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# Chapter 11

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

Jeffrey Hou

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

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

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



Nanjing East Road, Shanghai 200m



Hyehwa Catholic Church, Seoul 200m



Yoyogi Park, Tokyo 200m



Bangka, Taipei 200m



Shinjuku Station, Tokyo 200m

**Figure 11.0**

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

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

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

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

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2. I call the current movement a rediscovery because similar concepts have been explored before, including the work of the fluxus art movement, Parisian Situationists, Jane Jacobs, William Whyte, and Jonathan Raban in his book *Soft City* (1974).

3. While this chapter focuses on East Asia, it certainly does not suggest that the phenomenon is limited to the region.



**Figure 11.1**

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

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

### Structure of Flux

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

4. According to Bognar (1997), the average building costs only about 10 percent of land price in large and expensive urban areas in Japan.

5. Examples include the Kirin Plaza in Osaka (by Shin Takamatsu) and Grand Prince Hotel Akasaka (by Kenzo

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

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

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

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

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Tange) and may soon include the iconic Nakagin Capsule Tower (by Kishio Kurokawa).



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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



**Figure 11.2**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

8. "Outdoor Ballroom Dancing," Trip Advisor.



**Figure 11.3**

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

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

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

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

9. Site visit in August 2008.

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

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

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

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

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



**Figure 11.4**

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

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

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

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



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

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

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



Figure 11.5

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Figure 11.6

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



**Figure 11.7**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



**Figure 11.8**

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

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

17. "Eslite Market" (in Chinese), *Roodo*, July 4, 2006, accessed September 21, 2014, [http://blog.roodo.com/eslite\\_market/archives/1848593.html](http://blog.roodo.com/eslite_market/archives/1848593.html).

18. "Stall" (in Chinese), *ptt.cc*, accessed January 4, 2014, <http://www.ptt.cc/man/Stall/D86D/D8AE/M.1173150148.A.120.html>.

19. "Stall" (in Chinese), *ptt.cc*.

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

### Temporary Urbanism as Insurgent Planning

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

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

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

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



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

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

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