a city that, in order to be turned into a magnificent and prosperous metropolis, had to sacrifice its past appearance of a town and just keep a memory of it trough old postcards, with a certain kind of nostalgia.

China, trough the work of several architects represented by the Pritzker-price Wang Shu, has recently proved its incredible capacity to relate in a genuine way with history. Such a sensitive approach is a great hope for future cities where the meaning of extraordinariness could be rediscovered in the beauty of simple and ordinary architecture rather than the hypocritical majesty of shallow skyscrapers. It is indeed time to open up minds to new ways of conceiving metropolis, historicize the old Modern world of and to trust young generations of architects that are eager to go back to the fundamentals of space and architecture. Vernacular is not a side-talk of nostalgic remembrances, but a real condition of the metropolis. Its recognition and implication in the studies of architecture would make of it a self-sustaining effective model of urban development in the new-rising metropolis and of urban renewal in the old ones where the obsolescences of the Modern City have to be re-elaborated and transformed.

Above all, Vernacularism deserve to be protected from being submerged by the metropolitan arrogance. There is something incredibly deep with it that is capable to sublime the ordinary to a state of art (*picture left page*) (see Appendix _ Identity, Ritual, Icon). Differently from other forms of art, Vernacularism can't be shown in a museum but just perceived in its state of wilderness. If a painting is made by a single individual artist, a vernacular house, or a windmill, or a boat are simultaneously made by all the people that trough history had made a house, a windmill, a boat. This is because its essence as a typology has been conceived by a collective genius. Therefore the work of art is not the single knife I bought, but the totality of all the knives built like that and yet every of those has got is original singularities that give an holistic extra-value to the individual piece.

If Shanghai, the most formalized of the cities, manage to rediscover this beauty and the vernacularism that generated it, then the artwork is preserved, and there is still hope for it to be handed down without making of it a surrogate. This doesn't mean we all have to go back to bamboo knives and mud-houses, but surely there are indisputable qualities in those that sooner or later will just dissolve.

ANTONIO GUATELLI. Museum of rural ordinary objects. Ozzano Taro, Italy.

APPENDIX

VIDEO-DIRECTORY

ROOM WITH VIEW

A video-documentary which describes an informal settlement placed on the rooftop of a hundred years old abandoned Tofu factory in the Hongkou district of Shanghai. The reason we came across it was mainly because of the aesthetic attraction of the old building which later has revealed to be made by an English architect at the beginning of 20th century. Discovering a 30 years old village on its rooftop has been the surprising part. We found out that a middle-age man of one of the 25 families living in this compound was a former English teacher and we asked him for an interview. Out of his narration we discovered that all the families living there had at least one member employed in the Tofu factory, which closed around 1985, and before that, they all decided to create a community and to settle down on the rooftop of their working space because of economical necessities since most of them had moved there to work from outside Shanghai. The small houses were built in a relatively short time by the dwellers themselves with the help of illegal workers from rural areas. Soon after the construction of those the factory had to close, but they kept on living there until nowadays because of convenience reasons: no rent to pay, strategical position in the city, relevant coverage from the official City. During the recording of the documentary it was easy to establish an affective connection with mr. Zheng, our guide; his welcoming way to host us and the pride he showed in leading us around the community were clear evidences of the fulfillment of their way of living, and when he invited us to have dinner with them my memories suddenly linked this behavior to that of villagers of some remote small-towns I visited in China. Once again it comes out the parallelism between informal architecture and vernacular architecture, between urban villages and traditional ones, and I believe that this grass-roots event is more than a group of people claiming for a house which of course is the main and solid reason, but also they managed to create the homely environment made out of an emotive network of relationships between individuals belonging to the same community within the alienating and emotionally poor context of the over-scaled city.

DO YOU WANT THIS LAND?

A document to tell the concealed story of a community in the Lilong of Xingping Lane that has been now relocated. The video has been recorded during the last days before the total demolition, when few houses were still standing and many family where still living in. The scenario shows up a desolated land in the city center of Shanghai where recyclers walk around in the rubble to collect valuable materials to resell somewhere. We interviewed four different group of people, the first is with two women, one which has recently found herself widow and isolated in her hundred years old house about to be demolished, upset by the unreasonable manners showed up by who was negotiating with her and the second one explaining how the compensation refund, which is computed by square meters, has to be unfairly split and shared between her family and the other two living in the same building. While speaking with the two women a third character comes into scene as a representative of the demolishing company and take apart our interviewer to whisper her that those people are complaining too much. Second interview is with a woman within a group of people standing and discussing in front of the wall of a still standing building where it has been hanged a paper communication with guidelines for the relocation. She argued about the unclear responsibility of the representative whereas the paper is signed both by the local government and the court it is hard to chose who is responsible to go and refer to.

Third interview is toward a group of highly upset and outraged people who are informed about illegal movement made by the government in the negotiation process with the dwellers trough intended misunderstandings about the final land-usage of the area. Promises were made to rehabilitated the constructions but final choice has been to sell the land to a real-estate company which turned the use into commercial in order to make good profit out of the location values of it, while government refund has been just one tenth of the future value per square meters of the high-rise buildings that will come afterward. Last interviewed is an old man which speaks about the bitterness of leaving the house where him and his wife have been living for decades. He asked us to take a picture of him in front of the house as a memory, we after delivered the picture to his uncertain address.

NEW IS BETTER THAN OLD

Not so far from Lu Xun park there's a old neighbourhood of shikumens built by the japanese at the end of the 30's. We interviewed one of the family living there and out of their opinions living in an old Shikumen is not a matter of attachment with history or

architectural qualities. The 65 years old father said he inherited the house from his parents when it was already split in three parts after the Cultural Revolution and right now the 35 sqm are not enough to host a comfortable living for a retired couple and their 30 years old daughter. Shikumens are a small resistance of the neighbourhood concept in Shanghai but most of the dwellers believe that new typology of building can offer a better life and to question in which measure are memory and identity lying within the old fabric of these architectures reveal a social issues of collective amnesia.

SHIPPING OUT

Jingnan Shipyard is the biggest shipping company in China and one of the biggest in world. It has been moved to Changxing island in the Yangze river and just ahead Shanghai city after its relocation from the site that was later use for the World Expo 2010. The company has been state-owned from its founding in 1865 when it was the largest weapon factory in East Asia, and moved from its original location in 2009. The Shipyard builds, repairs and converts both civilian and military ships and its staff consists of 10 500 employees. This ten main enterprises have been rewarded with a compensation income of 2.5 millions RMB/acre, and since the average amount of the expense for the new resettle has been around 0.7 millions RMB/acre, it is clear that the extra income coming from the difference of this two numbers is a fair high amount of money to carry forward the development of the enterprises, which in the case of Jiangnan Shipyard it turned out to increase the physical size of the factory by eight times more. We made this short video-documentary on the island to figure out the decisive changes triggered by the implantation of the company. The impacts on Changxing were of different nature: from the disruption of the social-economical models of the islanders and of the employees to the environmental effects of the urban development. These changes gave start to a morphological mutation of the island itself, turned from rural to industrial, affecting lifestyles and any other activities on it.

THE THIRD LAW

Right after the documentary "Shipping out" we made a video-study on Chanxing island where we decided to go back to 2002 and tried to conjecture a different way to do the relocation. Our argumentation don't claim to be neither propositive nor critical, is not stepping back on a mistaken path, but just picturing an alternative present and a possible future. We present a visionary video-work which shows Changxing island in a foreseeable future in which the whole surface of it is totally urbanized by industries. This

work open up a series of questions on the possibility to gather in a single defined and bounded area a whole complex of factories about to dramatically improve their physical size under the super-fast economical pressure of China. We decided to undermine the concept of mega-project trough a dialectic discourse utopia-dystopia, considering these two as the result of enormous decision of urban generators, which appears to be the case of the EXPO's relocated industries. We learned from Thomas Moore that an Island is the perfect location for an Utopia, and together with Le Corbusier visionary Plan Voisin for Paris we could argue that building more than twenty square kilometers of dense industrial land on Changxing Island has to be considered an Utopian idea which could have come from a modernist approach to the city of high-level zoning. Nevertheless the concept of Utopia has always been related to positive attempts to make the world a better place, and obviously this is not the case. So we tried to look at our proposal as a Dystopian post-modern results of the Utopian slogan of the EXPO: "better city, better life". Of course a better city is also a productive one which grows and offers many chances to work and since the EXPO has given a great push forward to the economical development of the industrial sector of Shanghai, the resulting physical impact of the huge dimension of the whole industrial area has to make of Shanghai a better city. Considered that, our vision of the island has to be a product of the progressive mood of a growing society, similar to the idea of Junkspace described by Rem Koolhaas as "Junkspace is a Bermuda Triangle of concepts, an abandoned petri dish: it cancels distinctions, undermines resolve, confuses intention with realization. It replaces hierarchy with accumulation, composition with addition. More and more, more is more." The junkspace is generated by an architecture of the collage in which space is copied, pasted, quoted, recoded to fit site-specific purposes, the exact way we build up our video-work about the mutation of Changxing island. Our Dystopia in this sense, renounces to the great value of a natural-rural island to turn it into "hermetic regimes of ultimate exclusion and segregation"

THE ROOFTOP AND THE CRANE

There's a rooftop in Shanghai, in Siping road, Hongkou district. It is on a two story building and is one of between many forgotten spaces in the endless artificiality of the city. The area is under a transformation process which envisages a forthcoming developing project made of residential and offices. The building cover about 3 600 sqm and host an university experimental laboratory at the ground floor and a former supermarket at the second floor which is right now empty. One third of the rooftop (in correspond-

ence with the ex-supermarket) is further elevated and two rectangular areas on it are planted with some small trees. By the time we accidentally got on the top we soon realize the architectural quality of such a space to be turned into a place and decided so to video-record a little dance performance choreographed with a construction crane which was working on a nearby construction site. The video aims to show off the great potential of those uncertain spaces in catalysing creative energies which hardly manage to be expressed in such a dispersal city otherwise. Our suggestion is to open up part of the temporary, residual and liminal spaces in Shanghai to host temporary art events. The video has been later shown at the Basement 6 Shanghai Art Collective revealing trough the media a possible spot to be art-colonized within the city.

I KNOW THE STORY (text written by Tristan Biere)

In the 1930s and 40s, the possibility to enter Shanghai without visa, meant a rare opportunity for European Jews seeking to escape the horrors of Hitler. With the victory of the Japanese Shanghai nevertheless fell into the hands of an ally of the Third Reich. In November 1942, a ghetto, officially entitled "Designated Area for Stateless Refugees" was established in today's Hongkou district for over 20,000 Jews in Shanghai. Despite continuous claims of its German ally, the Japanese didn't introduce further anti-Semitic actions. After the liberation of Shanghai in 1945 the majority of Jews left the city.

Pointing towards the idea of a readability of cities, deciphering the urban is an endeavor that has to be situated in the field between large history and microhistories. Taking the vast amount of individual stories, what is called history is always both structuring and reductive. The French philosopher and linguist Roland Barthes therefore claimed in his 1967 reflections on "Semiology and the Urban" that ideally everyone (natives and strangers a like) should try to "decipher the city we are in, starting if necessary with a personal rapport" (published in Op. Cit. 10, 1967).

The documentary "I know the story" follows the 88 year old Mr. Ku on a walk through the former Jewish ghetto in Shanghai's Hongkou district. The retired English teacher had spent his entire life in the area around the Ohel Moshe Synagogue. In the life of Mr. Ku, the Japanese occupation seemed to weigh heavier than any other historic period. With trembling hands Mr. Ku shows us his three-story family house in Choushan Road that had been burnt down by the Japanese. In the turbulent history of Shanghai, the brief period of Jewish immigration plays only a minor role. Since the First Opium War (1839-1842) Shanghai experienced many drastic historical events and massive socio-economic and political transformations, all of which left their traces in the texts of neighbor-

hoods like Mr. Ku's.

QUOTATIONS

I collected a series of quotations which have guided and inspired this work. A series of authors, architects and non-architects, that have further integrated my ideas and built up the correct mindset on alternative ways of seeing and living the metropolis of Shanghai.

Italo Calvino _ MAURILIA

In Maurilia, the traveller is invited to visit the city and, at the same time, to examine some old postcards that show it as it used to be: the same identical square with a hen in the place of the bus station, a bandstand in the place of the overpass, two young ladies with white parasols in the place of the munitions factory. If the traveller does not wish to disappoint the inhabitants, he must praise the postcard city and prefer it to the present one, though he must be careful to contain his regret at the changes within definite limits; admitting that the magnificence and prosperity of the metropolis Maurilia, when compared to the old, provincial Maurilia, cannot compensate for a certain lost grace, which, however, can be appreciated only now in the old postcards, whereas before, when that provincial Maurilia was before one's eyes, one saw absolutely nothing graceful and would see it even less today, if Maurilia had remained unchanged; and in any case the metropolis has the added attraction that, through what it has become, one can look back with nostalgia at what it was.

Beware of saying to them that sometimes different cities follow one another on the same site and under the same name, born and dying without knowing one another, without communication among themselves. At time even the names of the inhabitants remain the same, and their voices' accent, and also the features of the faces; but the gods who live beneath names and above places have gone off without a word and outsiders have settled in their place. It is pointless to ask whether the new ones are better or worse than the old, since there is no connection between them, just as the old post cards do not depict Maurilia as it was, but a different city which, by chance, was called Maurilia, like this one.

Alvaro Siza _ URBAN RELATIONSHIPS

We are closing up parks and gardens, trough streets and connecting lanes between

buildings and other non-conventional places which have always been public, a transit that played an important role in the continuity and fluidity of the inner city. It is a tremendous mistake to destroy this type of relationship and think that the city's recovery only involve the recovery of its monuments. The problem resides in the fact that we are not regarding the historic as an ensemble of relationships and balances, and we are only focusing on the restoration of the monument.

Yona Friedman _ CRITICAL GROUP

The intensity of an influence between people will decay in inverse proportion to the number of intermediary transmissions necessary to its forwarding.

We will call "critical size" the Iimiting size where growth stops and beyond which, if an entity continues to grow, the growing entity suffers important qualitative changes. "Critical group size" will thus be the size of a social group characterized by certain qualities over which size this group can not keep these qualities. Critical group-size is effectively critical to the good functioning of a group or of an organization.

Ananya Roy _ SUBALTERN URBANISM

"subaltern urbanism" - which undertakes the theorization of the megacity and its subaltern spaces and subaltern classes. Of these, the ubiquitous 'slum' is the most prominent. Writing against apocalyptic and dystopian narratives of the slum, subaltern urbanism provides accounts of the slum as a terrain of habitation, livelihood, self-organization and politics. This is a vital and even radical challenge to dominant narratives of the megacity. However, this article is concerned with the limits of and alternatives to subaltern urbanism. It thus highlights emergent analytical strategies, utilizing theoretical categories that transcend the familiar metonyms of underdevelopment such as the megacity, the slum, mass politics and the habitus of the dispossessed. Instead, four categories are discussed peripheries, urban informality, zones of exception and gray spaces.

Milica Topalovic _ INFORMAL BELGRADE

Belgrade's informal development schemes, in which regulations are provisional, and design, credits, and professional construction, unnecessary, are surprisingly more efficient. Stabilized within a market, planning process, and legal framework, its efficiency is based on economic rationality: Building illegally in Belgrade can be as much as four times as cheap as its legal counterpart and construction time is cut in half. In addition, adherence to regulations promises unparalleled benefits trough security against demoli-

tion. Illegality is cheaper, faster, and, altogether, not a great risk, which makes it very attractive. When compared with housing markets in European countries, informal Belgrade always wins. The accelerated growth of informal cities all over the world during the fifties and sixties served as a fountain of inspiration for counter streams to the Modern Movement.

Joseph Beuys _ SOCIAL SCULPTURE

Only on condition of a radical widening of definitions will it be possible for art and activities related to art [to] provide evidence that art is now the only evolutionary-revolutionary power. Only art is capable of dismantling the repressive effects of a senile social system that continues to totter along the deathline: to dismantle in order to build "a social organism as a work of art", every human being is an artist who, from his state of freedom, the position of freedom that he experiences at first-hand, learns to determine the other positions of the total art work of the future social order.

Studio Mumbai _ CRAFTMANSHIP

Studio Mumbai carefully develops projects through a process that draws from traditional skills, local building techniques, materials and an ingenuity that arises from limited resources. The essence of their work lies in the relationship between land and architecture. Studio Mumbai describes themselves as being "inspired by real life conditions" as they understand complex relationships through the power of observation.
"The endeavor is to show the genuine possibility in creating buildings that emerge through a process of collective dialog, a face-to-face sharing of knowledge through imagination, intimacy, and modesty."

Buckminster Fuller _ EPHEMERALIZATION

I seek through comprehensive anticipatory design science and its reductions to physical practices to reform the environment instead of trying to reform humans, being intent thereby to accomplish prototyped capabilities of doing more with less

Mario Carpo _ OBJECTILE

An objectile is a "generative scripts that may beget one or more different objects, redesigned, adapted, messed up, and tampered with by a variety of human and technical agents, some of them uncontrollable and unpredictable" Watching at a building or a city as an objectile can open up an intense discussion about participation processes where

"open-endedness and interactivity create the context for collaborative and social use of the new media[…]But what if the same tools are used to involve, at the opposite end of the chain, the patrons or owners, for example, as well as clients, end users, customers, or citizens? What if some parts of the design process could be made interactive and public?"

Lorenzo Degli Esposti _ URBAMO

The urbAMO project is based on the installation, in spontaneous/informal settlements, of infra-free inhabited works of art (Advanced Melting Objects) unhooked from water and energy networks, in order to form resistant constellations against profit/not-for-profit and private/public forces. The position of the AMO objects and the social uses placed in them are dependent upon the specific reality of the project area and its context. Whatever the circumstances, the installation does not involve the expropriation of buildings and land from any occupant, rather favoring the positioning in unoccupied spaces or in the road network. In the AMO objects, energetic autonomy guaranteed by the infra-free technology embraces formal autonomy, giving rise to free, diversified and multivariate languages. The urbAMO project runs towards the common, eventually in synergy with the public and the private, also concerning the funding. Every AMO object is conceived and realized by a local critical group in a competences exchange with guest professionals. Every AMO object, in resisting against standardization, at the same time guarantees the narrations by the hosts and the guests, in favor of a lot of local which, everyone in their own way, look at the global.

Marco Casagrande _ ILLEGAL ARCHITECTURE

Illegal architecture comes in many forms. You have the horizontal and vertical illegal extensions of the apartment buildings, illegal houses and illegal community […] The point is that this fruitful culture of self-made architecture has only been illegal as long as the official city has been in this picture. These flexible, moving, adjustable and pliant forms of urban nomad structures have always been. Official city is the newcomer. Informal architecture is a new name for the citizen's right to express himself trough architecture. These guys don't need architects, they are more resourceful and creative than the official architects corrupted by the university teaching, building industry and laws and codes of construction.

Davide Pagliarini _ INVISIBLE LANDSCAPES

Combining different disciplines, from the graphic to photography, from engineering to landscape, the architecture expands its field of action, placing itself as a social device capable to trigger new strategies of settling, to be activated trough a new form of colonization, accomplished as the sum of minimal interventions and open to supports different and uncertain demands. If architecture own an intimate capacity to partici-pate to the representation of the identity of a place, the ecological machines correlated to it reveal new potentialities to express a renovated relationship between man and the environment in which he lives.

Transverse studio _ WAY PROJECT

The WAY Project is a four-year community-based social capital development project in the Southern District. Its objective is to develop a replicable model for social capital development, particularly with the involvement of staff and students of HKU. "This weekend is only the beginning of the project. HKU students are only painting one quar-ter of the rooftops designated for painting by the design. We hope the initiative we have started will encourage other villagers to paint their rooftops and bring out the vibrancy of the village. Working closely with HKU faculty teachers and students in building a sustainable community, we hope to integrate urban heritage values into a wider frame-work of city development. This is also one of the recommendations in UNESCO's Historic Urban Landscape, and we hope Pokfulam Village will be Hong Kong's shining example"

Hugo Mesquita _ LEARNING FROM FAVELAS

The vernacular architecture of the favelas is, essentially, an alternative to mainstream spatial practices, with its own rules and cultural codes that emerge from below, provid-ing a counterbalance to the top-down structure of official spatial production. Built with absolute material and economical pragmatism, the spaces of informal settlements entail much more than the "irrationality and chaotic" categorization to which they too often are wrongly reduced. Our research aims at bridging this gap, by revealing the morpho-logical and typological characteristics of these settlements, as a means to promote a more sustainable and inclusive perception of the spaces currently being formally trans-formed through slum upgrading programmes.

Bill Hillier _ SPACE IS THE MACHINE

It is clear from this analysis that architecture does not depend on architects, but can exist within the context of what we would normally call the vernacular. To the extent that the vernacular shows evidence of reflective thought and innovation at the level of the genotype, then that is evidence of the kind of thought we call architectural within the vernacular. This does not mean that the innovative production of buildings which are phenotypically individual within a vernacular should be thought of as architecture. Such phenotypical variety is normal as the product of culturally constrained non-discursive codes. It is only when the innovation, and therefore the reflective thought, changes the code that underlies the production of phenotypes that we detect the presence of abstract and comparative — and therefore architectural — thought within the confines of vernacular tradition.

D.G.Shane _ NOTES ON URBAN VILLAGES

In a curious paradox, urban villages, sometimes expanded into vast favela city expansions or suburbs, seem to hold the key to the megacity's future. David Sattherthwaite's hard-boiled optimism in the face of the Mike Davis The Planet of Slums argument seems well founded and far more persuasive, even in the case of postindustrial cities like Detroit, where small scale actions to consolidate urban village-like clusters, combined with the reintroduction of agriculture and parks hold the promise of managing the shrinking city.

IDENTITY RITUAL ICON

Totem Ritual Icon is the name of an exhibition we conceived together with Francesca Gotti as part of our thesis research. It investigates, trough three different keys to understanding, the relationship human-space in the contemporary cities. It will be shown in *O-collective happening* hosted by Tongji university the 15th of June 2014 (o.collective.happening@hotmail.com).
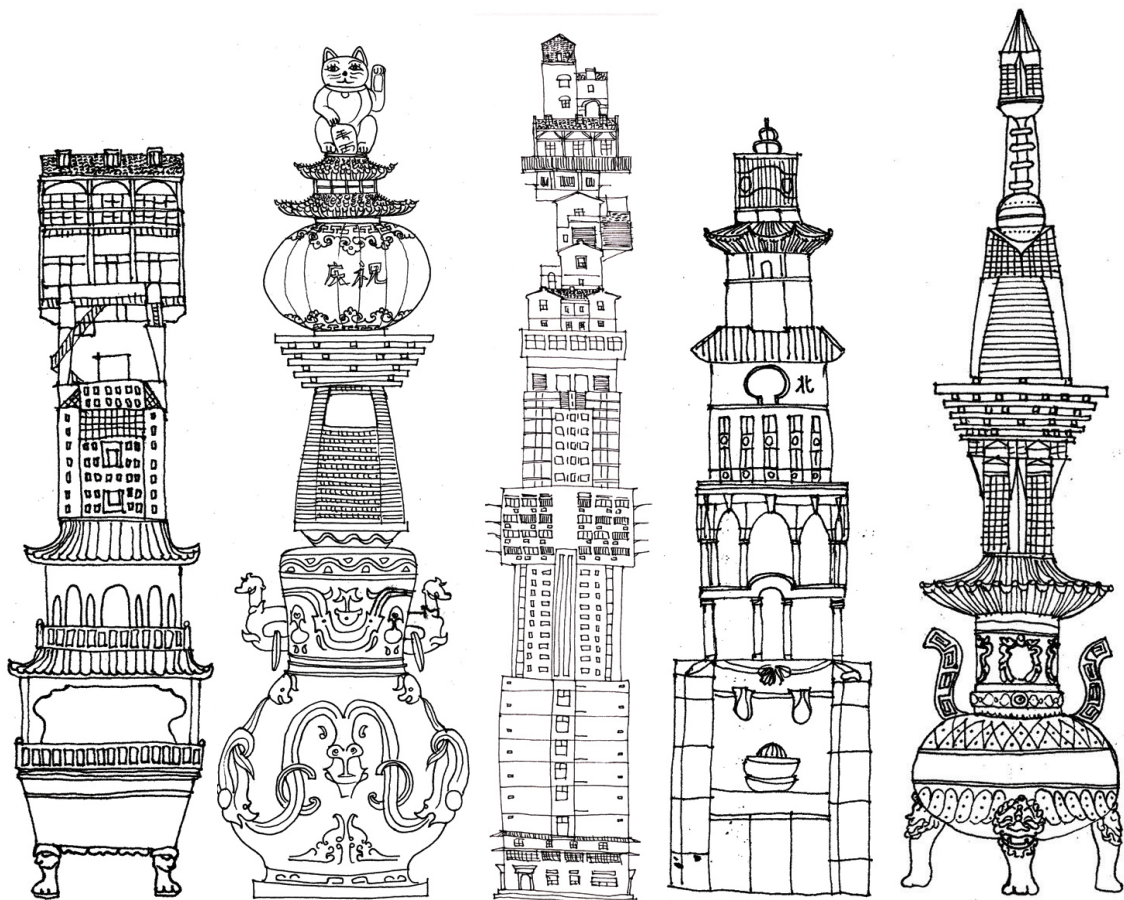
The concept behind it focuses on the idea that ordinary objects (and consequently, vernacular architecture) can be sublimed to a state of art. If taken individually, they look anonymous and disclaimed, but if grouped, they gain a holistic over-value of being series of individual artefacts and at the same time all variations of a type. It is the same value embed in the beauty of old towns and villages where all the variations of a vernacular typology are grouped together to make a settlement.

We collected everyday-use objects of China and mounted them up by typology creating small sculptures made of tea cups, birds cages, smoking pipes and incense burners. The result of piling up objects, similar to each other but still very peculiar in their individuality, is a Totem, an object again, made of all the artefacts belonging to the same family. Totems are monumental forms by definition. Four Totems are then exposed to express the concealed monumentality of the ordinary. The act of grouping objects shows that the art-work must be sought in the ideal wholeness of all the objects belonging to each typology created universally. The act of de-contextualizing the object from their usual location and use is a suggestion to claim back ordinariness as a value in its everyday habitats. The choice of such objects is to re-evaluate the ordinary rituals performed with them in their original habitats.

There are objects, like incense burners, which are by nature made for rituality, others instead celebrate simple events. Everyday all over China small rituals bring people together: drinking a cup of tea, hanging out birds cages in the park, smoking cigarettes. Everyday these rituals enrich and vitalize the city but is easy to be forgetful about it.

Eight Photo-collages bring together rituals and totems introducing a third element of contemporary cities: the icons. Cities like Shanghai are represented by few iconic buildings (*i.e. Pudong skyline*) that claim to be metonymy standing for the whole city. Nevertheless we believe that the current icons of Shanghai don't sincerely describe what the city is, for which reason in our photo-collages we turned the concepts of ordinary and extraordinary upside down, referring to the first with Totems and to the second with the icons of Shanghai. The technique allowed the creation of surreal situation where Totems made of ordinary objects undergo again a process of re-contextualization taking the role of urban icons and the Icons of Shanghai got shrank to the level of ordinary objects being used in everyday rituals of the City thus becoming a pretext for new speculations around the importance of ordinariness in defining the real identity of a city.

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