

# Excavating the Future

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## Once Upon a Time

Memory Lane Odds-n-Ends  
Old Town Bric-a-Brac  
Sweet Ready-Mades  
Coffee-Colored Daydreams

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The reader is invited to trail Shanghai's past in graphic and ethnographic fragments that explore the contemporary global city's infrastructure of imperial nostalgia. Mimicking the scrapbook and guided tourbook, the article alternates a collage of tourist information with textual snapshots and extended sections of social commentary that dig up further analytic depth on Shanghai's culture of nostalgia. It performatively detours the recent past to meander through collective memories of the future, such as the dream-wish of international brand distinction and the colonial bones of a vintage native modernity. Click on the menu bar to the left to excavate notes, reflections, and collective memories of Shanghai futures.

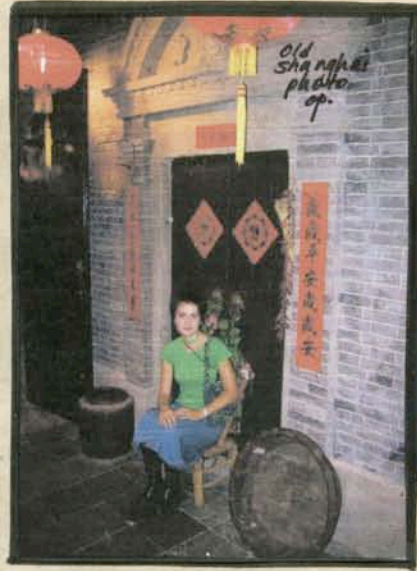


*Liminalities:  
A Journal of  
Performance  
Studies*  
5.2  
(July 2009)

By sifting through the cultural meanings and political-economic contexts of Old Shanghai sites throughout the city, the "Western-ethnographer" figure documents nostalgia's socio-spatial arrangements and visual-display conventions: living-history heritage districts, cosmopolitan boutique enclaves, technologically-reproducible ruins, and an Old Shanghai cinematic theme park where behind-the-scenes documentation lays the groundwork for a feminized nativized spectacle of Chinese history. At times, she finds herself uncannily inscribed in the collective memory of Old Shanghai, thereby re-collecting the visual dimensions of her own practice as part of the heritage industry. Academic storyteller Svetlana Boym (2001: xviii and 80) suggests, "To unearth the fragments of nostalgia, one needs a dual **an** archaeology of memory and place;" "memory resides in moving, **an** traversing, cutting through place, taking detours."

# Old Shanghai Miscellany

# ~ Memory Lane Odds-n-Ends ~



old shanghai photo op.



"shanghai in old days" display in subway stop

SHANGHAI IN OLD DAYS

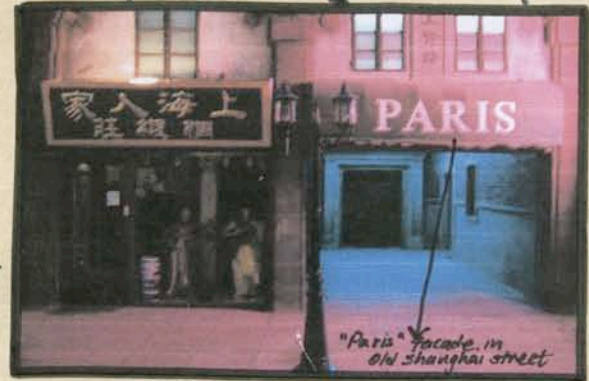
- ## Where?
1. Renmin Square subway interchange
  2. Grand Gateway Mall, upper floor
  3. SUPEH mezzanine
  4. Maoming St. qipaos and home decor
  5. Jinjiang historic hotel complex
  6. Every nook and cranny!



There are Old Shanghai Towns, Shanghai 1930s, Shanghai in Old Days, Shanghai a la Streets, Old Shanghai subway stops and themed mall walks, "Epitombed" Historic City Halls, Old Shanghai calendar collections and galleries and reading rooms, nostalgic restaurants and cafés, juicebar gimmicks, "Old" props everywhere foregrounding consumption and the good life, here, now...



"1930" photo op. and snack shop



"Paris" facade in old shanghai street



"1930" tea shop



"Shanghai a la Street" mall arcade



"1930" shopping street



## ~ Old Town Bric-a-brac ~



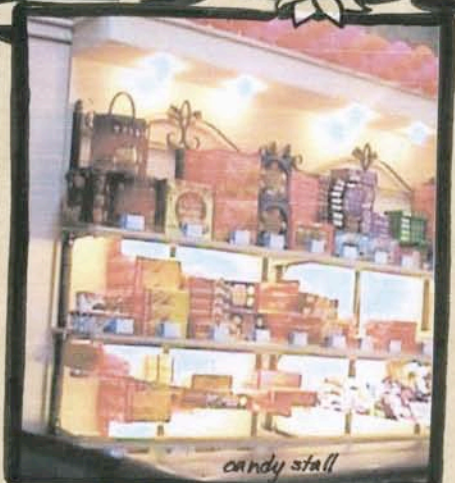
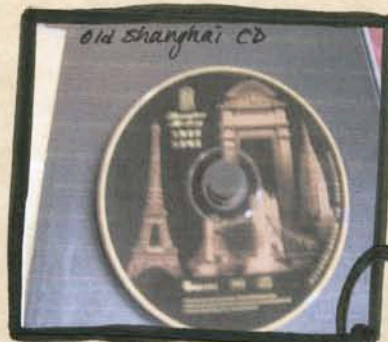
Just south of the Yuyuan Gardens and Oriental Bazaar in Nanshi district, I stumbled upon "Old Shanghai Street" (Fangbang Zhonglu) which simulates life in late-Qing and early-Republican eras. Packed with colorful curiosities, tea shops, and reproductions of 1930s bric-a-brac (such as Bing Crosby records and calendar girl pin-ups), the row of shophouses oozed with nostalgic ambience. Built in 1999, the old city attraction led to yet another attraction - Old Town - the former commercial and residential Chinese section of colonial Shanghai. Although brimming with life today, I found the run-down area billed as a living history museum, where foreigners may voyeuristically "walk into the past" and consume displays of "propinquity on the way."

### Old Shanghai Tea B



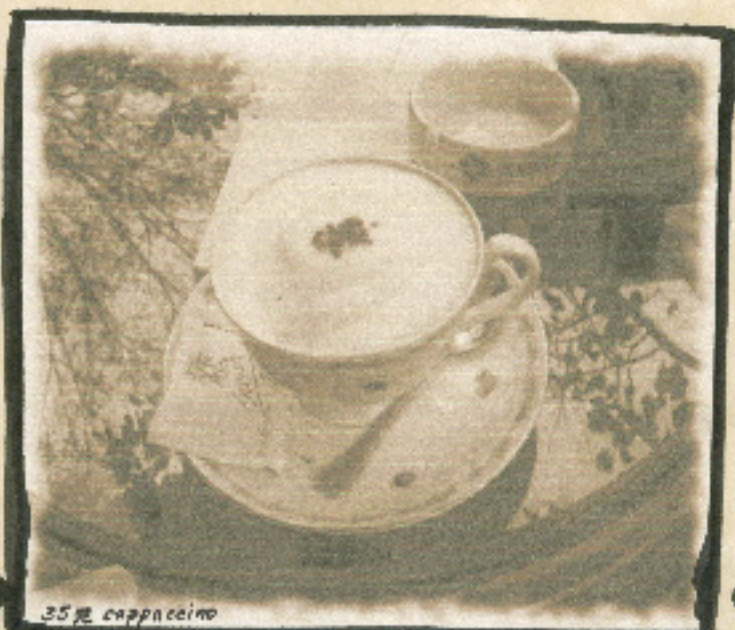
WALKING TOUR: Start at the Yuyuan Bazaar, exit south on Fangbang Zhonglu, follow Old Shanghai Street east toward Old Town and look for the remnants of the city's pre-colonial wall.

# ~ Sweet Ready-Mades ~



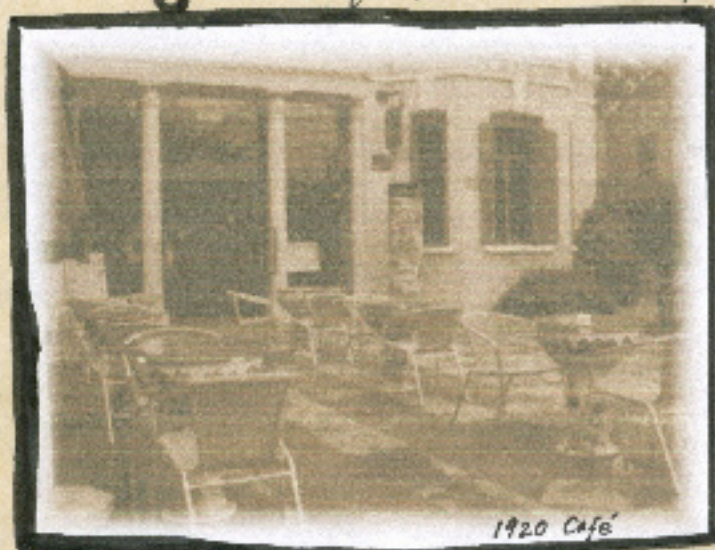
In the bottom ball of the Oriental Pearl TV Tower, just outside the exit of the Exhibition of Shanghai Urban Development History, is a large counter of colorful, assorted gift boxes full of sweet souvenirs that capture the attention of on-lookers. A tantalizing candy shop opens into view, brimming with delectable chocolates wrapped in images of 1930s fashion and "Shanghai History" liquors (vintage 1939 and 2001) accompanied by a free CD containing archival photos of Old Shanghai glamor. If you don't find satisfaction for your sweet tooth there, you can pick up a knick knack at one of the many gift kiosks around town: miniature statues of the Pearl TV Tower, keychains, and stuffed animals sold to you in front of historic Bund panoramas.

~ Coffee-Colored Daydreams ~



35元 cappuccino

In pursuit of Luxun Park and the Museum of Leftist Writers, I discovered a meandering old street of cafes and small shops. I sampled an expensive, foamy cappuccino and contemplated the texture of the street: 1930s calendar posters, old maps, tin time capsules, porcelain tables, movie star portraits, wicker chairs, qipao-adorned female statues, and antique furniture.



1920 Café



Old Film Café

I asked the elderly woman sitting on the bench next to me what she liked about the area. She replied, "the slow-paced outdoor leisure and time for contemplation."

WHERE?

Duolun Cultural Street  
Old Film Café  
1920 Café  
Nostalgia Restaurant



## Once Upon a Time

Shanghai's historical geography is not easily narrated. The three frames of a triptych best represent the city's vicissitudes: treaty port and quasi-colony; communist seedbed of revolution and radicalism; contemporary global city and hub of China's socialist market economy. Critic Ackbar Abbas describes this triple historical framework as being "made up of disparate elements producing a discontinuous, sometimes incoherent, narrative about a city haunted by the past and obsessed by the future, and often confused about which is which."<sup>1</sup> Shanghai, initially passed over during China's "open-door" efforts of the 1980s, emerged in the 1990s as the economic engine of the Yangzi River delta region as well as a national indicator of China's part in a global process. The city also surfaced as the central figure of a popular nostalgia that embellishes remembrance to assuage present anxiety over the speed of modernization through such notions as "destiny" and "discovery." The anticipated return of Shanghai skips over the recent socialist past to the city's pre-revolution era, legitimizing the present turmoil of society and synchronizing China with the growth of global capitalism. The city's pre-revolution past is taken to be convincing proof that modernization has always been an integral part of China's history and future.<sup>2</sup> A strategically-essentialized imperial past serves as a collective memory of the future, naturalizing the dramatic changes of the city's contemporary landscape of development. Whereas the representational violence and imperialist nostalgia of Western discourses of displacement lament vanished precolonial natives and spaces, Shanghai imperial nostalgia longs for the modern consumer and

fantasizes an historical-geography of the future global city unblemished by empire, former civilizing missions, or the contradictions of capitalism.<sup>3</sup>

Shanghai's history is what Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett would call a space of "cultural editing."<sup>4</sup> Out of the heap of cultural trash China has accumulated throughout the twentieth century, particularly after

the destructive whirlwind of the Cultural Revolution, bits of the past are re-collected in forms of urban heritage. An antiquarian sensibility oversees the process: a rupture in historical consciousness creates a sense of the past as distant and discontinuous, available to confiscate, imagine, and consume as one's own cultural other in the present.<sup>5</sup> From the dustbin of history, Old Shanghai conjures apparitions of an elegant bygone

### ~ Lost and Found ~

1

A remarkable event and collective memory of the future,  
Old Shanghai is the quintessential Renaissance City.

A revived exotic colonial port

A back-in-business Chinese metropolis

A glamorous nostalgic remake of a former imperial classic

A romantic excavation of the past,

foreshadowing an urban destiny of international brand  
Grand Old Shanghai cosmopolitanism

A "Once Upon a Time" more glamorous than Europe

Lost and Found

An archaeological discovery of Chinese History before the  
Revolution

An imagined future past recollected on the surface

dug up in heritage districts and living history museums  
trailed by ethnographic tourist ventures

An imperial identification with global synchronicity  
minus the scars of colonial history.

Play It Again Old Shanghai.

era of modernity and consumption.<sup>6</sup> The "once-upon-a-time" spell it casts upon the contemporary city summons the story of a fashionably-made-up Classic, a spectacle of commodity pleasure.<sup>7</sup> Multiple Old Shanghais, a panoply of scenes and cinematic projections, invoke the city's "return" to the global stage, settling over urban surfaces a thin patina of taste, cosmopolitan flavor, and material abundance ready for the (picture) taking. Shanghai's image is no longer one of an uncertain boom-or-bust treaty port teetering on the edge of a "dark continent" but one of a "lost-now-found" economic engine and commercial display cabinet, which lures on-lookers to consume sweet futures without material poverty or bitter history.

Old Shanghais reach out from every nook and cranny and invite people to enter secret chambers and seemingly private, phantasmagorical bourgeois interiors.

Old Shanghai scenes, relentlessly employed by city venues, attempt to stimulate and satiate the longing of residents to detour the busy, often chaotic reality of the city for the sideways glances of nostalgia and the meandering daydreams of the shopping bag.<sup>8</sup> Props and nostalgic backdrops lure on-lookers to step inside the commodity display, reflect their image as consumers (not producers—class relations are sequestered on the looking glass's other side), and experience a timeless, virtual freedom to consume an endlessly-fantastic commodity odyssey.<sup>9</sup> Old Shanghais entice, with reproducible, portable, pleasurable, and photo-inducing history scenes. They are "history as spectacle"—the commodity form—inhabitable as heritage attraction, old town, nostalgic interior, theatrical photo op., or snack shop.<sup>10</sup> Old Shanghais are mass-produced artifacts; they take the commodity for a walk. "Take a trip through history;" visit the past as a foreign country or sentimental village.<sup>11</sup> But be warned, most of the makeshift props do not last! Old Shanghai dioramas and aesthetic scenery decay and expire. Much like Walter Benjamin's characterization of fashion and the human-turned-mannequin corpse,<sup>12</sup> Old Shanghais are usually shoddily constructed and populated with hollow, easily-outdated retro objects.

"Grand Old Shanghai" still lifes do not hold still; consumer nostalgia has a short attention span.<sup>14</sup> Old Shanghais pop up and disappear into the city's basements and subterranean subways, back alleys and neighborhood outskirts, in addition to the usual showpieces for international eyes.<sup>15</sup> Old Shanghai decadent backdrops seep in and spread over, rising up in the cracks to supplement the homogenizing spaces and construction sites of the

## ~ Interiors ~

2

~~A dreamworld, Old Shanghai welcomes~~  
with its pleasurable and consensual character.  
A patina of "Orientalist Moderne" creates cocoon-like interiority,  
adding real estate value,  
aesthetic tradition,  
the taste and material trace of  
the transboundary cosmopolitanism of southern ~~China~~  
Sepia-toned scenes of "Paris of the East"  
provide ambience and  
perhaps an emotional antidote to the anxiety of the present.  
Imperial nostalgia is the hidden dream wish of the global city,  
projecting a postcolonial destiny of consumption,  
the good life,  
a promise of material abundance  
evidenced by the collected debris  
of an alternative modernity.

global city with cheap and showy odds and ends.<sup>16</sup> The thematic possibilities of Old Shanghai play an increasingly important role in the city's property development and placemarketing, organizing and commodifying urban space and insinuating cosmopolitan urbanism and distinction into public perceptions of Shanghai locally and internationally.<sup>17</sup> Tsung-yi Michelle Huang finds Old Shanghai representations inextricably linked to contemporary efforts to promote a global city:

The glory of Old Shanghai, a leitmotif in the urban discourse of Shanghai's global spatialization, is a powerful and convenient mirage produced by the new global space of the city. . . . The image of a phantasmagoric Old Shanghai . . . re-enchants the foreign investors and the local residents with a cosmopolitan past as not only a cultural heritage but also a foundation for a global city.<sup>18</sup>

Old Shanghai adds value, aligning historic preservation with real estate development to sell Shanghai as a unique destination to a burgeoning class of consumers and travelers.

Ann Anagnost offers a similar account of local efforts to expand the commodity economy through developing Old Streets and Old Towns, entire neighborhoods that emulate and commodify the antique, or aspects of an "earlier time." She states, "Old Towns have proliferated with bewildering speed in the last half-dozen years. They are something of a marketing phenomenon, one that cannot be fully explained in terms of satisfying the demands in international tourism for an authentic China rendered up for consumption."<sup>19</sup> The past is packaged in "antiquity quarters" scattered about modern urban space that offer experiences of local flavor and time travel. Although jarring reminders of the modern city constantly intrude on the dream landscape, Old Towns provide a sense of a local urban life in commodified form, paralleling the expansion of a market economy.<sup>20</sup> Old Towns and Old Shanghais do the same kind of work: they are marketplaces that sediment local diversity, color, flavor and "modern tradition," exciting the desire for a presocialist alternative modernity. According to Tim Oakes, "These spectacles of commodity consumption are at once a rejection of the socialist ARchitectural legacy, an invention of traditional Chinese urbanity and an affirmation of 'market Socialism' in which commodity exchange has seemingly replaced industrial production as the driver of history."<sup>21</sup> Socialism appears to be a brief rupture in a timeless urban heritage.

Old Shanghai heritage productions locate the cultural identity of the contemporary city in a timeless local urban cosmopolitanism, one that has transnational and/or transregional appeal. Rey Chow warns, "If nostalgia may be considered an alternative way of conjuring up a 'community' amid the ruthless fragmentation of postcoloniality, the continuity being conjured up is a mythic one."<sup>21</sup> Shanghai's nostalgia industry relies heavily on the legacy of the



transboundary past and present of southern China; the images, memories, trade routes, and networks of power and capital of a "transnational" urban

~ Gift Kiosk ~

3

The illusory spaces of "Once Upon a Time" stimulate desire and fill the vacuum of memory with endless delights:

A commodity odyssey of sweet ready-mades.

Every nook and cranny is potentially a display case,

a secret chamber,

a memory vault or detour,

a cavernous subway arcade,

a designed milieu.

Old Shanghai seep in and spread over the transition spaces of the

a relentless dispersal of symbolic enclosures

global city,  
and historical citations,

all touristic modes of consumption

enticing on-lookers to step inside the commodity display and  
travel to the past.

Take a walk down memory lane...

modernity initiated over a century ago continue to be cited, staged, performed, and toured today.<sup>23</sup> Cosmopolitanism serves as a cultural-economic development strategy. Old Shanghai nostalgia invokes the global city from the allegorical ruins of an aestheticized anaesthetized empire and the repressed memories of mercantile capitalism, in an era when Shanghai was the bustling "Port to the East." Old Shanghai, in

all its various forms, shows the global city, its pretensions of global grandeur, to be, in part, the trace and dream wish of imperial nostalgia. Old Shanghai suggest an emergent upwardly-mobile desire for global synchronicity and resonance with an "elsewhere" . . . a wish to transcend the nation-state and any trace of the cold, inhuman spectacle of China's history . . . an aspiration to set up a middle-class as the city's postcolonial colonizers . . . an identification with the international brand . . . the calming decorative certainty of back-lane local life minus the clutter of living reminders of struggle or poverty<sup>24</sup> . . . a yearning for regional flavor and cultural pluralization . . . desire for Old Shanghai cosmopolitan style as the foundation for a "Made in China" modernity.

~ Fieldwork Camouflage ~

A film about Shanghai in the 1930s was to be shot in the city's southwestern outskirts. The film would be the first entirely filmed on location in China, in conjunction with the Shanghai Film Studio. I was so curious about the sets and the cinematic joint venture that I enlisted as an ex-pat extra in November 2004. I was to don a Merchant-Ivory period costume and play the part of a Russian prostitute in 1937 Shanghai. As I had suspected, the making of the movie and the action behind-the-scenes turned out to be far more interesting than the story of "The White Countess." This work as an extra was grueling and unglamorous. But between my Sam's arrival and 11pm bus departure every day, I managed to excavate several important Old Shanghai archives.



THE WHITE COUNTESS

A little bit of Hollywood in Shanghai

Would you like to be an extra in "The White Countess", starring Ralph Fiennes, Natasha Richardson and Vanessa Redgrave? Please send information on age, height, weight, nationality and your photo (less than 100kb) to:

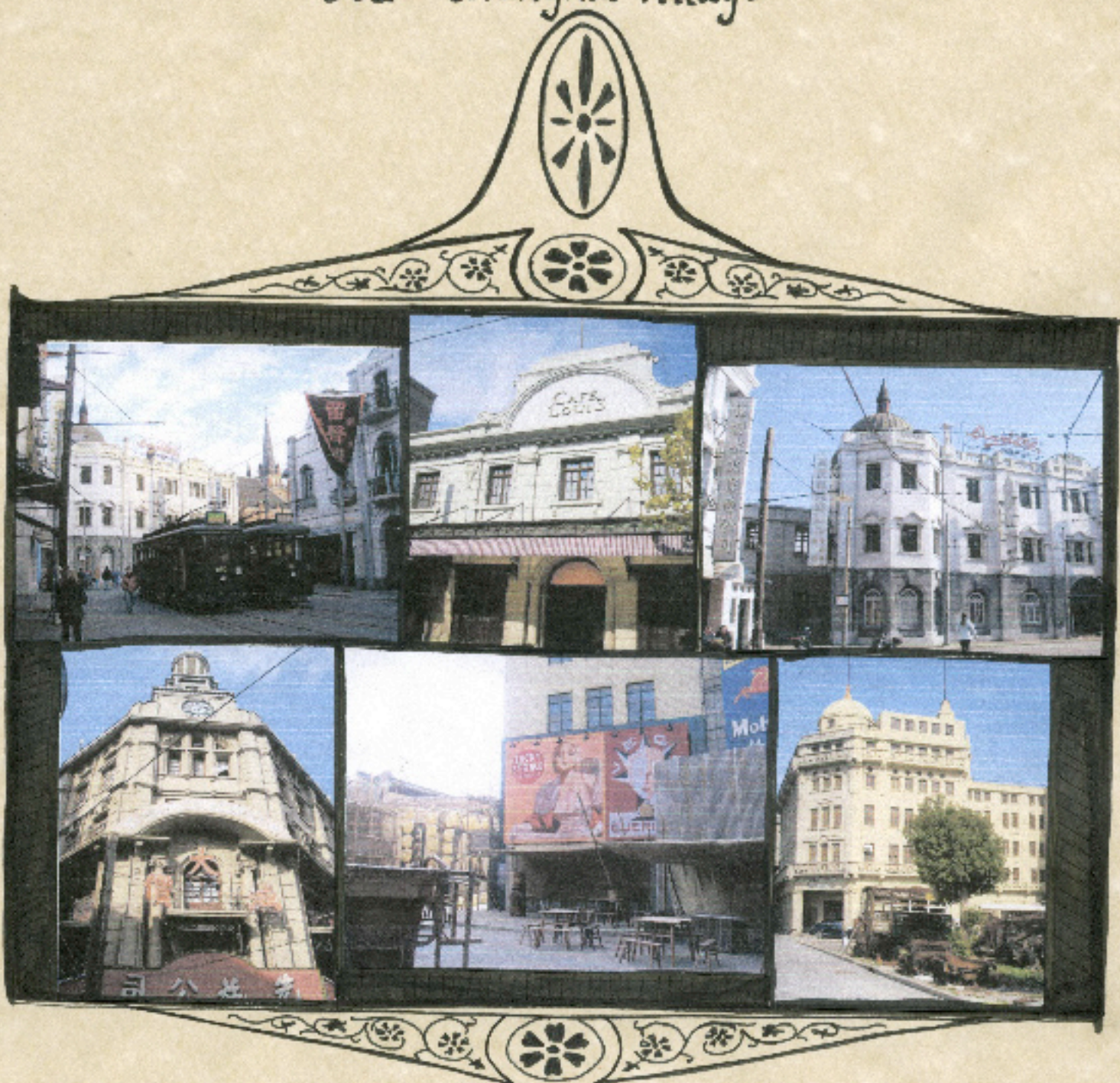
CASTING DEPARTMENT  
"The White Countess"  
Room 220, Shanghai Film Studios  
595 Cao Xi Road North, Shanghai 200030  
Voice Mail: (86) 1391-780-9511  
Email: whitecountess@163.com

上海

THE WHITE COUNTESS  
Merchant Ivory  
Productions (2005)  
c/o Shanghai Film Studio  
EXTRAS CASTING  
595 Cao Xi Road North  
Room 222 (shot in 2004)

SHANGHAI FILM STUDIO  
Shanghai Film and TV  
Shooting Base  
4915 N. Songgong Road  
Chedun Town  
Songjiang District

~ Old Shanghai Village ~



The sets were expansive and overwhelming. Compressed reproductions of famous colonial-era buildings and vernacular housing were collaged together into a movie-set theme park. Some were just facades, but the majority were soundstages with decorated interiors or film production wardrobes, makeup rooms, lounge areas for actors, exhibition spaces and storage facilities. I took the opportunity to tour and photograph the differently-themed spaces of the campus, such as the "European Gardens" and "Nanjing Road in the 1930s." Several other extras pointed out various theatrical spots in the giant jumble of architectural models where they had taken part in previous cinematic recreations of Old Shanghai. As I wandered around "town," I wondered if this theme village were a popular local attraction, a municipal special economic zone or both.

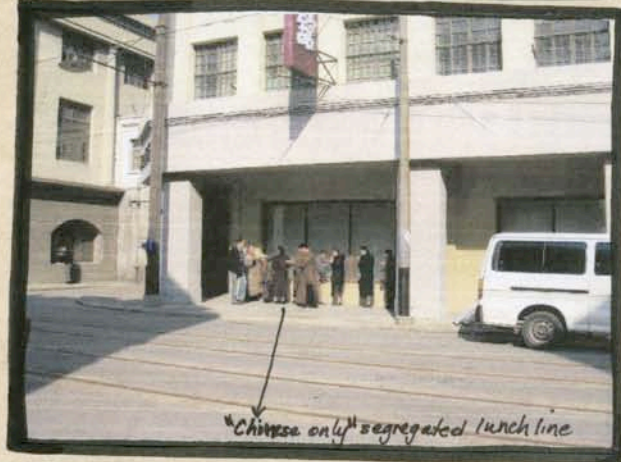
# ~ Old Shanghai Village ~



wardrobe room



map of Shanghai Film Park



"Chinese only" segregated lunch line



makeup room



"foreign actor" rest area



Inside one of the buildings on what I think was the "Downtown Shanghai in Old Times" set, female extras were given 1930s-era costumes. While waiting for my turn at the makeup line (where I was given a blonde Marilyn Monroe wig and green eyebrows on the first day!), I had to translate for Merchant-Ivory wardrobe staff, who could not speak any Chinese, and needed to explain certain things to the local tailors hired by the Shanghai Film Company. Things got tense when several Shanghai women extras enlisted the help of the tailors to alter their costumes and sew up the rips and holes. Other problem moments requiring impromptu translation included: foreign vegetarians unable to find anything to eat except in the segregated Chinese meal line; the confusion caused by a male Chinese-American extra who kept getting ushered over into the "Chinese meal line" and pay line; and behind-the-scenes animosity expressed toward several young Russian women who were treated as the "upper class" of the crew of extras for the "necessary authenticity" they provided the film, which centers around the Russian émigré population in pre-WWII Shanghai.

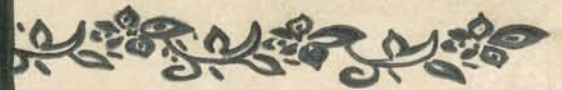


Shanghai Film Park Lunch Coffee Tea Film L. House

# ~ Colonial Mock-Up ~

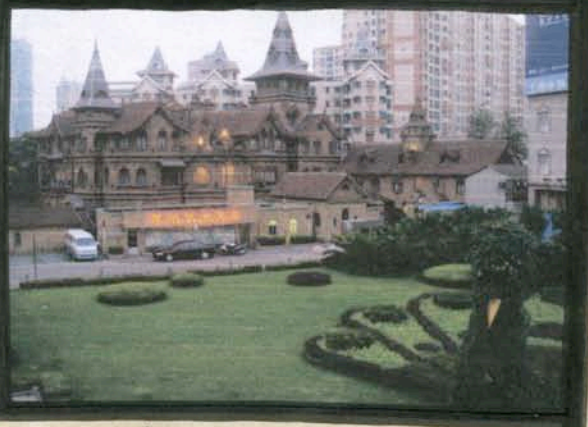


Can you tell which of these buildings was found on the Old Shanghai movie set and which was dug up in its original location in the city?



(above)  
Arts & Crafts Museum  
Found at:  
Fenyang Street

(right)  
Möller House  
Found at:  
Shaanxi Road



I talked with a man who worked at the Shanghai Film Park pulling tourists around the complex with a rickshaw. He said that although he was paid very little, he enjoyed watching movie production and sometimes doubled as an extra in Old Shanghai sets. He thought it would be really funny if we re-created a 1930s-era scene - but with me showing off my striped leg warmers. I was very hesitant to participate in this colonial representation, but he insisted it would be a good laugh. In retrospect, I wish I could have persuaded him to do a scene with me pulling him - this would have been a "mock-up" of his status as both an extra and a tour bus.



## *Ethnographic Joint Venture*

Nostalgia was once considered to be an ailment in philosophical and medical discourse; later, a yearning for childhood or the contemplation of human life's ephemerality. More recently, as Chow states, "Nostalgia now appears differently, working by a manipulation of temporality rather than by a simple projection of lack/loss onto space. If and when the past is to be (re)collected, it is (re)collected in compressed forms, forms that are fantasies of time."<sup>25</sup> These compressed forms are appealing because of their palpability, their concreteness. Their physicality materializes details of a different time that "become native witnesses and aboriginal evidences that fascinate and persuade the contemporary viewer."<sup>26</sup> The colors, architecture, décor, and decorum of "another time" orchestrate an ethnographic voyage facilitated by a romantic gaze that, in the process of socially detailing the past, turns the world into pictorial memories and curios.<sup>27</sup> The nostalgic traveler sets sail on a journey to an alternative time zone, allegorically shoring up memories of times past, viewing the ruins of Old Shanghai as shipwrecked souvenirs on a secret treasure map.

According to Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Increasingly, we travel to actual destinations to experience virtual places."<sup>28</sup> Yet dichotomizing the real and the virtual is too simplistic, as I experienced firsthand in my encounter with an Old Shanghai ethnographic village: the Shanghai Film and TV Shooting Base (hereafter referred to as the Shanghai Film Park). During that visit, I experienced and enacted the neocolonial relations involved in the global city's political economy. I slipped between the positions of anthropologist-tourist, digging up Old Shanghai scenes, and the street walker, a prostitute figure in a global production of China's history as feminized filmic spectacle.

In the fall of 2004, I took a bus fieldtrip to the Shanghai Film Park's sprawling campus of six film studios that produce an hallucinogenic vision of Shanghai's European architecture, Old Shanghai street scenes, and disappearing local housing styles. Located in Chedun Town in Songjiang County, the Shanghai Film Park is situated to the southwest of Shanghai along with the Qingdun Industrial Development zone, municipal-level Songjiang Industrial Zone (which features preferential corporate tax policies similar to those offered in the nearby national-level Pudong Development Zone), and the historic village attraction Songjiang Town (the northern part built in a British/European style; the southern part constructed in Ming/Qing-era designs). In an interesting historical reversal, Songjiang county once included Shanghai as part of Suzhou city; since 1998, however, it has been incorporated into Shanghai's fold as a district.<sup>29</sup> One of Shanghai's fast-developing "countryside" outskirts, this area is an amalgam of agriculture and small-scale industry, constant highway and road construction, universities and residences, short-lived theme parks and water worlds, science and technology parks, and industrial development zones that host international corporations (from Japan, U.S., Singapore, Taiwan, Malaysia, South Korea) involved in textiles, pharmaceuticals, tools, chemicals, plastics, steel

tubing, and other industrial products.<sup>30</sup> The approximately 20,000 square-meter Shanghai Film Studio is surrounded by this hodge-podge of scenic spots, infrastructural projects, and joint-venture environments.

The Shanghai Film Group Corporation built the theme park for "Old Shanghai sightseeing" and offers film/TV shooting and services, lease of equipment, costumes, and props as well as scene installation, actor recruitment, and joint management of the nearby Film and TV Apartments.<sup>31</sup> A myriad of studio scenery on different scales ranging from 1,800 to 576 square meters, resides on the site. There are exhibitions of historical costumes, from a collection of over 200,000 pieces, and displays of props, such as the automobiles of the first half of the 20th century.<sup>32</sup> The park also hosts weddings, banquets, and "Dream of Old Shanghai" theme parties that utilize the studio's sets to create a nostalgic, glamorous atmosphere. Visitors can tour the shooting of nostalgia films and TV shows that are booked year-round on the grounds, in the process transforming the behind-the-scenes into performances watched "up close." Tourists may observe soundstages, prop and costume warehouses, screening rooms, makeup and dressing rooms, and rest areas for actors when film/TV productions are in session.

An extensive number of films and TV shows have utilized the Shanghai Film Studio to produce stories and nostalgic images of Old Shanghai, including the Merchant Ivory production *THE WHITE COUNTESS* (2005) and the shooting of Hong Kong director Stanley Kwan's *EVERLASTING SORROW* (chang hen ge, 2005), an adaptation of a novel by well-known contemporary Shanghai author Wang Anyi, who textures her stories with the back lanes of Shanghai's famed rowhouses. Kwan has produced two previous nostalgia movies, *CENTER STAGE* (1992) and *RED ROSE, WHITE ROSE* (*HONG MEIGUI, BAI MEIGUI*, 1994), depicting an antique Shanghai in the 1920s and 1930s. Chow expands, "If cinema is an index to our contemporary culture at large, then the nostalgia we see in Chinese cinema may well be the episteme of Chinese cultural production in the 1980s and 1990s. Nostalgia links the otherwise diverse intellectual and artistic undertakings of the mainland, Taiwan, and Hong Kong."<sup>33</sup> The transboundary dynamic most visibly at work at the Shanghai Film Park is that of "nativizing" Shanghai and by extension

### ~ Field Trip ~

4

On the outskirts of town,  
a complex of Old Shanghai movie sets doubles as ethnographic theme park!

Visitors stroll behind-the-scenes of nostalgia filmmaking in staged displays of:

"Shanghai Traditional Houses"  
"Old Shanghai Bridge"  
"Nanjing Road in the 1930s"  
"European Gardens."

A special economic zone of joint-venture movie making, off-shored Hollywood, Merchant-Ivory, and Hong Kong-based Old Shanghai productions captivate many locals to give native authenticity to the set, often for free.

A spectator-ethnographer might find herself inscribed as a streetwalker in the feminized spectacle of the Chinese history movie sets, the visual dimensions of her own practice now part of the spectacular articulation of modernity, and its reproducible, portable, pleasurable, photo-inducing history scenes.

Like anthropological tourism villages in world's fairs past, the Shanghai Film Park produces a colonial "past living in the present" effect, where a rickshaw puller can be both

an extra  
and  
a tour bus.

mainland China.<sup>34</sup> The park solidifies displays of the past as a theme village inhabited by present-day Chinese people for the purposes of transnational joint-venture nostalgic filmmaking.

The Shanghai Film Park is akin to the ethnographic villages exhibited at world fairs of the past. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett elaborates, "Cultural precincts have a long history. Model villages, open-air museums, and theme parks are the legacy of foreign villages at international expositions in the nineteenth century."<sup>35</sup> The relations that produce the films are neocolonial. The Shanghai Film Group works with other international filmmakers to produce mythic images that rely on Shanghai and mainland Chinese people as backdrop natives on display that give the film authenticity and a reduced budget, since "natives" don't need payment to be themselves or, at most, are given only a fraction of what foreign actors are paid. Chow makes similar remarks with regard to the production of the film *THE LAST EMPEROR* (1987), "The repeated emphases on the 'international' nature of the film's production can HARDLY disguise the fact that what appear on screen are mostly what would be identified as 'Chinese' faces enacting a 'Chinese' story/history. My point is not that Hollywood's neglect of the Chinese actors and actresses is a sign of racial discrimination tout court; rather, that in this failure to give equal recognition to the film's acting lies perhaps a confusion of the players with what they play."<sup>36</sup> By Hollywood's account, "the Chinese" are not actors making the movie and playing fictional roles; rather, they are natives to be captured on film.

I observed this repeatedly while working as an extra for *THE WHITE COUNTESS*, lauded as the first "Western" film to be entirely shot in China. The film, a joint production of the Shanghai Film Group Corporation and Merchant Ivory Productions, is set in 1937 Shanghai and focuses on the lives of a disillusioned, blind American diplomat and a former Russian countess and her family, who were forced to emigrate from Russia to Shanghai after the October revolution. As an extra, I played the part of a Russian émigré prostitute and dance hall girl. My experience on set bore witness to a relentless display of xenophobic "national character," labor exploitation, and racialized segregation. The extras were divided into two camps: "Chinese" and "Western/white ex-patriots" (a Chinese-American extra constantly confused these racialized, residually colonial categories, as did anyone else of non-mainland Chinese descent). We had separate rest areas and breakfast/lunch/dinner lines. Meals attempted to provide for the different "taste" of their recipients and were highly segregated: chopsticks and Chinese cuisine for Chinese nationals, and forks, bread, and pasta for the Westerners. Such displays of East/West stereotypes, even extended to beverages: coffee for foreigners, tea for local Chinese. I created quite a stir by attempting to procure an orange from the Chinese line, as did the Westerner vegetarians who preferred the generous non-meat portions of the Chinese meals. The segregation of the film's shooting worked as an extension of the colonial scenes depicted on set, establishing a racialized "fault line"



that attempted to maintain order by collapsing filmic image with the film's production and naturalizing these social relations as part of the massive anthropological-touristic outdoor village. In my attempts to "cross the line" and talk with Shanghainese extras during the long hours of waiting between scenes, I was frequently told to "stay in character" and get back to "my group."<sup>37</sup> Ironically, on-set film scenes provided better opportunities to find out about the political economy fueling the entire enterprise. According to one man from Jiangsu province with whom I spoke during the filming of an extended bar scene, he was paid less than one-tenth of what I received, putting him at around \$8 U.S. per day (15-18 hours). He said it was worth it in order to be on set for a major film. I also discovered while working on set that peasants from the countryside were enlisted to "play themselves" in scenes depicting the chaotic evacuation of the city during the bombings by Japan. The film's Old Shanghai production created a virtually portable ethnographic theme village.

By the end of my participation in the film's shooting, I even felt like my own labor had been exploited, though by no means to the level experienced by local extras. On many occasions I had to provide impromptu translation services not remunerated or incorporated into the film's formal budget. In the costume department, so renowned and admired in the period films of Merchant Ivory Productions, I intervened on several occasions to clear up confused and hostile exchanges between Merchant-Ivory staff and Shanghainese female extras. After these experiences and more, it was obvious that the "joint venture" only worked out in practice through unscripted translation performances, particularly that of the invaluable fluent Chinese of Australian cameraman Chris Doyle and the bilingual skills of several local Chinese actors, film hands from Hong Kong, and a few foreign extras.

At first I entertained the idea that I could remain distant from the neocolonial relations I saw at work, positioning myself as the academic-archaeologist behind the camera lens producing social documentary (the costume serving as camouflage). However, I quickly became aware of my presence as complicit in the joint venture apparatus and complementary to the spectacle of the ethnographic theme village. An impromptu behind-the-scenes translator, I performed as "mouthpiece" for the nostalgia film industry and perpetuated the historical colonial relations of the political economy of the global media. My participation as an extra onset embroided me in even more confusing ways. As a street walker figure, I served as part of the exotic, hyper-sexualized backdrop for the film's story, ironically about an American diplomat-turned entrepreneur who "saves" a former Countess from the misery of prostitution in a city where historically, by 1934, one person in 130 was a prostitute.<sup>38</sup> I became a part of the feminized spectacle of Old Shanghai and the cinematic grounds for the nostalgia industry. My off-set antics as a disgruntled, beleaguered extra were an attempt to reject this orientalism, whereas my observer-archaeological figure facilitated the racialized, gendered labor relations and stereotypes undergirding my tourism of the film production.

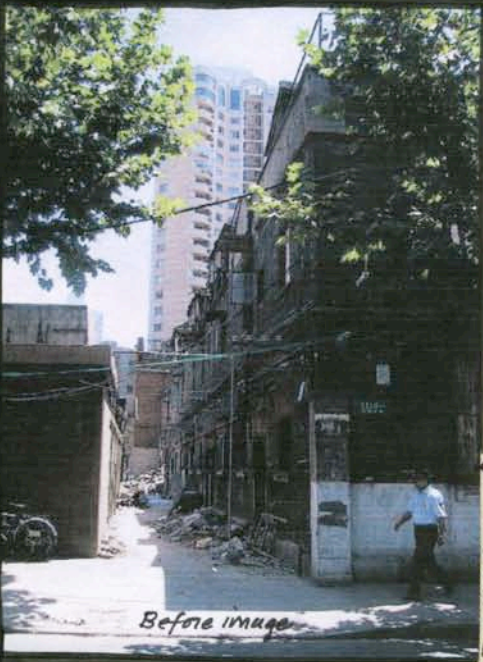
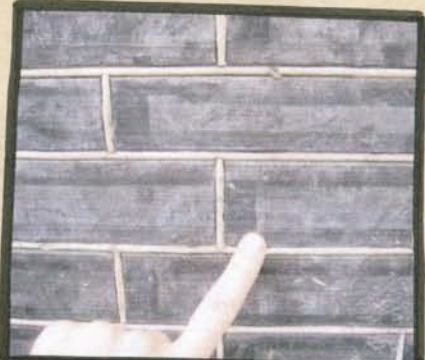
THE WHITE COUNTESS would not have been possible without the assistance of the Shanghai Film Group which, as co-producer, obtained visas for foreign actors on short notice, provided full use of the movie sets in Songjiang, and found locals to inhabit the set as "natives" of the past. The partnership significantly reduced the cost of the picture from \$30 million to \$16 million by utilizing Chinese crews and local extras for a fraction of the pay. This is an increasingly common strategy in a number of global industries. In this case, foreign film studios set up joint ventures with local film companies, hire skilled Chinese crews, and enlist local actors and eager ex-pats for an overall production cost of half to one-fourth of what it would cost to make in the U.S.<sup>39</sup> The critical-cultural "watchdog" web site on the Chinese media, called DANWEI, traces this trend to Quentin Tarantino's KILL BILL movies, which saved enough money filming around Beijing to extend the project into a two-part series.<sup>40</sup> An ever-expanding list of films follows suit.

Not only do these filmic joint ventures save the money of foreign studios, they also ensure exemption from China's quota system, which limits the screening and distribution of foreign films to twenty per year.<sup>41</sup> However, this loophole in distribution does not necessarily ensure that China's domestic market will avidly consume these films. Movies that use Shanghai sets to attempt to evoke a "nostalgic feeling" or to serve merely as a backdrop for any movie typically exhibit little awareness of the contemporary city and the lives of local audiences.<sup>42</sup> Such films fetishize authenticity and confuse the significantly-reduced cost of filming in China with the artistic clout and craft of low-budget "indie" filmmaking.<sup>43</sup> The Shanghai Film Studio encourages such partnerships and considers them a shortcut for China's film industry to attain a more professional standard, not to mention a profit. It does so, however, by sponsoring and maintaining a "native Chinese" class of laborers and an Old Shanghai cultural enclosure that extends beyond the campus of the film park.

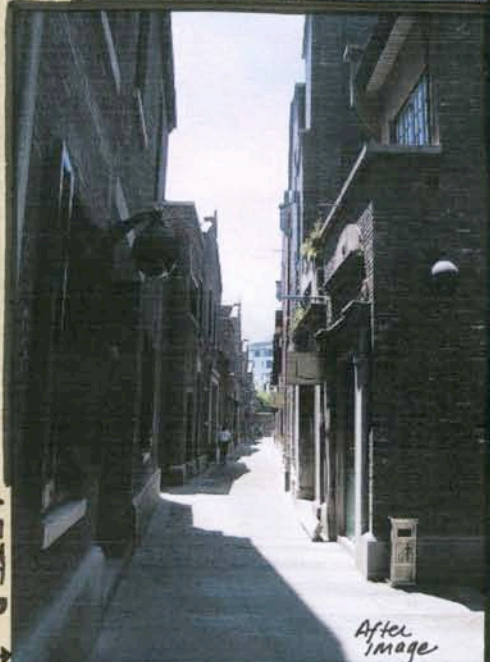
Joint-venture film production is a burgeoning field in China, due to the loosening of state regulations and growing domestic market. The Songjiang-based Shanghai Film Park will continue to host such projects increasingly, year-round and around-the-clock.<sup>44</sup> While a few scenes of THE WHITE COUNTESS were filmed at the Bund, Shanghai's historic waterfront, and in city neighborhoods, James Ivory utilized the Shanghai Film Park for much of the movie's setting, although there is no mention of this nor the partnership with the Shanghai Film Group in the DVD's commentary "Making of THE WHITE COUNTESS" (one is led to believe that Merchant Ivory Productions built all of the sets). Ivory describes why an "impressionistic" approach to Old Shanghai was necessary, "It is nothing like shooting in Paris, or even in places like India, where you could exactly evoke the past. The physical world you need to evoke the old Shanghai just isn't available to us anymore. Whenever you pick up the camera, you immediately see things looming up that didn't exist before."<sup>45</sup> As film productions retreat to the cultural enclosure of the Shanghai Film Park, avoiding the dynamically-shifting horizon of present-day Shanghai, the contemporary city wrestles with a novel kind of special economic zone, where foreign capital works by way of the nativizing performance and compressed space-time of an Old Shanghai theme village.



Xintiandi ("New Heaven and Earth")  
 Near the Huangpi Nanlu subway station and Huaihai Zhonglu  
 There are also replicas in other cities: try Hangzhou's Xihu Tiandi ("West Lake Heaven Earth")



Before image



After image

BEFORE → **Retrofitting** ← AFTER



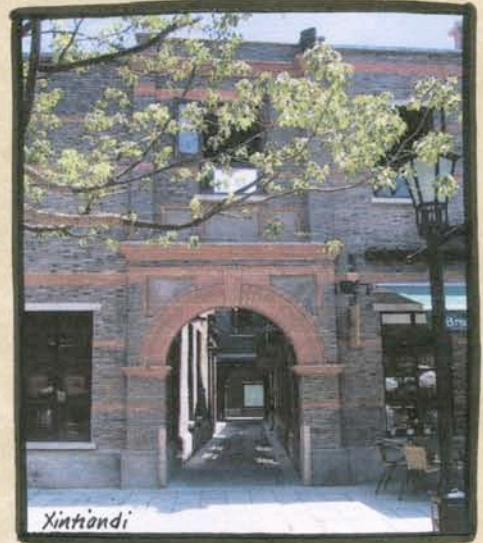
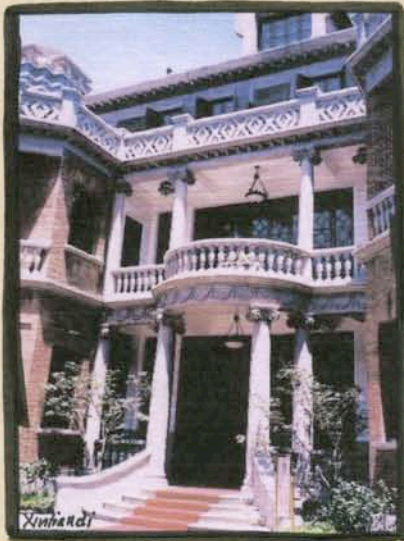
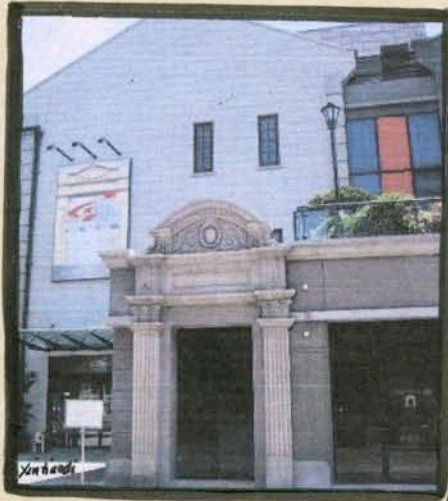
shikumen in new arcade

Prime downtown land was given by the Luwan district to Hong Kong's Shui On Group for redevelopment, provided they tastefully preserve the old meeting hall of the First Communist Party. An ordinary if run-down neighborhood of longtang housing, unique to Shanghai's colonial period, is now "retrofitted" and the residents moved off-site. Nearly all is replaced but some of the decorative shikumen stone arches, which provide a quaint feel to modern buildings erected in place of former residences.



Xintiandi

# ~ Pressed Flowers ~

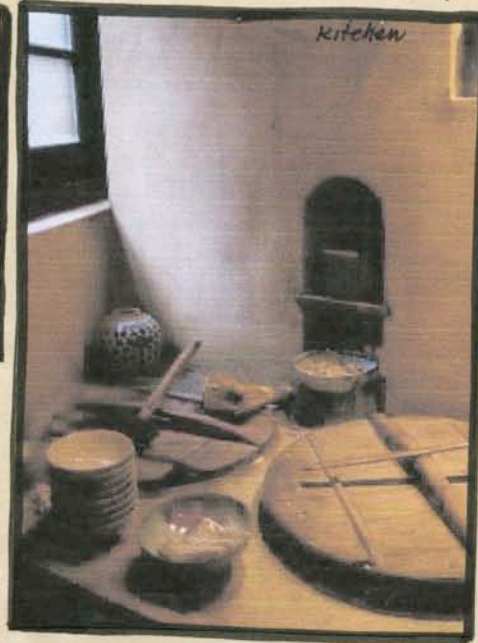


# ~ Living History Diorama ~

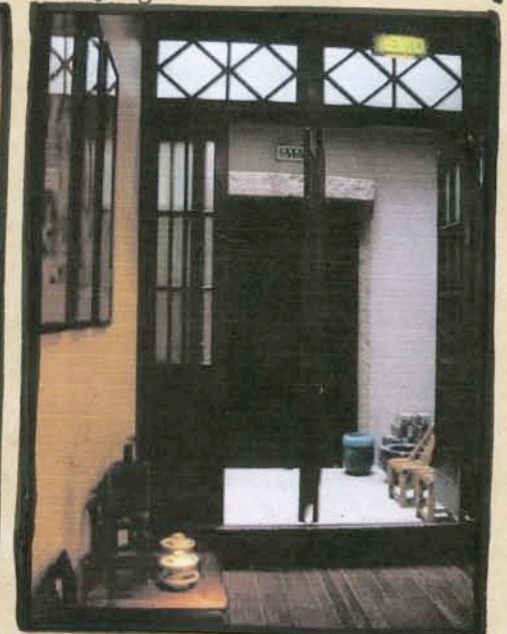
A full-sized replica of a longtang rowhouse is tucked inside one of the boutique alleys of Xintiandi for public display. Laid out on three floors, "Life in the old days" unfolds. Displayed objects romantically suggest a typical Chinese family (grandmother, married couple, and children) plus a boarder whose room has the aura of a struggling writer.



entry to Xintiandi "Home Museum"



Kitchen



"Life in the old days"



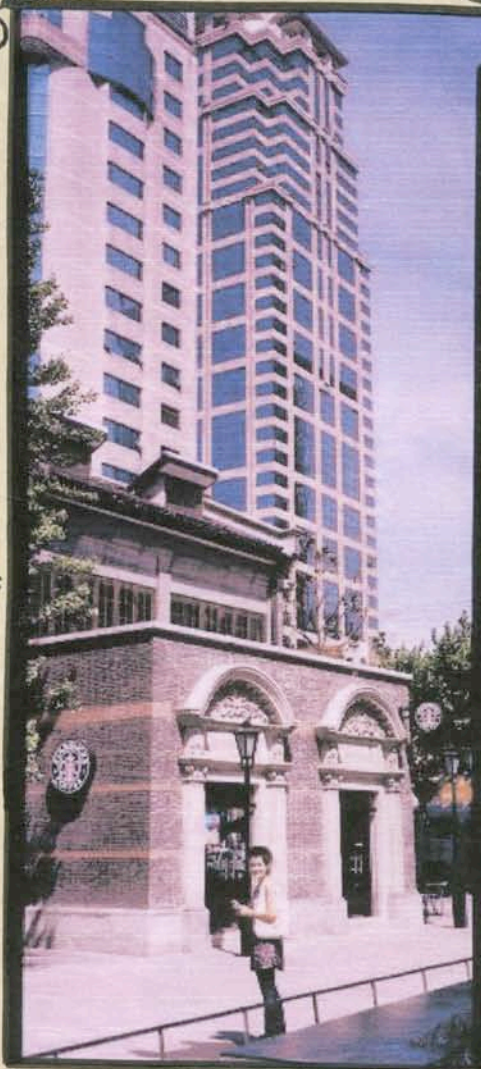
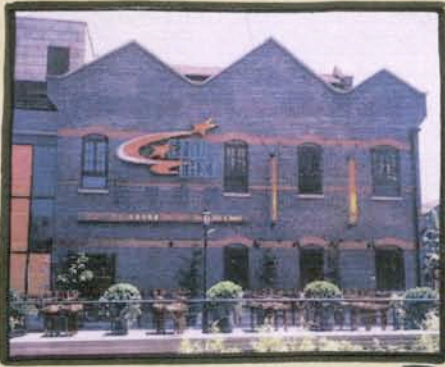
writer's desk



"[The antiquarian] search is primarily an aesthetic one, an attempt to erase the actual past in order to create an imagined past which is available for consumption." S. Stewart (1999)

The antique veneer of the Longtang replica travels outside Xintiandi's borders, making the surrounding crumbling neighborhood a kind of living history museum, an Old Shanghai ruin, a mythical past stuck in the present.

# Classic Brand



Xintiandi is an upscale market of international style: Jackie Chan's Star East Bistro, Starbucks, Vidal Sassoon, a luxurious athletic club, trendy restaurants and boutiques such as Shanghai Tang which features retro fashions and "Chinese Classic" interior designs from Hong Kong. There is even a model miniature of the development project, the ultimate portable brand.

In Xintiandi, I overheard a businessman criticize several foreign tourists: "Foreigners are as clueless as peasants." Such cosmopolitan identification mirrors the shopping district's relentless display of brands. Shui On's logo is visible on every surface; the shikumen style lanes are exported around China too. Xintiandi now boasts its own wine, bottled in France and labeled with the famous stone arch.



## *Museum of Lifestyle*

The heritage district aestheticizes whole neighborhoods, turning the old and decrepit or backward and outdated into places of "living history," purchasable commodities of cultural distinction.<sup>46</sup> Recoding space as time, "where time stands still or the past lives on," the remains of the past are packaged as shopping containers, museum walk-in dioramas, and lucid spaces of tourism and corporate branding.<sup>47</sup> Given new life as exhibitions of themselves, their complexities of life washed out, the remains of the past become "a new marketplace for architectural styles and fashionable lives. . . . Images become aestheticized commodities representing livable cities for sale, placing products in lifestyle stage sets, turning museum exhibitions and cultural entertainments into events for corporate enhancement."<sup>48</sup> Whether in forms that improve on the original and "fake up" the old to be more palatable in the present or in spectacles of the everyday that exhibit ethnographic enthusiasm for the "authentic" details of the commonplace, the living history hawked by heritage projects "tells us as much about the present as it does about the past. In the spirit of the age—the here-and-now—it is centrally concerned not with politics or economics, the subjects of yesteryear's grand narratives . . . but essentially with that great preoccupation of the 'Me' generation: lifestyles. It privileges the private over the public sphere."<sup>49</sup>

Representing a shift away from the gigantic and the monumental to the local, regional, and domestic, Shanghai's Xintiandi (meaning "New Heaven and Earth") district rediscovers the "quaint and picturesque simple life" of the back lanes of the city's former housing in an upscale marketplace, often compared to New York's South Street Seaport and Boston's Quincy Market/Faneuil Hall Marketplace.<sup>50</sup> Located in the heart of the fifty-two-hectare mixed-use Taipingqiao redevelopment project in the Luwan district of downtown Shanghai (near Huaihai Zhonglu and Huangpi Nanlu metro station), Xintiandi stages an idyllic past designed for cosmopolitan and international ambiance using imitative reconstructions combined with actual ruins of SHIKUMEN residences unique to Shanghai's history. These two-to-three-story rowhouses, which date back to the 1860s and at one point constituted nearly sixty percent of Shanghai's housing, were originally constructed for the expanding population taking refuge in Shanghai's foreign concessions. The residences, built along narrow alleyways (hence the name LONGTANG houses) with carved stone archways (SHIKUMEN in Chinese) leading to interior courtyards, are famous for combining "East" and "West" design elements, giving the Chinese homes "a Parisian sensibility."<sup>51</sup> They decayed dramatically due to neglect during the socialist period, and the government took the opportunity to move people out of dense inner-city areas, relocating them to large high-rises in the outskirts of town to redevelop the land for commercial use.<sup>52</sup> In most cases this has destroyed what historic housing was present. However, the Shui On Group, in charge of demolishing existing structures around Huaihai Zhonglu for new entertainment centers, corporate buildings, and luxury high-rises has added "Historic Preservation District" and cultural tourism to its list. According to Vincent H. S. Lo, Chairman of the Shui On Group, "today, many of Shanghai's oldshikumen neighborhoods have been ploughed under, in the face of modernization, and we hope that

Shanghai Xintiandi will allow visitors to pause and contemplate the city's history amidst its rapid development."<sup>53</sup>

The "cultural turn" of urban planning and real estate development hinges on cultural "flash" as the key to attracting mobile investment and talent. Li Zhang states:

It has been widely observed that in places like Shanghai and Beijing some cultural-historical sites have become the prime target for gentrification and the developers are quick to exploit the symbolic capital of heritage. Rather than destroying the old structures and neighborhoods, such renewal efforts aim to remodel the old to suit the needs and tastes of a small group of the cash-rich upper-middle class that seeks prestige and distinction.<sup>54</sup>

This gentrification tale is a familiar story; original residents are displaced by the new rich at Xintiandi. The protection of heritage sites makes "living history" the preserve of the affluent. "The selected aspect of history," according to geographer You-tien Hsing, "is a symbol of prestige and social status with a price tag."<sup>55</sup> Xintiandi also demonstrates the collusion of Shanghai's Luwan district government with Hong Kong-based Shui On in modernizing old areas of the urban core considered to be "plagued" by high residential density, unsafe structures, and inadequate facilities.<sup>56</sup> Hsing contextualizes this: "Under the banner of improving the

### ~ The Old Days ~

5

Now as never before seen!

Old Shanghai designs retrofit ordinary Shanghai neighborhoods, producing "quaint" local flavor out of the everyday rock materials of inner-city residential life.

Delicate stone arches  
alleyways and  
colonial-era rowhouses

become instant city ruins  
preserved behind glass or wedged into the brickwork of  
new buildings

folded into fashionable arcades or torn down and reconstructed  
as retro chic replicas,

evacuating whole streets of people to  
develop a fancy "Old Days" shopping retreat.

Nostalgia walks hand in hand with capitalism.

living environment for residents and modernizing the city, municipal governments across China have launched massive urban redevelopment projects in urban core areas since the early 1990s. They have established their own land development companies, and/or used land as equity shares to partner with commercial developers in undertaking such projects."<sup>57</sup> The zone demarcated for the Xintiandi development, in the process of

demolishing old urban structures, installs the spatial and sociopolitical authority of district-level management to formulate land use and development plans (powers delegated by the municipal government). Hsing elaborates, "The district governments are allowed to retain as much as 85% of the total revenue from land base sales. As a result, district leaders have embarked on ambitious projects of turning old neighborhoods into new commercial complexes."<sup>58</sup> In the case of Xintiandi, branding is central to the success of this process. Materials I obtained on site set up



Xintiandi as an icon among worldly others, like New York's Statue of Liberty and London's Westminster, and boast that the district is the richest in Shanghai. An English-language brochure adds that Xintiandi is a "brand laboratory" that has invented a distinct district-based cosmopolitan style.

Shui On employed Benjamin Wood of Wood and Zapata Inc., a Boston-based architectural firm specializing in adaptive re-use of old buildings as festival marketplaces, to oversee the \$170 million restoration of versions of shikumen houses that preserve the character of the neighborhood in an overall balance of local-flavor theme park and upscale shopping mall. The Singapore office of Nikken Sekkei International Ltd. and Shanghai's Tongji University Urban Planning, Design and Research Institute were also involved in the multinational redevelopment project. The heritage district is arranged along a two-block pedestrian street, incorporating constructions that imitate the grey-brick houses the development replaced. Existing rowhouses were by and large torn down and replaced with synthetic alleyways and "cleaner," more "orderly" buildings, reconstructed from old design drawings. Original bricks and tiles, doorways, and lintels were sometimes preserved along with the shikumen stone archways, which, like pressed flowers, can now be found sandwiched between newly-constructed modern buildings or behind glass storefronts to inspire reminiscence and nostalgia.

More than two-thousand families were relocated in order to renovate the area, including thirty families housed in a large mansion that has now been restored to a clubhouse, complete with a conference center and exclusive private dining rooms.<sup>59</sup> The whole development has rapidly increased the value of the surrounding land, and the heritage district continues to expand. Shui On's logo, a red-painted arch shaped like that of the shikumen, is visible on every construction wall that cloisters the soon-to-disappear grey rowhouses still standing across the street from Xintiandi. The district has become a verb; "to xintiandi" means to make modern facilities appear antique with old decorative elements or to make historic residential neighborhoods aestheticized, hygienic living history museums.<sup>60</sup>

Xintiandi has gutted the existing neighborhood housing, tearing down exterior walls and any interiors to "retrofit" the selected remnants of local detail into reconstructed stylish tableaux vivants and inhabitable dioramas, where on-lookers are invited to walk-in, take a look, and shop around. Raphael Samuel characterizes this practice, "The idea of the 'period' shopping street—the inspiration of today's market shopping precincts, as well as a great visitor attraction at the open-air museums and theme parks—was born in the museum world."<sup>61</sup> Similarly, M. Christine Boyer states, "Like statues and paintings torn from their original location in palaces and churches and then placed within the guarded walls of a museum, these restored city streets and districts turned parts of the city into new visual spectacles and revitalized theatrical decors."<sup>62</sup> Xintiandi monumentalizes the historically domestic while going about slum clearance. An ethnographic bell jar seems to have dropped over the neighborhood of Xintiandi. The terrain is undergoing dissection as a "living museum in situ;" "the

museum effect, rendering the quotidian spectacular, becomes ubiquitous."<sup>63</sup> Residents are moved out, but the traces of their former lives become images of "local life" while model reconstructions are put back in place in the tradition of the period room and zoological display.

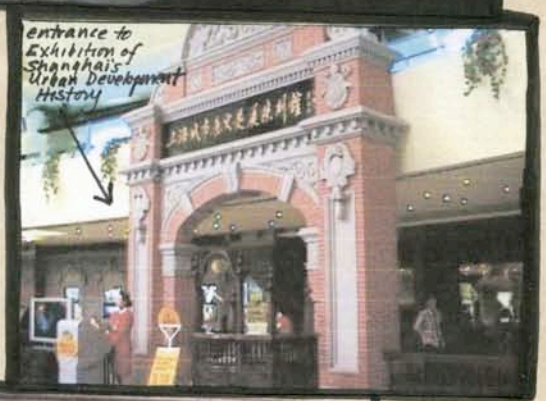
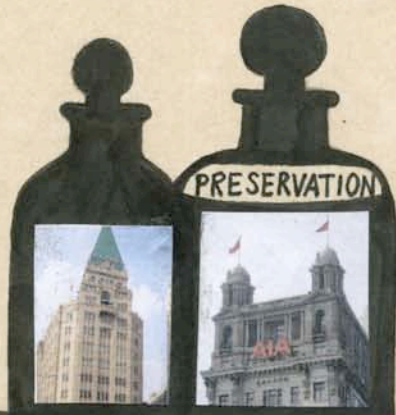
A completely-reconstructed three-story longtang home with antique objects exhibiting information in a layout of intimate rooms is tucked into a Xintiandi shopping lane. This "home museum" functions as a showcase of the antique, the kind of personalized/humanized marketing mechanism of commodities one can see on sale in Xintiandi's retrochic stores. Its interior narrative climaxes in an attic archive about the making of Xintiandi and its unique architectural style. There are maps and photos of the reconstruction effort and the brickwork involved in recreating the shikumen lanes. Samuel describes the role of brickwork in the heritage industry as proof of authenticity; it "gives an air of dignity to new developments, masks fast-track methods of construction with a patina of rusticity."<sup>64</sup> When old bricks were not used in recreating Xintiandi's shikumen lanes lined with boutiques and restaurants, new ones were distressed to look old or painted to give the impression. During one visit to Xintiandi, I happened upon a man painting the edges of the bricks black for an antiqued look. Providing an imaginary pedigree and cultural distinction, brickwork is "the nether side of comprehensive clearance and development."<sup>65</sup>

Xintiandi is a trademarked style that is being replicated throughout China. There is already a Xintiandi at Hangzhou's famous West Lake resort area, named "Xihu Tiandi" ("West Lake Heaven and Earth"). Another portable brand, a miniature model of an historical longtang rowhouse may be purchased at Xintiandi's museum store. Susan Stewart states that the "consumerism of the miniature is the consumerism of the classic."<sup>66</sup> Although Xintiandi is already in danger of becoming a Disneyfied cliché, architecture and urban planning audiences abroad recognize the development as a classic; for example, the North Block of Xintiandi was awarded the Urban Land Institute's Award for Excellence in 2003 for superior design, economic success, and progressive use of the past to highlight the city's future.<sup>67</sup> The first project located in mainland China ever to receive this distinction, Xintiandi entrenches designer-led consumerism with its own architectural simulation of the international brand. Crowds of foreigners and local members of China's elite professional class visit Xintiandi's hub of exclusive names (including Jackie Chan's "planet Hong Kong" Star East, Christian Dior, Comme des Garçons, and Vidal Sassoon) to consume and indulge the life of the international brand. Xintiandi is a symbolic enclosure of urban cosmopolitanism and transboundary nostalgia and a favorite stop for visitors from the East and Southeast Asia region, particularly Hong Kong and Singapore. Xintiandi is imperial nostalgia par excellence; it incites among the local middle- and upper-classes a fervent desire to consume name brands that extend beyond the nation-state, colonizing the city with their international elite taste.

All of this would not have been possible without the aesthetic management of the municipal government and the Chinese Communist

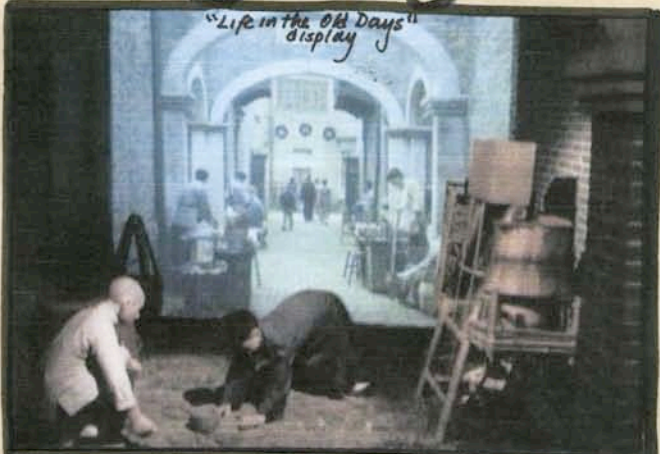
Party (CCP). The Shui On Group was granted the rights to develop 128-acres of downtown land contingent upon the preservation of the birth place of the CCP, under state protection. At No. 76-78 Xingye Road, in the middle of Xintiandi, dividing it into North and South Blocks, stand two simple houses with stone-framed gates. It was here on July 23, 1921 that the first meeting of the Party convened in a sitting room on the ground floor. The now-renovated buildings chronicle the Party's genesis (and Mao Zedong's attendance) in a small museum of period furniture replicas, wax figures, and displays of precious documents. The municipal government stipulated that a tasteful restoration of the site had to be performed, one that would avoid the garish commercialism of so many of Shanghai's new developments.<sup>68</sup> Xintiandi carries on the tradition of the vanguard: the ruins of the vanguard Party now sit dead-center in the middle of Shanghai's vanguard of taste.

# ~ Preserved Specimens ~



THIS BOUNDARY STONE HAS BEEN OFFICIALLY FIXED BY A JOINT COMMISSION, CONSISTING OF THE SHANGHAI MAGISTRATE, THE MIXED COURT MAGISTRATE, THE CITY AND COUNTRY COMMITTEES, ACTING UNDER INSTRUCTIONS OF THE HIGHER AUTHORITIES, TOGETHER WITH THE UNITED STATES VICE CONSUL-GENERAL REPRESENTING THE CONSULAR BODY, AND THE MUNICIPAL ENGINEER AND ASSISTANT

~ Storage Closet ~



"Life in the Old Days" display



"Take a Walk Down Memory Lane" Super impositors photo op.

Shanghai Municipal History Museum  
Hongqiao Rd.  
LEASE LOST - CLOSED UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE  
The museum's artifacts are stored in a warehouse in Pudong awaiting excavation. A few are on display at the Pudong Pearl TV Tower's "Exhibition of Shanghai's Urban Development History."



models

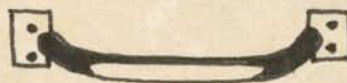
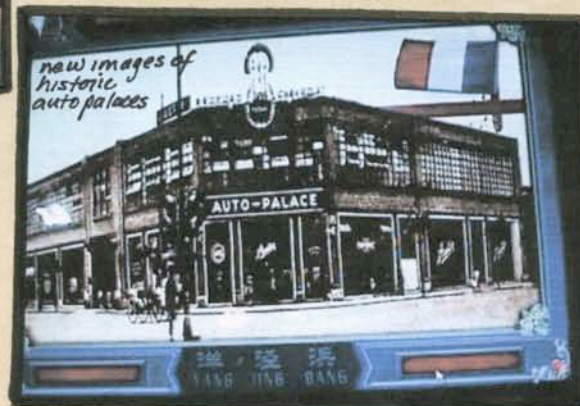
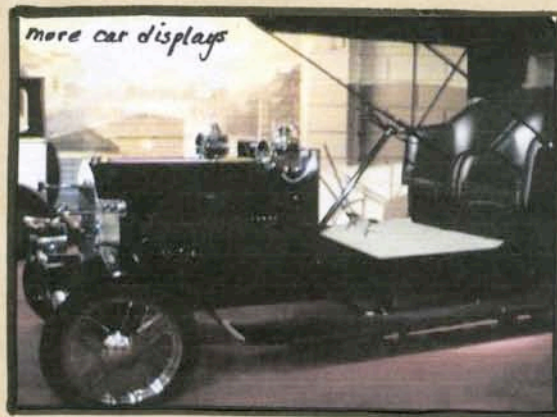
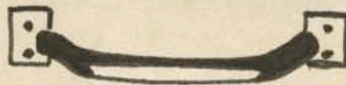
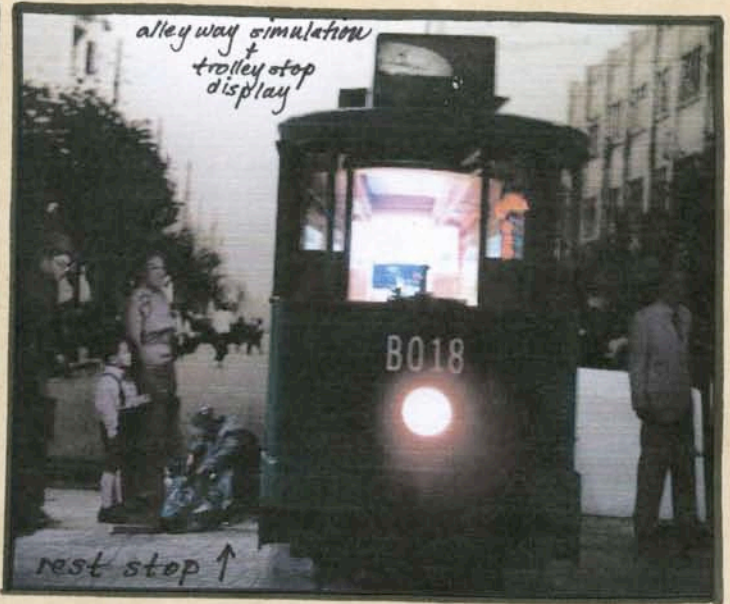
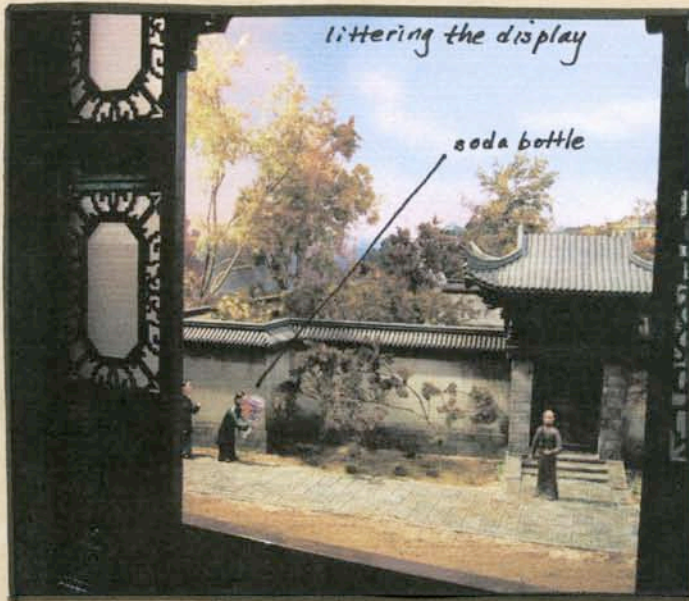


old Shanghai lounge



ballroom model

~ Unsorted Drawers / New Excavations ~



## The Bone Room

Shanghai's urban development has caused massive upheaval in the city's landscape. While the communist period preserved the shell of the city's pre-revolutionary life (architecture, interiors, even art deco swimming pools) by not expending resources on the demolition of degrading colonial reminders nor investing significantly in the built environment, the city after reform had little interest in keeping these colonial artifacts intact. Instead of catching a past long gone, Shanghai tried to "catch up," shed its old appearance, tear out the layers of run-down buildings and housing, and clean out its closets.<sup>41</sup>

Many writers and intellectuals, city residents, tourists and the like lament the violence of redevelopment accompanying the city's wholesale destruction of its past and colonization of everyday life in pursuit of economic growth. In a change of cultural-development strategy, the municipal government increasingly exhibits an interest in cementing a stable cultural stratum to prop up the certainty of the urban future, re-investing remnant "colonial bones" as historical depth and exemplars of urban authenticity. Shanghai now hosts a number of heritage-designated sites and cultural preservation projects that combine the aesthetics/technologies of museum conservation and the economics of "themed" urban regeneration. Following the rapid disappearance of Shanghai's historical built environment, the "city museum" in particular has become one of Shanghai's most desired institutional developments. The museological process this entails is city-wide in effect. Numerous exhibitions depict the city's development history in photographic collages contrasting the colonial city "then" with the contemporary city "now."<sup>70</sup> Such collections display the evolution of Shanghai's contemporary urban development and the municipal state's policies. As the municipal government prepares to host the 2010 world expo, surviving city remnants become fossils of a mythic urban origin, sedimenting a collective memory of the nation's future in the shells of the city's past. Extinction also ensures commercial success, producing museum artifacts as souvenirs that commemorate what is gone but technologically reproducible as nostalgia. Conventional museum display strategies, presentational themes, dioramas, and/or boutique lighting can make objects into new

### ~ Urban Ore ~

6

#### Historic designation

grants "second life" to the obsolete and outmoded.  
Even industrial waterfronts and factories can be mined, extracted, resuscitated, and transvalued by these powerful technologies of urban redevelopment. Shanghai's colonial-era monumental embankment — the Bund facing the Huangpu River at the entrance to the harbor, was recently cleaned, renovated, and repaired — the buildings converted into a skyline exhibition of various Gothic, Baroque, Romanesque, and Neoclassical styles.

#### A municipal collection of colonial relics,

this beautiful riverside row of brownstones increasingly wards off locals of average income, while Cartier and Armani ride in on the coattails of imperial nostalgia and set up shop. The districts' "formaldehyde-jar" preservation style violently weeds but contaminating reminders of the everyday and the recent past, demolishing the famous nine-story Friendship Store for being a socialist-era "blight" on the Bund horizon, in spite of its spectacular glass elevator view of the Pudong development zone.

originals and authentic bric-a-brac, transmitting value to the city's Old Shanghai simulations that aren't anywhere in particular but are potentially everywhere.

These anchors of "heritage" can extend in scale from single object-artifacts to the institution of the museum itself, as demonstrated by the Shanghai Municipal Heritage Museum, whose future "discovery" and development rests on its excavation from the city's debris of the present. The original museum on Hongqiao Road was unable to renew its lease when its ten-year contract expired. Shanghai's real estate industry refused to wait for the dead weight of a museum.<sup>71</sup> The artifacts of the museum were boxed up and buried in a warehouse in Pudong, across the Huangpu River from historic Shanghai, where they await future excavation. Since the museum's closure, the successful Shanghai Museum has demonstrated that museums can be profitable culture zones and modernizing tools that cultivate expertise, urban development opportunities, and model urban citizens. The municipal government has therefore decided to support and rebuild a city history museum in the Yangpu area, North of the Bund by Suzhou Creek, in order to edify the unique municipal heritage of Shanghai and add the patina of history to the nostalgia industry. The new museum is slated to participate in the "nostalgic excavations" of the many former factories clustered around Suzhou Creek, which have begun to host galleries, artist studios, conference centers, and fancy restaurants. The Shanghai Municipal History Museum is currently the second-highest-priority municipal revival project, behind the redevelopment of the area where the world expo is to be held.<sup>72</sup>

While a new municipal history museum is built, some remains of the

~ Miscellany ~

7

Old Shanghai

An archaeological excavation of a colonial natural history  
A museological process

dissecting hundreds of municipal heritage sites  
A bell jar drops over certain buildings for safe keeping

Whole neighborhoods become "Old Towns," living history museums  
walk-in dioramas where the past stubbornly sticks to the present.

A "cabinet of curiosities" theme park now inhabits the former  
department store space in the bottom ball of the Pearl TV Tower.

Here, an otherworldly layer of fantasy and miscellany of the past  
braces the above-ground "New Shanghai" architectural heights.

Museums branch,

newly valued as economic and cultural assets,

establishing complicated circuitries of exhibitions and relics  
stockpiling history in compressed fetish forms that can travel

and provide the raw materials of simulations  
storing up images of the past that produce lifelike prehistories  
through the theater of installation.

Time gathers dust as a commodity—a circulating curiosity—

obscuring the back stories of artifactual exemplars  
and the labor of changing history.

original ground the  
Pearl TV Tower's "Exhib-  
ition of Shanghai's  
Urban Development  
History," a spectacular  
colonial-era "cabinet of  
curiosities" theme park.  
Sited in the bottom  
ball of the tower in what  
was once a department  
store, the exhibition,  
with its dark winding  
trail of dioramas, models,  
and holographic displays  
of the city's past,  
suggests an underground  
tour of a sunken histori-  
cal city and a potpourri  
of vintage commodities.  
The Shanghai Municipal  
History Museum assisted  
the Committee for the  
Management of Historical

Relics (which oversees all academic-level museums) with the initial project to develop the site, loaning several former museum objects and assisting display design and information.<sup>73</sup> However, the commercially-oriented Pudong exhibition of Old Shanghai is privately managed by the Pearl TV Tower Company and considered a CHENLIE GUAN, an exhibition rather than museum, geared toward entertaining



tourists and presenting distilled models of buildings and former ways of life rather than preserving strict chronological history or requiring historical research expertise like the conventional museum. Located in Pudong, Shanghai's new financial and trade area, the Pearl TV Tower was chosen as the most ideal site to present a popular picture of Old Shanghai in the midst of the New Shanghai. As I was told in an interview with the Assistant General Manager and Director of the Display Department, the purpose of the exhibition is to evoke an experience of the city's past in an entertaining archaeology "closer to the people."<sup>74</sup>

Graeme Gilloch remarks on the historical connections of the museum and commodity display, "Like the arcade, and the department store that succeeded it, the museum was a compartmentalized setting, in this case for the fantastical display of exotic objects, a display case for artifacts dedicated to the cult of progress."<sup>75</sup> The amassing of objects in the museum approaches the culture of the commodity and the museum itself becomes a commodified spectacular space. In the case of the "Exhibition of Shanghai's Urban Development History," Old Shanghai simulations, holograms, and other forms of artifice combine seamlessly with conventional museum display and lighting strategies to create an overall nostalgic effect, an archaeological "experience" commodified as one of the city's most expensive but popular entry ticket prices. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett suggests that this kind of public culture installation adheres to the "Expo Model." She states, "Moreover, world's fairs are more like what museums are increasingly being asked to become: 'customer focused' and 'commercially positive,' with exhibitions driving the agenda and exciting installations a priority."<sup>76</sup>

The exhibition is a cavernous virtual world that conjures ruins along a loosely-chronological trail through the city's history, divided into four main sections: early village life, the early colonial period, the late-colonial turn-of-the-century, and a collection of 1920s/30s products and miniatures. In general, the exhibition compensates for the demise of so many of Shanghai's historic buildings above ground by relentlessly piling up miniaturized reproductions of the city's famous architecture in its dark arcade hallways. An assemblage of fabricated ruins creates the atmosphere of a den of consumption: wax figures demonstrating traditional Chinese life, dioramas with colonial-era woman mannequins displaying old products or QIPAO dresses in prostitution house sets (a VIP can step inside the set for a picture with a "hostess").<sup>77</sup> Here, the female figure is the ultimate storage unit of Old Shanghai images—as the original consumer, the cipher of the city's colonial history, the ethnographic charm of Chinese culture. A chain of panoramic models of the Bund in different eras and a menagerie of twinkling miniatures fill in the darkness of the meandering trail, turning the exhibit into a romantic escapade.<sup>78</sup> Maps, historic bricks, and original boundary stones delineate the international and French settlement. "Day in the Lane" dioramas combined with digital projections produce historical re-enactments of ordinary life in Shanghai's LONGTANG housing. There is even a blue-screen room where one's

image is superimposed on a photograph of Shanghai's famous Nanjing Road, which is actually a photograph of the historical street's condensed form in the Shanghai Film Park's "Nanjing in Old Days" set. According to Boym, "Cyberspace makes the bric-a-brac of nostalgia available in digital form."<sup>79</sup> There is no end to the exhibition's trail of Old Shanghai citations.

The "cabinet of curiosity" theme park has an overall disorienting effect of displaying the hallucinatory future through vivid miscellany of the past and the technologies that make it all possible (which go out-of-date as fast as the idealized forms they project). Displays create an experience of voyeurism of a moment in time and attempt to inspire consumer desire for objects shown in dioramas that serve as commercial shop windows.<sup>80</sup> The entire exhibition itself works as an allegory of extinction, a petrified forest of imagined memories of the future collected in replicas of the past. New naturalia are constantly dug out of the unsorted drawers of history's closets, and the storehouse of city history is continually re-collected to illuminate powerful futures. In response to the rise of the privately-owned automobile, the car was recently excavated and paid homage in the exhibition, using models of gas stations, digital documentation of historic auto

palaces, and a special room showcasing a chronologically-organized sequence of vintage automobiles. A tremendous amount of "sorting" has already taken place in preparation for Shanghai's 2010 World Expo and will continue to sediment Old Shanghai even deeper into the city's collective memory.<sup>81</sup>

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett describes the power of the museum effect, "Not only do ordinary things become special when placed in museum settings, but the museum experience itself becomes a model for experiencing life outside its walls."<sup>82</sup> Marcel Duchamp's "ready-mades" are instructive; he demonstrated, in his critique of the institutions of art, that anything can be a museum ready-made. Once placed inside a museum, a bicycle wheel, a urinal, anything can become an object of curiosity. The exhibition incorporates, in its final hall, colorful glass display cases of retro contemporary commodities and commodity replicas from the 1920s/30s, many of which are purchasable in the antique markets, old towns, and Old Shanghai spaces in the city. In many cases, only the exemplary packaging of former luxury goods (perfumes, hair products, furs, and fans) is exhibited behind glass, not any visibly-material object or product. The installations commemorate a mythic "Made in China" history and invent native brand authenticity, anticipating the exhibition's shopping climax in the colorful candy store and gift shop lit up at the end of the hall.<sup>83</sup>

### ~ Everyday Salvage ~

8

*The spell of Old Shanghai continues to spread,  
conjuring collective memories of the city's future  
from petrified relics of the "Paris of the East"  
and the colonial skeletons dug out from everyday depths.  
BUT the unsorted drawers of the debris of the present spill out.  
The sugar-coated spectacle arrested by:  
a belly ache and piles of empty packaging;  
miniaturized scenes of traditional life suddenly  
gummed up  
with the out-of-proportion intrusion of human litter;  
cardboard scenes of Old Shanghai  
uncannily converted into alleyway rest stops.  
The making and movement of relics is simultaneously  
junked and salvaged by everyday life.*

Old Shanghai's function as instant-museum installation spaces and multiply-reiterated commodity environments brimming with retro ready-mades. The "museum effect" utilized in theme-park installations of heritage can powerfully invoke the aura of native authenticity and a community of cosmopolitan nostalgia in the process of sedimenting the brand as the most recent excavation of the city's history. And yet museum showmanship and social management are never securely cemented. There is no telling when a museum-goer will satirically gum up a miniature model of "traditional life" with a Pepsi bottle or candy wrapper. Or when a migrant will unknowingly arrest the spectacle of history by utilizing the virtual diorama of "Shanghai in Old Days," much like the alleyways of the past, as a cool spot to rest, removed from the well-lit hustle-bustle of the subway.

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## Reflections

"Excavating the Future" is an experiment in writing a performance ethnography. Della Pollock has said there is no easy absorption of performance into textuality, and that the distinctions between performance and text, performativity and print-textuality, are problematic if not false.<sup>84</sup> Performative writing moves away from what words do or don't mean to explore how to mean, performing writing as effect/affect, as a sedimentation in the form of a specific social relation; it "reflects on its own forms, in its own fulfillment of form, in what amounts to its performance of itself."<sup>85</sup> What performative writing can do is perform what it names, perform its own socio-spatial relations, using the particular material-geographic forms under study as analytic and aesthetic guides. Academic discourse is not medium-specific and could resonate with a variety of technologies and forms; meaning would not be read off of form but rather form itself—its social life—would direct and shape the research. Such a project is part of a longer trajectory of experimenting with writing as a visual and performance-oriented enterprise, combining print conventions with other technologies. Gregory Ulmer recalls a rich legacy of avant-garde experimentations and esteems Roland Barthes's allegorical writing as "an essayistic or pedagogical equivalent of filmic writing, demonstrating one version of academic discourse drawing on the features of film/video."<sup>86</sup> Angela McRobbie similarly characterizes Walter Benjamin as "an experimentalist writer endlessly trying to adjust in language to the irreversible advances which have taken place in the visual mass media."<sup>87</sup> Benjamin favored the essay form, in which he could juxtapose concrete images and fragments, cultural close-ups and details that functioned allegorically.<sup>88</sup> Disregarding the borders of literature and criticism, this form of writing sought the material foundations of ideas, "shifting away from commentary and explanation, which rely on concepts, to work instead by means of examples," to write history as photography using a kind of "pictogrammar."<sup>89</sup>

Benjamin's work is a kind of geographical performance art that telescopes complex world-historical processes through specific places, situations, and objects. Benjamin's montages made philosophy with the most mundane objects, piling quotations in a manner visually similar to the layering of neon and architecture in the city. His dialectical images graphically figured his reflections, simultaneously representing and critiquing.<sup>90</sup> Benjamin let objects lead; he became a conduit for the theoretical sparks set off by even the most banal. Benjamin's was a philosophy attentive to form—the form of analysis in relation to the materials at hand—which "requires the writer to drop down to a place where words and the world intersect in active interpretation, where each pushes, cajoles, entrances the other into alternative formations, where words press into and are deeply impressed by the seriousness of their referents."<sup>91</sup> He experimented with writing characterized by a sense of uncertainty and even enjoyment, and his experimentations with affect "intensified rather than blunted his critical faculties."<sup>92</sup> Benjamin's work operates "with an epistemology of performance—knowing as making,

producing, doing, acting."<sup>93</sup> His oeuvre embodies a drama of objects and citations, wrapping themselves around each other in affective alliances "no more and no less formally intelligible than a road sign or a landmark. . . It takes its value from the context map in which it is located and which<sup>it</sup> simultaneously marks, determines transforms."<sup>94</sup>

Benjamin's allegorical method inspired cultural geographer Allan Pred, who developed a practice—"historical geographies of the present"—that sought to unpack the city as a constellation of multiply-scaled relations and explored the irruptions and transformative potential of multiple pasts condensed in the present. Pred crafted intimate snapshots of cityspaces, including **places**, touches, myths, voices, and lost puns, shot through with urban political economy and world-historical, structural force. Using a Benjaminian "condensed mode of envisioning," Pred summoned the phenomenological materiality of the everyday by synthesizing fragmented close-ups, not to render things more precise or visible, but to reveal new formations of objects and subjects, past and present. Pred's scholarship attempted to show rather than say, perform what it named using modes of expression that resonated with the materials used. Recalling Benjamin's use of figures, such as the ragpicker, the flaneur, the prostitute, and the sandwichboardman, to emblemize urban modernity, Pred's montages spliced together various voices that called attention to the aesthetic constitution of himself as author, partly identifiable in multiple figures ranging from a 19th-century Swedish dockworker to Josephine Baker. Pred's "figuring" contributed to an ongoing tradition of experimenting with scholarly production as cultural praxis, including the inventive ethnographies of Michael Taussig, Kathleen Stewart's work on affect, Donna Haraway's figural science studies, and the performative theoretical writings of Andrea Fraser, Jon McKenzie, Anna Tsing, Amitava Kumar, and Gregory Ulmer.<sup>95</sup>

Taking important cues from this body of work, "Excavating the Future: A Shanghai Miscellany" assembles an experimental ethnographic microcosm of the city of Shanghai using two performative writing strategies: "ethno-figures" and "tours." Ethno-figures organize and inhabit visual-textual terrains that allegorize the relations and objects of research. The ethno-figure is a composite image that shows different modes of visibility, narrative positions, aesthetic possibilities, conventions of observation, documentation, and consumption. Ethno-figures speak to the phenomena they engage and the different relations that come into conjunction at the research object or site, performing the complexity of the site of inquiry and its lack of closure spatially and temporally. The tour emblemizes the epistemological practices, world-historical forces, and transformative possibilities of the city's institutions, objects, and people, and the author's enmeshment in them. The tour complicates the inside/outside relationship of the ethnographer and her microcosm or model; the ethnographer is frequently on the other side of the lens, implicated in the ethno-figure's allegorical constructions of the city. This kind of ethnographic practice is a theatrical process that channels culpability in the sites/sights of research and blurs self and world, body and image, spectator and performer. The tour acknowledges the cultural mixing and proximity between observer and observed, and creates a terrain that is social and relational; it is a form of criticism that works by

way of "close distance," focusing on complicit engagements with found or potential critical dimensions already in play within the field. Attentive to its own spatial, aesthetic form, the tour is an exhibition that utilizes particular conventions of touristic-ethnographic documentation to arrive at unique insights through the formal expressive possibilities of its critical organization, even incorporating irony and satirical play to expose power relations and implicate the critic-artist in her own stories and observations. Ethno-figures and tours bring form and medium into view by performing them, in the process instigating reflection upon how the formal properties of those performances "locate" the contemporary subject along a network of identifications, objects, institutions, and stereotypes that disallow complete access to intentionality and agency. The researcher is fragmented and de-centered, the effect of contingent corporeal, shifting, situated relations rather than the foundational identity of an experience narrative. The tours, guided by ethno-figures, attend to non-transcendent, non-neutral, historical-material sociality, simultaneously critiquing the academic account itself and the conditions and frameworks that make knowledge visible.

Shanghai's exhibitionary modernity requires the researcher-visitor-tourist to account for herself as part of the modernity in the making. This is particularly important for a non-national, non-Chinese subject, who inevitably finds herself inscribed in the field in particular ways, often complicit with state models and displays of expertise and spectacle, whether intentional or not. The featured figure of the Western archaeologist-ethnographer sifts through the cultural meanings and political-economic contexts of Old Shanghai throughout the city, visually digging through old streets and unearthing various collections of Old Shanghai curios. The ethnographer documents nostalgia's socio-spatial arrangements and visual display conventions: living history heritage districts, cosmopolitan boutique enclaves, technologically-reproducible city ruins, and an Old Shanghai cinematic theme park where behind-the-scenes documentation lays the groundwork for a neocolonial spectacle of Chinese history. She uncannily finds herself at moments inscribed in the collective memory of Old Shanghai, thereby recollecting the visual dimensions of her own practice as part of the political economy of the heritage industry. The "ethnographer as film extra" in particular critically illustrates how ethnographers are enmeshed in scenes beyond the control of a reflective sovereign subject. The film extra ethnographer graphically figures how ethnographic activities are implicated in neocolonial productions of racial oppression and privilege. The Western/white female researcher not only becomes part of the nostalgia industry's exoticized displays, as a "street walker" in an Old Shanghai movie set regaling a feminized spectacle of Chinese history, but also enables the re-enactment of historical colonial-era racisms, and their suturing to the present-day racialized political economy of the joint-venture film production. Her translation services and recuperation of a purportedly "insider-outsider" ethnographic position are instrumental to the production of neocolonial spectacle.

"Excavating the Future" attempts to capture ethnography's touristic performativity and desire for "the classic." The manuscript stages

photographs and uses the convention of writing on photos to evoke the affect of heritage and nostalgia in Shanghai's tourism business. The tourist's nostalgia for style and enclosure blends with fieldwork souvenirs of "the having been there," demonstrating the yearning for firsthand experience. The use of tourist photos—obvious touristic framings—attempts to make this more transparent, showing the investments in particular research scenes. Ethnographic romance with realism is put on display; ethnographic realism enshrines the classic by attempting to rein in the rough edges, nostalgically fashioning the imaginary coherence of a solitary bourgeois author. The hand-made scrapbook aesthetic gives the semblance of organic form and the "interior" of autobiography. The hand-drawn and crafted collages, an allegory of handwriting against reification, show the ethnographer's desire for contact with sensuous, lived experience and the utopian longing for auratic objects, rescued from circulation to privacy. The contrast of handwriting and typewriter-produced text, and the use of old paper and stapled or paper-clipped notecards, illustrates the layered mediation and bricolage of the "realist" account. In this context, the digital scanning of the hand-crafted pages is a delicious irony, demonstrating that the mediation of the phenomenal world can intensify the pursuit of origins. The nostalgic mood/mode of the collages—its "long-distance romance" with its own historical-geographical production—is amplified by its technological reproduction. The showcase of nostalgic objects and exotica stage the author in a series of still lives, attempting to fix author-personae and place, in the process collapsing sexuality and aesthetics into the dominant political economy. The exhibition value of this hand-made but "second-hand" ensemble of Old Shanghai suggests that the sexual pursuit of "art for art's sake"—an oriental ornamental aestheticism—animates the ethnographic enterprise.

"Excavating the Future" dialectically assembles and disassembles diverse working materials while displaying many of its methodological traces. The terrain is constructed so that the relative weight of research is based in several modes at once, including ethnography mass media analysis, exhibition design, curatorial practices, academic texts, guidebook or travelogue, storytelling, interviewing, historical analysis, literary reading, self-reflection, and satire. The staging of the text captures the marginalia of the urban setting—the fragmentation, interiorization, and commodification of experience—and the various elements and "places" stitched together in the imaginative geographies of Old Shanghai. Concepts are imagistically constructed. Organized as a miscellany, "Excavating the Future" is a constellation, not a narrative. It combines the style of the scrapbook with the kitschy travel guidebook, including a collage of tourist information (boxes of facts and tidbits), visual-ethnographic notes, visual curiosities, and extended sections of social commentary in conventional narrative form that dig up further analytic depth on Shanghai's culture of nostalgia. The format suggests an "academic zine" or "ethnographic zine" compiled from the rubble of recognition following fieldwork and China's postsocialist modernization more generally.

A proliferation of junkspaces, historical fragments, and postsocialist debris—the dust of China's modernity—trail the productivist discourses and spectacular spaces cultivated in contemporary Shanghai.<sup>96</sup> The zine explores three particular "sites" or dust particles that

provide the raw materials for an imaginative geography of Old Shanghai nostalgia: the ruin, the brand, and the souvenir. The ruin involves the figure of the archaeologist digging up the colonial bones of a vintage "alternative modernity" in order to create a collective memory of the future by way of the past. Imperial nostalgia searches for "difference" and "synchronicity" simultaneously. "Lost-now-found" Old Shanghai ruins resuscitate a sense of authenticity, (re)inventing cosmopolitan tradition by "finding" and marketing an old cosmopolitanism as if it were always there. Nostalgia's resistance to a homogenous narrative of globalization not only involves the (re)writing of Shanghai into the imperial world system and solidifying a picture of synchronic globalization but also a spatially colonizing and self-orientalizing commercial process, whereby urban modernity winds up as kitsch, as souvenirs, and as nostalgic "living history museums."<sup>47</sup> The ruins of former lifeworlds are suddenly nailed to a board like butterflies; the everyday lives of people in poor areas of Shanghai become ethnographic display to attract the tourist eye.

The brand continues the work of memory that arose with the advent of consumer society and globalization in China, using memory to design and promote historical discourses. Evoking the fashionista, film star, and enclaves of international brand distinction, the brand displays the desire to transcend flattened social existence and re-enchant quotidian life and human relations dominated by exchange and money with unique and fashionable objects and lifestyles. Ban Wang astutely observes that the acceleration of modernity is haunted by constant returns to the mythical.<sup>48</sup> From epic narrative to structures of feeling and affect, Old Shanghai nostalgia exhibits a downward turn to the immediate and everyday, from crafting images and perceiving everyday objects, to experimenting with sexuality and consumptive practices of pleasure. The brand provides "foretaste" of a local international identity and serves as a vehicle for identification with transnational consumption and distinction. The brand becomes a kind of "natural history" of residual middle-class habits of consumption and an aura of communal living and aesthetic experience. Simultaneously, the brand signals the advent of homogenizing spatial gentrification in the city.

Working alongside the city's global city makeover, an Old Shanghai nostalgia industry busily remediates the construction dust to mark the city as a place brimming with historical value. The souvenir remembers the city as a destination with enchanted heritage. The archaeological remains of former interiors are put on display within the phantasmagoric web of the commodity. Tourist nostalgia for style and enclosure refashions historical events and memories as mass-produced articles and quaint spectacles of costume drama: petrified dioramas of "life in the old days," old town shopping streets and oriental bazaars, Old Shanghai snack shops, tea shops, and alleyway food courts. Where there are no remains, cheap and showy ornaments fill the vacuum of memory and transform transition spaces of the global city into storage closets of museum ready-mades and props for symbolic Old Shanghai enclosures. The souvenir commemorates an imaginative geography of nostalgia that saturates the city with "once-upon-a-time" fairy-tale charm and "take a walk down memory lane" clichés. The souvenir remembers history as kitsch.

"Excavating the Future" has foregrounded the affinities between



certain relations and postsocialist debris in Shanghai, among them nostalgia, consumerism, and the touristic performativity of ethnographic productions. The recent past—the socialist era—hangs in the backdrop, where it provides the grounds for practices of reordering and remembering, remediating and reterritorializing. Postsocialist spectacle and nostalgia attempt to engineer new subjectivities and urban spaces by retooling the residues of socialist modernity and inputting technology and cultural transfers of neoliberal capitalism to paradoxically assemble an alternative to the "end of history" and cultivate a "well-off society." Such futures have entailed the emergence of a postsocialist state that has relinquished responsibility for many services and public management, while forwarding a program of market capitalism that has led to massive dislocation, the fusion of private profits and bureaucracy, and new forms of primitive accumulation without the constraints of former socialist restrictions on the placement of people and the chaos of economic growth. The state has attempted to congeal the past in such a way as to coexist with China's jarring present, appropriating fragments of pasts to render certain futures and generate collective memories of those futures as inevitable and natural. "Excavating the Future" shows a performative way of doing ethnography that retains the possibility that the "as is" can be something "other," and the present's postsocialist pasts are as frangible and uncertain as its futures. The "postsocialist ethnographic zine" is an allegorical constellation of the ruin, the brand, and the souvenir, combined with reflections, fragments, litter, retrospective and prospective residues, substrata, and relics of Shanghai's postsocialist development. The "ruins" of academic experience do not remain to prescribe or merely describe Shanghai; they stick around, glued or stapled to the page, to suggest the possibilities of actively (re)collecting memories to make different arrangements of the future.

## Endnotes

All images are courtesy of the author. They were taken by camera or digital video during three periods of fieldwork in Shanghai, China: summer 2001, winter 2004-2005, and summer 2006.

1. Ackbar Abbas, 2002, "Play It Again Shanghai: Urban Preservation in the Global Era," in SHANGHAI REFLECTIONS. ARCHITECTURE, URBANISM, AND THE SEARCH FOR AN ALTERNATIVE MODERNITY, ed. Mario Gandelsonas, 36-55 (New York: Princeton Architectural Press) 41.
2. Dai Jinhua, 1997, "Imagined Nostalgia," in POSTMODERNISM AND CHINA, eds. Arif Dirlik and Zhang Xudong, special issue, BOUNDARY 2 24(3): 143-161, esp. page 160.
3. Caren Kaplan discusses nostalgic operations in the aftermath of imperialism in her 1996 book QUESTIONS OF TRAVEL: POSTMODERN DISCOURSES OF DISPLACEMENT (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press). See Renato Rosaldo's work on imperial nostalgia in his 1989 book CULTURE AND TRUTH: THE REMAKING OF SOCIAL ANALYSIS (Boston: Beacon Press) esp. page 68.
4. Refer to Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998, DESTINATION CULTURE: TOURISM, MUSEUMS, AND HERITAGE (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press). Also see her 1998 article, "The Ethnographic Burlesque," TDR: THE DRAMA REVIEW 42(2): 175-180.
5. Susan Stewart, 1993, ON LONGING: NARRATIVES OF THE MINIATURE, THE GIGANTIC, THE SOUVENIR, AND THE COLLECTION (Durham, NC: Duke University Press) 142.
6. Dai, "Imagined Nostalgia,"
7. See Abbas, "Play It Again Shanghai." Also see Tsung-yi Michelle Huang, 2004, WALKING BETWEEN SLUMS AND SKYSCRAPERS: ILLUSIONS OF OPEN SPACE IN HONG KONG, TOKYO, AND SHANGHAI (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press).
8. Refer to Svetlana Boym, 2001, THE FUTURE OF NOSTALGIA (New York, NY: Basic Books) for a general discussion of nostalgia's commercial purposes.
9. Geographer Allan Pred, describing "Old Stockholm" at the 1897 Swedish International Exhibition, captures the kind of illusory space in which the collective historical memory of "once upon a time" is fabricated. Refer to Allan Pred, 1995, RECOGNIZING EUROPEAN MODERNITIES: A MONTAGE OF THE PRESENT (London: Routledge) esp. page 70.
10. My interview with the Shanghai Urban Planning Exhibition Hall Director of Foreign Affairs Reception (SUPEH), on November 6 2004, took place in the institution's underground "Shanghai 1930" miniature shopping arcade connected to the subway shop at Renmin Square, in a small faux-art deco tea shop. I inquired about the setting and he informed me of the popularity of old

street scenes from Shanghai's international history and modernity. He referred to the Old Shanghai shopping street as a cozy, relaxing, and fun shopping experience.

11. Graeme Gilloch, 1996, MYTH AND METROPOLIS: WALTER BENJAMIN AND THE CITY (Cambridge, MA: Polity Press) 163.
12. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, DESTINATION CULTURE, 150.
13. See Convolute B "Fashion" in Walter Benjamin's unfinished ARCADES PROJECT, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999) 62-81.
14. Boym, THE FUTURE OF NOSTALGIA, 38.
15. To cite but two examples, I watched businesses fail in the underground Old Shanghai faux street connected to the subway in Renmin Square several times during my fieldwork in 2005. I also saw Old Shanghai-themed businesses in the Grand Gateway small miniature arcade come and go until the popularity of ethnic Tibetan and other minority crafts among the mall's younger crowds took over the aesthetic.
16. Huang makes a similar connection between the global city and the city of nostalgia in WALKING BETWEEN SLUMS AND SKYSCRAPERS.
17. Interview with Callison Architecture's Gregory Carpenter, lead designer for the Grand Gateway mall and office/condo tower, Feb 8 2001, by email.
18. Huang, WALKING BETWEEN SLUMS AND SKYSCRAPERS, 119-120.
19. Ann Anagnost, 1997, NATIONAL PAST-TIMES: NARRATIVE, REPRESENTATIONS, AND POWER IN MODERN CHINA (Durham, NC: Duke University Press) 167.
20. Anagnost, NATIONAL PAST-TIMES, 166-67.
21. Tim Oakes, 1998, TOURISM AND MODERNITY IN CHINA, ed. David S. Goodman (London: Routledge) 52.
22. Rey Chow, 1993, "A Souvenir of Love," MODERN CHINESE LITERATURE 7: 75.
23. See Carolyn Cartier, 2001, GLOBALIZING SOUTH CHINA (Oxford: Blackwell) 235-36.
24. Many people have been displaced by the city's urban development and have strong sentiments of longing for what was lost during the fast-paced changes going on in the city. The preservation of particular sites, especially former residences, as "heritage" after the people have been removed is particularly tragic. The removal of residents from their neighborhoods in city centers to peripheral areas can rupture the fabric of everyday lives forever. I acknowledge the suffering experienced by many of these local communities. However, in this project I focus predominantly on the nostalgia industry of Old Shanghai from the perspective of an

anthropologist-tourist and the local state, rather than that of the local people. I attempt to perform the visual culture of the city's heritage development through graphic and ethnographic documentation. I also reflect on the complicity of critiques of urban development and the loss of cultural history in the city's nostalgia craze.

25. Chow, "A Souvenir of Love," 61.
26. Ibid., 68.
27. Boym, THE FUTURE OF NOSTALGIA, 55.
28. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, DESTINATION CULTURE, 171.
29. Refer to Hsing's 2006 article on the way cities in China often consolidate their administrative and territorial power by absorbing county areas into their metropolitan fold: "Land and Territorial Politics in Urban China," THE CHINA QUARTERLY 187: 575-91.
30. The district government website (in English), "Che Dun: Shanghai Songjiang Industrial Zone Chedun Sub-Zone," 2000, [HTTP://CNTW2000.COM/ENG/GOV/CD/INDEX.HTM](http://CNTW2000.COM/ENG/GOV/CD/INDEX.HTM) (accessed July 1, 2007) contains further information about the Songjiang Industrial Zone and Chedun sub-zone. I left the movie set early one afternoon and hired a taxi to take me around the area for a glimpse.
31. In 2005, the Shanghai Film Studio offered a comprehensive virtual tour of the Shanghai Film Park and its studios on its website [HTTP://WWW.SFS-CN.COM](http://WWW.SFS-CN.COM); unfortunately, this is no longer available (last accessed May 21 2006).
32. Ibid.
33. Chow, "A Souvenir of Love," 73. Chow discusses cosmopolitanism as a trans-local nostalgia zone.
34. "Transboundary" refers to the transnational, translocal spatiality of Old Shanghai nostalgia films, both their production and reception. The term references the Chinese diaspora but without the ideological, ethnicist tinges of neo-Confucianism, Pacific-Rim discourses, or the guanxi networks of "Greater China." See Pheng Cheah's critique of such ethno-specific Chinese cosmopolitan discourses/ideologies in postcolonial southeast Asia in his article, "Chinese Cosmopolitanism in Two Senses and Postcolonial National Memory," in COSMOPOLITAN GEOGRAPHIES: NEW LOCATIONS IN LITERATURE AND CULTURE, ed. Vinay Dharwadker (New York: Routledge, 2001) 133-169.
35. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, DESTINATION CULTURE, 163.
36. Rey Chow, 1995, PRIMITIVE PASSIONS: VISUALITY, SEXUALITY, AND CONTEMPORARY CHINESE CINEMA (New York: Columbia University Press 15.
37. The segregated on-set protocols depended on the elimination of

contact and communication across the established racial divide. It was as if my talking with Shanghainese extras on set threatened to shatter the colonial illusion the filmic image invoked.

38. Chow, PRIMITIVE PASSIONS, 38, quoting Rhoads Murphey, 1953, SHANGHAI: KEY TO MODERN CHINA (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press).
39. James Roy, 2006, "Mission: Bankable," in Eurobiz Magazine, [HTTP://SINOMEDIA.NET/EUROBIZ/V200601/COMMENTARY0601.HTML](http://sinomedia.net/eurobiz/v200601/commentary0601.html) (accessed May 20 2006).
40. DANWEI, 2004, "Merchant Ivory Wants to Exploit You in Shanghai," (Oct. 20) [HTTP://WWW.DANWEI.ORG/FILM/MERCHANT\\_IVORY\\_WANTS\\_TO\\_EXPLOI.PHP](http://www.danwei.org/film/merchant_ivory_wants_to_exploi.php) (accessed May 21 2006).
41. David Barboza, 2005, "Hollywood Movie Studios See the Chinese Film Market as Their Next Rising Star," THE NEW YORK TIMES (July 4).
42. Xu Wei, 2005, "Shanghai is Over-exposed," XINHUA (May 10) [HTTP://MY.TDCTRADE.COM/AIRNEWSE/INDEX.ASP?ID=7009](http://my.tdctrade.com/airnewse/index.asp?id=7009) (accessed January 15 2006). This article states that critics and some movie-goers are becoming worried about Shanghai's "overexposure" in the nostalgia film industry: pictures with Shanghai settings are becoming redundant, overly-commercial and deliberately mystifying.
43. THAT'S SHANGHAI, 2005, "Unveiled the Real Edward Norton," THAT'S SHANGHAI (Dec. 8) [HTTP://WWW.CHINA.ORG.CN/ENGLISH/NM-R/151256.HTM](http://www.china.org.cn/english/nm-r/151256.htm) (accessed Jan. 15 2006).
44. Many of the ex-pat extras had been in five or more Old Shanghai movies.
45. Howard W. French, 2004, "Searching for Scenes from Shanghai's Lost Past," THE NEW YORK TIMES (Nov. 28) [HTTP://MERCHANTIVORY.COM/NEWS-SHANGHAI.HTML](http://merchantivory.com/news-shanghai.html) (accessed May 20 2006).
46. Raphael Samuel, 1994, THEATRES OF MEMORY VOLUME 1: past and PRESENT IN CONTEMPORARY CULTURE (London: Verso) 103.
47. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, DESTINATION CULTURE, 194.
48. M. Christine Boyer, 1998, THE CITY OF COLLECTIVE MEMORY: ITS HISTORICAL IMAGERY AND ARCHITECTURAL ENTERTAINMENTS (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press) 65.
49. Samuel, THEATRES OF MEMORY, 196.
50. Paul Goldberger, 2005/2006, "Shanghai Surprise: The radical quaintness of the Xintiandi district," THE NEW YORKER (Dec. 26 Jan. 2) 144-45.
51. Goldberger, "Shanghai Surprise," 144.
52. For a more in-depth analysis of China's urban redevelopment,

- see You-tien Hsing's 2006 article, "Land and Territorial Politics in Urban China," THE CHINA QUARTERLY 187.
53. Shui On Group, 2003, "Shanghai Xintiandi Wins the ULI Award for Excellence," [HTTP://WWW.SHUION.COM/ENG/GROUP/MEDIAROOM/2003/NEWS200311A.ASP](http://www.shuion.com/eng/group/mediaroom/2003/news200311a.asp) (accessed Jan. 15 2006).
54. See Li Zhang's reply, page 481, to the various published comments on her 2006 article, "Contesting Spatial Modernity in Late-Socialist China," in CURRENT ANTHROPOLOGY 47(3): 461-484.
55. You-tien Hsing, 2006, published comments to Li Zhang's article "Contesting Spatial Modernity in Late-Socialist China," in CURRENT ANTHROPOLOGY 47(3): 461-484.
56. Zhang emphasizes the clientelist ties between bureaucrats and entrepreneurs in her case study of urban redevelopment in Kunming. Hsing also discusses this in "Land and Territorial Politics in Urban China," esp. 584.
57. See Hsing, "Land and Territorial Politics in Urban China," 58.
58. Ibid., 589.
59. The Xintiandi on-site museum provides information detailing Shui On's intensive reconstruction of the area. The display refers to the redevelopment project's massive removal of previous residents but lauds this as a part of the protective efforts of the project.
60. Informal interview with Shanghai-based architect, Dec. 8 2004, at the Arc, Xintiandi.
61. Samuel, THEATRES OF MEMORY, 194.
62. Boyer, THE CITY OF COLLECTIVE MEMORY, 54.
63. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, DESTINATION CULTURE, 54.
64. Samuel, THEATRES OF MEMORY, 121.
65. Ibid., 130.
66. Stewart, ON LONGING, 86.
67. Shui On Group, "Shanghai Xintiandi Wins the ULI Award for Excellence."
68. This information was posted at the patriotic site itself; it was also incorporated into the small exhibition of Xintiandi's development in the reconstructed longtang museum.
69. Zhang similarly discusses the discourse of "lateness" that pervades the city of Kunming's urban planning in "Contesting Spatial Modernity in Late-Socialist China."
70. Such "old" mixed with "new" panoramas of the city are also popular on-line; the official Shanghai world expo website

used to offer a timeline that scrolled horizontally between black-and-white historical images and colorful contemporary photos, completely skipping Shanghai's revolutionary period and activities.

71. Vice Director Shanghai Historical Museum, interview by the author, Nov. 24, 2004, Huizhong Commercial Building, Shanghai.

72. Ibid.

73. Assistant General Manager Shanghai Oriental Pearl Radio and TV Tower, interview by the author, Dec. 23 2004, Pearl TV Tower, Pudong New Area, Shanghai; also Director of Display Department, interview by the author, Dec. 23 2004, Pearl TV Tower, Pudong New Area, Shanghai.

74. Ibid.

75. Gilloch, MYTH AND METROPOLIS, 129.

76. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2000, "The Museum as Catalyst," MUSEUM 2000: CONFIRMATION OR CHALLENGE? ed. Per-Uno Agren (Stockholm Riksstallningar [Swedish Traveling Exhibitions], Svenska museiforeningen [Swedish Museum Association], 2002), 2.

77. On several occasions, I saw the official escorting and news broadcasting of VIPs through the exhibition. During these encounters, authorities extended invitations to VIPs to walk into the dioramas for a "fun" photo opportunity, specifically the display with 1930s-era "prostitute" mannequins.

78. Displays of affection in the dark corners of this exhibition were a common sight during my visits.

79. Boym, THE FUTURE OF NOSTALGIA, 347.

80. Celeste Olalquiaga, 1998, THE ARTIFICIAL KINGDOM: A TREASURY OF THE KITSCH EXPERIENCE (New York: Pantheon Books) 275-277.

81. ZHONGGUO YU SHIBO LISHIJU (1851-1940) [China and World Exposition Historical Records], 2002 (Shanghai: Shanghai Academy of Sciences Publishing House). This fascinating book, compiled by the Shanghai Library, presents a comprehensive survey of the history of world's fairs and international exhibitions. In the process, it documents in great detail the participation of any person of Chinese descent in the historical fairs and expos, thereby historically inscribing the People's Republic of China nation-state as co-producer of imperial culture.

82. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, DESTINATION CULTURE, 51.

83. Martin Hall discusses how "authentic objects" often anchor themed environments and simulations, reinjecting realism and making "experience" more memorable. Refer to Martin Hall, 2006 "The Reappearance of the Authentic," in MUSEUM FRICTIONS: PUBLIC CULTURES/GLOBAL TRANSFORMATIONS, eds. Ivan Karp, Corinne A. Kratz, et. al. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 70-101). The Assistant General Manager of the Shanghai Oriental Pearl Radio and TV Tower discussed the exhibition's plans to show quality "Made in China" products and eradicate China's title as the chief producer and exporter of the world's cheap goods.

84. Della Pollock, 1998, "Performing Writing," in THE ENDS OF PERFORMANCE, eds. Peggy Phelan and Jill Lane, 73-103 (New York, NY: New York University Press) 75-76.
85. Pollock, "Performing Writing," 75-76, 78-79.
86. Gregory Ulmer, 1989, TELETHEORY: GRAMMATOLOGY IN THE AGE OF VIDEO (New York, NY: Routledge) 96.
87. Angela McRobbie, 1993, "The Place of Walter Benjamin in Cultural Studies," in THE CULTURAL STUDIES READER, 2nd ed., ed. Simon During, 77-96 (London: Routledge) 86.
88. Gregory Ulmer, 1998, "The Object of Post-Criticism," in THE ANTI-AESTHETIC: ESSAYS ON POSTMODERN CULTURE, ed. Hal Foster, 93-125 (New York, NY: The New Press) 110.
89. Ulmer, 1998, "The Object of Post-Criticism," 97.
90. McRobbie, "The Place of Walter Benjamin in Cultural Studies," 86.
91. Pollock, "Performing Writing," 81.
92. McRobbie, "The Place of Walter Benjamin in Cultural Studies," 84.
93. Ulmer, "The Object of Post-Criticism," 107.
94. Pollock, "Performing Writing," 75.
95. Examples of texts include: Michael Taussig, 2004, MY COCAINE MUSEUM (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press); Kathleen Stewart, 2007, ORDINARY AFFECTS (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press); Donna Haraway, 1997, MODEST WITNESS@SECOND\_MILLENIUM.FEMALEMAN@MEETS\_ONCOMOUSE™ (New York and London: Routledge); Andrea Fraser, 2005, MUSEUM HIGHLIGHTS: THE WRITINGS OF ANDREA FRASER, ed. Alexander Alberro (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press); Jon McKenzie, 2001, PERFORM OR ELSE: FROM DISCIPLINE TO PERFORMANCE (London and New York: Routledge); Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, 2005, FRICTION: AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF GLOBAL CONNECTION (Princeton, NJ and Oxford: Princeton University Press); Allan Pred, 2004, THE PAST IS NOT DEAD: FACTS, FICTIONS, AND ENDURING RACIAL STEREOTYPES (Minneapolis, MN and London: University of Minnesota Press); Gregory Ulmer, 1994, HEURETICS: THE LOGIC OF INVENTION (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press); Amitava Kumar, 1999, "Teaching in the Republic of Love Letters," in POETICS/POLITICS ed. Amitava Kumar, 261-71 (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press).
96. Rem Koolhaas, 2004, "Junk Space," in CONTENT, ed. Rem Koolhaas 162-171 (Köln, Germany: Taschen).
97. Ban Wang, 2004, ILLUMINATIONS FROM THE PAST: TRAUMA, MEMORY, AND HISTORY IN MODERN CHINA (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press) 219.
98. Wang, ILLUMINATIONS FROM THE PAST, 128.