

Future Lost and Resumed: Media and the Spatialization of Time in Shanghai

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The current resurgence of the Chinese mega city of Shanghai involves a radical restructuring of the urban fabric, infrastructure, economy and media culture. New Shanghai competes to become the information communication hub in the Asia-Pacific, and partly through the display of wide-ranging digitalization at the World exposition of 2010 and in the city, the municipal government has set its mind on once again detaining the future right here. In this paper I probe the question of how one place becomes continually endowed with futurity. Futurity, I argue, is in fact an essential part of a collective memory in the city: it is Shanghai’s *genius loci*. Moving from the Golden Age of modernity and cosmopolitanism of the 1920s and 30s, through the city under Communism, into the current global/digital city of Shanghai I inquire into the ways in which media and communication have been historically, and are at present, a backbone of the Shanghai imaginary. I further discuss how the future is both obsessively desired in Shanghai of today and at once under seizure since New Shanghai is, as much as it is a place of physical monumentality, an elusive and contradictory space of temporal coexistence as well as of hypermobility and hypermediation.

Introduction

Shanghai has the capacity to turn dreams into wonders...All the industrialists and great leaders of the world gather here, not only to discuss the future of China, but the future of the world.

Promotion film: "A Tour of New Shanghai", By supervision and commission of the Shanghai Municipal Government

Zhang Jun, 43, professor from Fu Dan University, said he is concerned about Shanghai's future, not sure whether the city can keep up economic development and expand its prosperity if it stayed with its political and economic format.

<http://josieliu.blogspot.com/2007/01/shanghai-another-hong-kong.html>

Media and cities constitute two – sometimes converging – realms in which 'the future' is often imagined. They become signs that fix 'the future' to a certain place or space. Media technologies and the modern city are cultural forms that often invoke both utopian and dystopian anticipations of the future (cf. Gold 1985; Robins and Hepworth 1988; Highmore 2005). Where *is* 'the future' today? Which city in the world has the capacity to conjure up a convincing sense of *futurity*? In this paper I will suggest that it is imperative to consider the Chinese mega and media city of Shanghai, in this context. Shanghai is currently undergoing a radical rebirth and transformation, unsurpassed in history. The city, which has a population of 18.7 million people, has in approximately 15 years redeveloped into a modern metropolis, with an ultramodern skyline, expressways, elevated highways, and thousands of high-rise buildings mostly along the skyline of the Pudong New Area.¹ It also contains the world's fastest train (The *Maglev*). The city has now reached the size of greater London and NYC together (*Cities. Architecture and Society*, la Biennale di Venezia, October 2006). The economy has grown with 11.9 percent per year since 1993 (see Wu 2003) and more than half of the 'Fortune Global 500' companies, the largest companies in the world, have offices in the city.

Shanghai is China's commercial hub and main industrial city, and it is currently, in accordance with the Master Plan (covering 1999–2020), striving to become a financial, economical, trade and shipping centre. Through these measures, Shanghai aspires to become a world city and perhaps even, as some argue, the capital of the world of the 21st century. As signs of globality the cityscape is replete with large screens and multimedia installations, and with bodies that move through the city carrying the latest modern media equipment such as cellphones, I-pods, MP3-players, digital cameras etc. Shanghai also competes to become the information and communication hub of the Asia Pacific and strives to develop its infoport by advancing digital technology beyond the era of the Internet (Li et al 2005; Ding et al: 2005).

1 In 1986 'The Scheme of Urban Master Plan for Shanghai Municipality' was approved. In 1993, building on this, the Pudong area (the financial district of Lujiazui (Figure 2) was formed on a spot which was covered mainly by farmland 15 years ago. In 1995 the Master Plan from 1986 was revised. Six guiding principles lay behind the effort. The first was to build a socialist modern city guided by openness to the world which would incorporate multiple functions and advanced science and technology. Second, the process of change was steered toward co-ordinating the developments of urban and rural areas through rational decentralization. Third, urban functions within the city were to be dispersed. Fourth, special economic zones were to be given special advantages. Fifth, the Pudong area was planned to become an export-oriented, multi-functional new zone. Finally, the goal was explicitly to integrate the past and the future: in the words of planners to 'respect history but to build for the future' (Rowe 2004: 57).

In 2006 the government launched the “HEAD strategy” by which four areas are to be privileged within the coming 20 years – “Health”, “Environment”, “Affordable” and “Digital.” Through mediatization and digitalization, among other things, at the world Expo in particular – the fulfilment of the current building up process – the city is envisioned to parade its fully achieved modernization before the world.

Shanghai is indeed a city capable invoking expectations and a sense of out- of this world-ness, that begets a magical atmosphere, a feeling that the everything is possible and that the future has arrived already, that the future is *here* (cf. Wasserstrom 2003: 52; Kuan 2004). At the same time the imaginary ‘spaces of the future’ can never be sealed or secured. In Shanghai they work within the city imaginary as a *structure of feeling* (Williams 1977) which involves an anticipation that also comprises jeopardy – an anxiety that the momentum to detain the future *right here* might slip away – and that the future, so eagerly looked for, imagined and carefully planned, will go astray before it could be profited from; before it could be *lived*. The dramatic resurrection of the city can be depicted in terms of an encapsulation process coupled with, and indeed feeding from, its integral threat of decapsulation (Jansson and Lagerkvist 2006). In other words, there is a sense that the building up of Shanghai for the world Expo 2010, will mark not only the apogee of the current regeneration process, but also the beginning of the demise of Shanghai: the beginning of a lost future. Shanghai, as all mega cities, is fraught with many problems such as uneven distribution of urban resources, an overheated real estate economy, and in consequence, insecurity about for how long these miraculous wheels of fortune and growth will be spinning.

The starting point for this discussion is phenomenological: the present is not conceived as a *point in time*, but as an *horizon* stretching itself backwards and forwards (de Beauvoir 1947). *The future is here* also means that the future is in our making: it is something we imagine, live and engage with in the present in relation to the past. This paper lays the claim that understanding New Shanghai requires a meticulous inquiry into how space is imbued with time – or how Shanghai exemplifies a dense “multiple, heterogenous and uneven” urban timespace (May and Thrift 2001) and this further leads to exploring *temporal coexistence* in this metropolis and media city (cf Huyssen 1995; Crang 2005). The contention is that there is a large cultural anxiety about temporality or obsession with time in contemporary China (see Zhang 2001). In this regard, Shanghai offers a forceful case in point. Instead of exemplifying a timeless world (due to time-space compression), Shanghai is globalizing city where *space is filled with time* (cf. Ekecrantz 2003; May and Thrift eds. 2001). Social time is radically *uneven*, and this relates to its constitution by spatial variation. Shanghai exemplifies this unevenness through its *lamination of urban ideologies* from three different eras (Qingyun 2006) – colonial capitalism, stalinist work units and the current edifices of globalization under Chinese characteristics. This also reflects that in the city, different spatiotemporal structures coincide and sometimes clash with one another in a disharmonious yet fully operating textural rhythm.

Temporal coexistence in Shanghai further relates to two phenomena that have heretofore been studied separately. Firstly, it relates to Zhang’s discussion on the spatialization of time in Shanghai. Zhang details how structures of time are being recast by the rapid transition from socialism to market economy and the changes from production to consumption. She argues that through an “unselfconscious echo of past undertakings to catch up to the West, stretching from the nineteenth century all the way to Mao’s Great Leap Forward, time has become a space in the global arena waiting to be filled or conquered” (2001: 137–138).. The infrastructure itself is also vindication of what is underway, according to Zhang: “an immense project of spatializing time and arresting the future” (ibid: 134). This includes the building of expressways, railways, bridges, airfields, elevators and assembly lines. Zhang argues that these are

spatio-temporal passages (à la Benjamin) that link past and future but also inadvertently foreground the vast unevenness, or non-synchronous simultaneity, between the old and the new, the rural and the urban, the inland and the coastal geoeconomical topographies (ibid).

This also reflects that China is undergoing industrialization and post-industrialization at the same time. Shanghai encompasses discrepant and overlapping time-structures. It represents a space of *global temporality* which implies *both* a uniform way of measuring time (which has come about through for example international air transport, satellite connections, e-mail and Internet, standardized time zones, the international dateline and a universal second) (Aveni 1995) *and* a confrontation of discrepant and context-specific time frames. Global time (the temporality of for example digitalized capital flows) imbricates upon the slower time orientations of the nation, and of industrial sectors and bureaucracies (Sassen 2000; see also Wallman 1992; Persoon and van Est 2000).

A second dimension of the characteristic multi-temporality of contemporary Shanghai is the way that the city brings about a strong sense of *temporal play* (Shields 1991) and invites visitors to practice *time travel* (Lagerkvist, 2007 forthcoming). The city is obsessed with the future. But this obsession is perpetuated through the evocation of selected parts of the Golden Age of the Colonial period in terms of a preservation program of old heritage buildings and a nostalgia industry and tourism culture which profits from a memorabilia of this era. A craze for Old Shanghai of the 1920s and 30s has appeared since the early nineties (Bergère 2004: 47). The term 'nineteen thirties' is a powerful connotation which is used in for example advertising for restaurants and cafés. Bits and pieces of its mythology – retrieved on posters, fashion calendars, black and white photographs of the city, labels of famous brands, old songs and movies, books and clothes – are once and again *dragged into the present* (Rojek 1997) i.e. into the city's imaginary. Media forms and their circulation of place-based nostalgia and cultural memory thus enable contact with the past (cf. Couldry and McCarthy 2004: 3).

The histories of Shanghai are multifaceted, as is the manner in which they are drawn upon in pursuit for the future. 19th and early 20th Century Shanghai flourished as a crossroads for commerce and trade. The city derived its importance as the center of China's import-export trade from its functions as a port on the Eastern seaboard. Already a century and a half ago, Shanghai was a hybrid of the 'Orient' and the 'Occident'. It became the key treaty port in the Far East of the English, French and American occupational powers in the aftermath of the Opium wars of 1839-42. The city succeeded the role of Canton as the center for foreign trade and receiver of modernizing impulses from the rest of the world. Shanghai consisted of concessions, established adjacent to the old city, that were independent of Chinese authorities. During the interwar period Shanghai was one of the most cosmopolitan cities in the world. It was one of the world's major cities; it was named *Paris of the East* and had a reputation of sinfulness, lawlessness and cultural tolerance, which coexisted with drug trade, prostitution and mafia gangs (triads) (Wakeman 1996). Shanghai of the 1920s and 30s also saw an economic miracle, of which Chinese entrepreneurs were the main architects, although foreign presence was essential. This rapid economic growth triggered the transformation of the city from treaty port to Metropolis. In this era, foreign businessmen, Chinese migrants and adventurers of all kinds were drawn to the city. After the 1949 Communist victory, foreigners and wealthy Chinese fled the city and the nightlife vanished. The city kept a shadowy existence for over forty years until the early 1990s when Shanghai opened up for foreign investment and modernization. Deng Xiaoping has been quoted to have expressed repentance over the fact that the Communist party had neglected to create a special economic zone in Shanghai, and this diktat set off the rebirth of Shanghai as a Metropolis in 1992. This process involved the central governments' announcement of granting Shanghai preferential status and the building up of the Pudong New Area.

I agree fully with scholars in cautioning against trying to find the ‘essence’ of any city. All representations of cities are ‘partial and provisional – shortsighted, interested, parts (impossibly) standing in for wholes’ (Balshaw and Kennedy 2000: 19, see also Philips 2000). Nonetheless, Jos Gamble identifies a distinct *cosmopolitan identity* of Shanghai, as the city has been, since the mid-nineteenth century at least, permeated by global and intra-national cultural flows (2003). In this paper I suggest that in Shanghai *futurity* is a crucial part of the collective memory of the city in which both the Chinese in general, the Shanghainese inhabitants and foreigners participate. Futurity I define as a structure of feeling which includes both the hopes and anticipations for a bright future and the fear of the fulfillment of the future – due to its unpredictability. Can futurity, in this dual mode of conceptualization, in fact be outlined as constituting the *genius loci* of Shanghai – the defining propensity of the place; a place identity and atmosphere which is culturally produced and enacted and a textural resource (cf. Jansson 2006) that is made use of by different agents with different agendas at different points in time? This exploratory paper sets out to qualify such as proposition. In this pursuit I will probe how one place becomes *re-endowed with futurity*. How is nostalgia for futures past reconfigured in imaginings of the future in Shanghai and how do media and communication technologies work within the future imaginary?²

A second ambition is, ultimately, to merge the two discourses on temporal coexistence: the notion of the asynchronous synchronicity of different time-structures that reflect the dense lamination of the city and the way the city invites and calls for what I elsewhere describe as ‘time travel’ – to actively and by means of performance become absorbed on your Shanghai journey into a city “where yesterday meets tomorrow” (Xintiendi Museum, cf Lagerkvist 2007, forthcoming).

The Future is *Here*

I will begin by consulting a travelogue from the interwar era, which is reprinted on websites for today’s virtual tourists:

I have seen places that were, no doubt, as busy and as thickly populous as the Chinese city in Shanghai, but none that so overwhelmingly impressed me with its business and populousness. In no city, West or East, have I ever had such an impression of dense, rank richly clotted life. Old Shanghai is Bergson’s *elan vital* in the raw, so to speak, and with the lid off. It is Life itself.[...]

Yes, it will all be there, just as intensely and tenaciously alive as ever-all there a thousand years hence, five thousand, ten. You have only to stroll through old Shanghai to be certain of it. London and Paris offer no such certainty. And even India seems by comparison provisional and precarious.

(Huxley 1926: 241-242)

2 Shanghai is in transition. Any attempt at boiling down such a complex and protean process would obviously fail. Inevitably the propositions that may be put forward – since the object of study is transforming by the minute – are fragmentary and must rely on piecemeal observations. This present discussion on Shanghai builds on extracts from a range of media forms: the World Expo 2010 website, the city website, advertising and place promotion, reporting from Shanghai in newspapers, newsmagazines, life style magazines, novels and travelogues, material from the Shanghai Urban Planning Exhibition Centre, The Bund Museum, Xintiendi museum and Shanghai Urban History Development Museum, and policy documents such as Master plans and five-year plans, and the Expo plan. In addition I have interviewed and talked to people working within realms of digitalization, urban planning and conservation. In bringing these excerpts together, I hope to gradually unfold the sense in which this place affords futurity and the different ways in which this affordance has been taken advantage of over time.



Figure 1. Place promotion in Shanghai. Photograph by the author.

In this brief, panegyric account of his impressions of Old Shanghai of the 1920s, Aldous Huxley was taken aback by the spirit of the city of the interwar era. While he was discussing the exceptionally vital, ancient mores of the 'Chinaman' one cannot ignore that these were observed during the *Golden Age* of Shanghai, of blooming entrepreneurial activities, Western presence and cosmopolitanism. 'So much life', he writes, 'so carefully canalised, so rapidly and strongly flowing - the spectacle of it inspires something like terror. All this was going on when we were cannibalistic savages' (Ibid). This author, who is more famous for a less enthusiastic futuristic vision, extrapolated *ten thousand years* into the future of Shanghai. In stark contrast with the bleak colors of the brave new world he would envision some years later, its future appeared garishly bright. It seemed to entail *Life itself*.

Shanghai was the crossroads of Asia. Entering into *the spirit of Shanghai* (see figure 1) as Huxley did, also meant for thousands of foreigners, company workers, entrepreneurs, missionaries, tourists and Chinese migrants to be immersed into the extraordinary mixture of conspicuous consumption and poverty, refinement and decadence that was a pervasive feature of the city's atmosphere during Shanghai's heyday of modernization (Gandelsonas 2002). The globality of Shanghai was already in the late nineteenth century a fact. Through media and communication forms the world came into reach and Shanghai connected to the world – particularity through regular mail steamers and the telegraph, which brought Shanghai in touch with Europe and America (Gamble 2003: 65). In the interwar era, Shanghai turned into a true world metropolis. The central district of the International settlement became a modern business centre with banks, trade- and insurance companies and department stores. The futurity of the city in this era was however marked not only by the economic miracle. The sense that the city was a city of the future was also brought into play through the presence of dance halls (Boyer 2002), movie theaters showing American imports as well as the

productions of the domestic film industry (Zhen 2005). Radio, film, advertising but also mass cultural forms and forms of leisure, such as the race-track and the lottery, were defining aspects of modernity in Shanghai.

A second aspect of the futurity of the global city of Shanghai of the 1920s and 30s was the climate of cultural tolerance and diversity of opinions. The city was also relatively free haven for different publications, cultural expressions, and exchanges of ideas (Reed 2005). This climate allowed for protests and strikes which arose among the Chinese populace against the occupational powers, in the 1920s, but foreign nationals managed to maintain jurisdiction over large parts of the city. Another related vindication of the futurity of this place was the founding of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in 1921. The CCP didn't view Shanghai as China's future – to the contrary – it was on the rubble of this city that New Red China would be built. But it is with great irony that one can observe that anything *new* in China originates from Shanghai. In the CCPs case because they could operate relatively unmonitored and free there.

After 1949 and the communist victory, the city was forgotten by the world for over forty years. It paid a penalty for its sinful and Western-oriented, capitalist past. As another ideology came in sway, the early twentieth century modernizing zeal of the city, including its seemingly open-ended future, was lost. Old Shanghai reminded of colonial humiliation and it was, as Marie Claire Bergère writes, denounced as a bastion of imperialism and of compradorial bourgeoisie 'where luxury was an insult to extreme poverty' (2004: 44). While this future was interrupted in Shanghai another one was envisioned and brought into play: Shanghai evolved into China's most important industrial city. Due to a strict fiscal policy, Shanghai contributed for decades a significant proportion of revenue to the state and the central government in Beijing. Through forty years of industrialization the city built up a strong economic base, which mainly relied on domestic markets (Wu 2000). This particular communistic future, and revolutionary enclosure of Shanghai is today a mostly silenced experience and forgotten vision.³ This era is now a stigma of modern Shanghai and it is often deleted out of the official memoryscape. This is evident at for example the Shanghai Urban Planning Exhibition Centre where other historical eras and chronological exposes of old photographs from the city are used to promote a sense of development and movement into the future. The era of Communism is shunned from historical memory and is *not* considered one of the 'three great periods in Shanghai's history' since it is generally conceived that Shanghai lost its role as an international centre of growth and development for over 40 years, due to the policies of the Communist regime (Zhen 2005).

The Future is *Now*

In the early 1990s, Shanghai began to resume its lost future, in its drive for progress and modernization, which was interrupted by the 1949 revolution. There are several entwined facets of Shanghai's futurity today. In China– and perhaps most noticeably in Shanghai – new models for social mobility and the rise of a consumer culture endorsed by an official ideology of the democracy of consumption have emerged. In this new socio-economic structure high paid jobs in urban areas have opened for young and beautiful women, ensuing the formation

3 Another example of the capacity that the city seems to hold in setting off new futures, can be traced to the year of 1966 when the Cultural Revolution (1966-76) began in Shanghai. (The revolution proceeded most intensively in 1966-69). Jiang Qing as the leader of the Gang of Four, used Shanghai as its propagandist central base to drive forward and accelerate the progression of the Cultural Revolution. On the fourth of January 1967, the Shanghai group of the Gang of Four initiated large mass meetings, and established the WenHui Daily, Liberation Daily, and the Shanghai Radio and Television stations, encouraging the media to demand the restoration of order. The media played the double role as instigator of the Cultural Revolution and as a brake on it when needed, by different red guard factions.

of an urban mass culture and a new sexual politics (see Zhang 2001). This new urban space is suffused with venues for commodity consumption and libidinal indulgence. There is thus a strong connection here as in other spaces of rapid modernization, between the futurity of the city and the new identities for women, new consumerist social spaces that have evolved as the city has undergone modernization (cf. Felski 1995; Highmore 2005). Shanghai's new international feel of visitors of different national origins also attributes futurity to the city. The presence of foreigners, and in particular of Westerners, offers this sense, which brings back the previous era of Western presence, abundance and prosperity of the city, the epoch of the 1920s and 30s (cf. Lagerkvist forthcoming, 2007). Another important futuristic vision will be exposed at the Shanghai World Exposition of 2010. At Expo 2010 the theme *Better City Better Life* will highlight the need for sustainable development in the urban age. A further visible manifestation of the return of foreign presence in Shanghai which also brings about a strong sense of the future is the work of European, American and Japanese architecture firms (Cody 2004) which have contributed to the city's new look and made Shanghai into a 'museum of architects.'

City of Science Fiction: Mediatized Architecture



Figure 2. The skyline of Pudong.

The city of Shanghai is not only – in an historically overly aware manner – making plans and building up for its future as a world city, it also stimulates visitors and inhabitants to fantasize about the future. Shanghai is perceived and conceived among visitors as a mediatized space of the future. Architecture and physical edifices in Shanghai are both reflective and constitutive of futuristic projections. The Pudong New Area has by unequalled speed developed into a mini-Manhattan during the 1990s and in this district in particular, symbolic meanings are

provided to spatial forms. Here, futuristic visions are spatialized as e.g. in the Oriental Pearl TV tower (see Figure 2) which is already the established icon of New Shanghai, embodying national and local symbols of modernity and arrival (cf. Graham and Marvin 2001; Castells 1999). Futurity is afforded through three facets of media space: *mediations of the cityscape*, the *mediatized sense of space* evoked in the city, and through the *mediatization* of this space (Jansson and Falkheimer 2006). In the following, I will discuss these three facets by expounding the role of mediation and new media within the futurological imaginary, which locates the future *right here* and *right now*; in Shanghai.

Architectural forms become part of the encapsulation of the city and retain a liminal status as both physical and symbolic indicators of futurity. Especially Pudong, the financial district of LuJiaZhui calls forth mediatized memories of SF classics such as *Blade Runner* or *Star Wars*. References to SF abound among visitors as they become immersed into the space age, "the city of science fiction", or as they experience "Gotham City" in Shanghai (see e.g. Albons 2000; Nilhén 2005). The future is not only a prospect, it is physically located here, in Pudong, and in that sense it is *now*. In another fictional example, the Shanghai cityscape is permeated by a kind of weightlessness in buildings that is truly miraculous. In his Science Fiction novel *The Diamond Age* from 1995, Neil Stephenson locates the future of the world into the hands of a girl living in a territory called Atlantis-Shanghai and the future of cities in Pudong. The book is laid in the Twenty first century, fifty years into the future in an era on nano-technology and hyper-interactive media forms such as 'mediatrons' and interactive books. One of the protagonists, Hackworth, reflects upon the old cities of the world – weighed down by material problems – and he foresees their extinction and survival solely as theme parks:

From the high point of the arch, Hackworth could look across the flat territory of outer Pudong and into the high-rise district of metropolis. He was struck as ever, by the sheer clunkiness of old cities, the acreage sacrificed, over the centuries, to various stabs at the problem of Moving Stuff Around. Highways, bridges, railways, and their attendant smoky, glinting yards, power lines, pipelines, port facilities [...]. Hackworth had enjoyed San Francisco and was hardly immune to its charm, but Atlantis/Shanghai had imbued him with the sense that all the old cities of the world were doomed, except possibly as theme parks and that the future was in the new cities, built from the bedrock up, one atom at a time, their Feed lines as integral as capillaries were to flesh. (1995: 71)

It is interesting that Shanghai should be chosen for this cyberfictional plot which favors the city as *the* site of novelty and of future prospects. Cyber fiction narratives are often set in a near-future and place information and cyberspace technologies, such as the Internet, virtual reality, telemediation, computer intelligence, surveillance or person-machine relations at the centre of the story (Kitchin and Kneale 2001). The *Diamond Age*, moreover, in situating the future in Shanghai also seems to portray aspects and driving forces within the development in contemporary Shanghai of making the city into a *media city*.

The Charm of Digital Shanghai

In contemporary Shanghai the incentive for the transformation and reappearance of the city on the global map, has since the late nineties been tantamount with aspirations of becoming a fully-fledged 'digital city'. At Pudong airport in August of 2005, this was visible as new life in the new city was portrayed in advertising welcoming visitors, by means of a photograph depicting the 'digital lifestyle' of a young Chinese modern family. The ad is imbued with an ideology of communication where the thoroughly mediatized everyday life of the family is saturated with ideals of instantaneous time and networked kinship. New life, in a media city, seems to entail prospects for newness in many subdivisions of life and society: for

community, education, services, as well as pleasure and maximum revenue. The city is also saturated with large screens and multimedia installations, and with people moving about the city carrying the latest modern media equipment.

In 1997 the Shanghai municipal government took an initiative to build Shanghai into a digital city and drafted a city informatization construction strategy.⁴ Today, a far-flung, interconnected, high-speed network of information infrastructure has emerged in Shanghai and the IT industry has become the city's pillar industry. The informatization of the city is depicted at the Shanghai Urban Planning Exhibition Centre as nothing short of a 'silent revolution' which has 'injected great vitality to the fabric of the city and brought dramatic impacts on shifting governmental functions, transforming traditional industries and improving public services' (SUPEC, "Shanghai Infoport" floor 4). At the exhibition centre, the mediatization of Shanghai also includes an imaginary dimension, as one statement clearly displays: 'Can you imagine that one day Internet will also be outdated? Following the era of the Internet will be that of grid.' (SUPEC, floor 4). This prophetic formulation predicts the supercession and emulation of one media form by another. On reflection, however, the functions of the city grid resemble those of the Internet closely. In Digital Shanghai the ideal machinery of technocratic authoritarian China will materialize. The grid will integrate separate service sectors such as medical care, fire agency and public security into one comprehensive functional system of e-government. It will further coordinate the work of different departments 'according to the orientation of demands and their information will be widely shared on the basis of a universal grid standard.' The official aim is to concentrate all the urban resources in the shortest possible time in order to enhance the efficiency at e.g. emergencies such as public health crises like SARS. The exhibition promises a better future in the wake of the implementation of these new information services. Three chronological steps are envisioned for fulfilling these expectations:

Stage One By 2005, with the completion of the tenth five year plan, the main index for Shanghai's informatization construction will have reached the average level of the major cities in developed countries.

Stage Two By 2007, a framework for 'Digital City' will have been primarily established, with the objective of digitalizing information resources, networking information transmission and popularizing information technology coming true.

Stage Three By 2010, the charm of digital Shanghai will be fully displayed at the World Expo, a major milestone in Shanghai's course of development as the city first enters the well-to-do category and achieves modernization. (SUPEC, floor 4)

Hence, in this process of transformation 'new media' plays an important and distinctive role. Building up in order to fully accomplish and display the potential of digital Shanghai, the year 2010 and the World Expo, as is clear from the quote above, is envisioned as the magical moment when world centrality will be achieved. By 2010, Shanghai informatization is planned to reach the level of the central cities of advanced countries and excellence in information technology innovation and international competitiveness within the information industry are further aspired. Shanghai competes to become *the* information communication hub in the Asia-Pacific.

4 The Shanghai city informatization project started in 1999 and in 2002, the Shanghai Municipal Government announced the Digital City Shanghai initiative (Ding et al 2005).

The aims for the digital Expo, as well as the digital city, demonstrate visionary and even utopian discourses surrounding new media forms. There is nothing particularly unique about the visions of the digital city, they could apply to other cities. Two elements of a *post-urban fantasy* that was common in the 1990s (Graham 2004) are particularly displayed. First, the realisation of Digital Shanghai is described as a revolution that involves casting away the ballast of materiality. In a digital city, life is made easier and more functional. This also implies that information within in a ‘theology of cyberspace’ (Bolter and Grusin 1999) becomes a space to inhabit, instead of something which is contained separately within computers.



Figure 3. The visions for digital Shanghai as a space to inhabit. SUPEC, Shanghai Infoport, Floor 4.

Second, in the course of blending ICTs with human bodies and with the intimate spheres of the Shanghainese (Figure 3) the dream of *telepresence* is also manifested. Both these fantasies also relate to heightened *speed* (digital time) which will secure the goal of bettering life. On the other hand, missing out here is the commonly embraced and unbridled *cyberlibertarianism* (that information infrastructures are inherently democratic and transformative) of Western discourse, within the Chinese context. In addition, in contrast with the post-urban discourse, there is no account of a demise of Shanghai as a built environment. In its resurrection, the city will prevail both in terms of ‘bits’ and atoms.

Temporal Coexistence "Where Yesterday Meets Tomorrow"



Figure 4. "Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow". SUPEC floor 4. Photograph by the author.

In one part of the exhibition at the Shanghai Urban Planning Exhibition Centre at Peoples Square, an entwinement of the past, the present and the future is featured visually and encoded graphically within *one space* (Figure 4). Along the wall three words are outlined "Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow" followed by a description of each point on this time line. The word TOMORROW is featured on glass on top of a photograph of modern high-rise buildings along the *Huangpu* river Beneath the temporal marker 'tomorrow', the sign reads:

The Hungapu River will grow even beautiful (sic!) in the years to come. She is the blueprint the designers are planning, the prospect that the people are delightfully talking about and the dream that the children are dreaming as well. While dwelling upon *the wonders that time has bestowed Shanghai, we are at the same time looking forward to her glorious future* (SUPEC, floor 4, italics added).

A screen containing an image of the Bund, which is the famous promenade along the river at the heart of the city, (symbolizing 'the past') is placed further below. This seems illustrative of key facets of the encapsulation of New Shanghai. The quote reveals that time is conceived as *productive in itself*. Here time is understood as an abstraction constituted by a series of 'nows' in sequence (see Crang 2005). But linear development is only half of the story. There is in fact a complex play going on in the city, enacted by planners and municipal government policies, which brings the past into play within the present in order to propel the futurity of the city in a wished for direction. For example, the enthusiasm for new communication

technologies in Shanghai of today is reminiscent of the role that the 'new' played in the rhetoric of modernizing Shanghai of the twenties and thirties (Boyer 2002). In fact, the reappearance of Shanghai also draws on reminiscences of the city as a *media city* (Reed 2004) and a mediated city—the “Shanghai illusion” construed by gaudy fiction and wacky movies, as one 1930s travel writer put it (Wasserstrom 2003: 59) as well as on nostalgia for the entrepreneurial spirit of Shanghai. The encapsulation of the city hereby exploits a nostalgia for futures past (cf Adam 2004a; Hyltén-Cavallius 2002). In other words, something as contradictory and reversed as *retroactive futurity* is put into practice within the city. Within a cultural memory of the city, as I traced back to Aldous Huxley at the beginning of this paper, 'the new', life itself, bergsonian mobility and *the future* seem to reside at this site. This is a living memory of the future which is engaged within the contemporary city's imaginary. Futurity is thus *replayed* in the city of Shanghai. And as the future is once again right here, the fervor with novelty and modernization, is balanced against a reactivation of selected parts of the complex collage of memories that Shanghai invokes. In the words of the Shanghai government:

The past prosperity of Shanghai has both dazzling brilliance worth parading and bitterness difficult to tell. The reason for our looking for the past traces of Shanghai now is to know the yesterday, think today and supr (sic!) on ourselves tomorrow rather than to have a nostalgia for past prosperity. (Shanghai Urban History Museum, Hall VI)

Hence, the sense of time that is activated in Shanghai is that of a complex intertwining of past, present and future. In “Play it Again Shanghai,” Ackbar Abbas holds that

Shanghai today is not just a city on the make with the new and the brash everywhere; it is also something more subtle and historically elusive: the city as remake, a shot-by-shot reworking of a classic, with a different cast, addressed to a different audience, not 'Back to the future' but 'Forward to the past' (2002: 38)

Abbas claims that preservation is motivated more by anticipations of a new Shanghai that will rival the old than by tender feelings for the old and as Tianshu Pan (2005: 136) has argued recently, Shanghai nostalgia has been employed as a political strategy within the futuristic visions among the leaders in order to turn this increasingly global city into a leading commercial hub of East Asia.

China's eager will to link up with the (rail)tracks of the world, as Zhang has discussed, would seem to mean to *both* to synchronize with 'global time' (and western clock-time) *and* to establish oneself as the beachhead into a future which requires managing *temporal discrepancies* and diverging modernization forms and paces (Huysen 1995). Temporal preoccupation is thus not solely translatable to the urge among the Shanghainese to conceive of time in order to produce 'an action space, a container of possibilities' (Crang 2005) in the global arena. Obsession with time also promotes a self-understanding which seeks to incorporate a *coping with and thriving on temporal coexistence* (cf Jameson 1998: 54). As the exhibition commemorates tripartite time, one space overflowing with three times, temporal anxieties are here made into a resource for identity. Hence, along the wall the outlined words Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow figure, not simply to mirror the futuristic orientation of linear development – 'the arrow of time'. There is something else going on: a more or less conscious working out of a simultaneity of times: *tripartite time* (Crang 2005). In promoting such a multi-temporally aware appearance, Shanghai seems geared at achieving centrality of a new kind.

What is more, however, these scriptings at the SUPEC (neighbouring the exhibition on Shanghai Infoport) also mark an identification of place through an embracement of

instantaneous time (Lash and Urry 1994) in which the future is not only *at this site* but also *now*. The slogan which meets the eye almost everywhere; “The past, the present and the future,” seems to correlate in a curious way with the relativization of the near and the far – and of the bygone, the now and the then – implied by digitalization. This new timestructure, digital time, however duly illustrates the shift to materialism within the logic of the post-Mao era. The Communist Party’s call for people to ‘look to the future’ (*wang qian kan*) becomes by changing a single character ‘look towards money’: people want the future *now* and are more concerned with making money in the present than to put their faith in an uncertain future (Gamble 2003: 21). The consequence is that as the temporal fixation of the future city – which seems instantly made up and reappears with special effect quality – is merged with the time orientation of digitalization, a futuristic momentum of the past is not only retrieved and resumed, it is also in an ironic sense *retracted* as the future is *already here, located within the present*. In other words, the future is paradoxically dissolving – it is ‘lost’ once more while obsessive visions for it culminate. The dream of fulfilling and realizing the future city thus holds the potential, and no doubt unintended, toppling of those same visions – and the future of Shanghai balances on a rift between general hope and unrest.

“Futurology often carries components of a return to the past” (Allon, 2004: 25) and conversely “heritage is often an aspect of the information economy and the new technologies that support it” (Frenchman 1998). Heritage in Shanghai is not so much a yearning for the past as something which is being pulled by a movement which is happening towards the future. While Shanghai is undergoing modernization characterized by a craving for the new (poignantly exemplified by its digital ambitions) – always yearning for something which is anything *but* like the past – simultaneously, Shanghai benefits from keeping the futurity of the mercantile pre-1949 era alive in the city’s collective memory. Such memories serve both political and commercial interests. According to Stephen Graham and Simon Marvin with reference to the networked city, it is imperative to ‘recognise how the configurations of infrastructure networks are inevitably imbued with biased struggles for social, economic, ecological and political power to benefit from *connecting to (more or less) distant times and places*’ (2001: 10). Hence, far from an unintentional and chaotic blending of different urban ideologies and time structures, Shanghai exemplifies a celebration of tripartite time and of the epoch of simultaneity and the ‘side-by-side’ that Michel Foucault once described, in a much quoted passage (Foucault 1967/ 1998: 237). Not only is space compressed as Shanghai globalizes and is linking up to the world and the world is coming to Shanghai. The CCP and the Shanghai Municipal Government are involved in branding the nation and localizing its ‘bridge to the future’ (see Chen 2005) in Shanghai, by means of allowing the city to thrive on its long-term reputation of magical development, as if having risen up ‘out of enchantment’, something which the city was thought to embody already in the 1890s (Wasserstrom 2003: 55). This includes shunting aside the outright critique, doubts and ambivalence that the CCP felt earlier toward the capitalist, adventurous, indulgent and cosmopolitan Shanghai, and allowing these exact features of the city’s past futurity to form the kernel of the city of the future.

Conclusion: An Intentional Future

Moving from the *Golden Age* of modernity and cosmopolitanism of the 1920s and 30s, through the city under Communism (when one future was lost and another one envisioned), into the current global/digital city of Shanghai I have in this paper inquired into some of the different ways in which media and communication – the technological imaginary, mediations of ‘the Shanghai spirit’ and the factual media and/or mass cultural forms intrinsic to the urban fabric – have been historically, and are at present, important constituents of the collective memory dispositif; for the city’s mode of representation, identity and texture and for what I

call Shanghai's genius loci – *futurity*. Today, the mushrooming of skyscrapers, the new media landscape and commercialized media system, the abundance of media forms in the digital age, in themselves reenact a *future past*, as they carry that same magic of *novelty* bestowed onto Shanghai ever since at least the late 19th century. I suggest that media is a triggering factor, although not a determinant, in affording futurity to the city. More importantly however, media forms, and the load they carry as messages about newness (cf MacLuhan 1964) and their prophecy about perfecting the city, become not only instigators of hope for a bright future but simultaneously imply an anxiety hovering about Shanghai, shadowing the glittering city – and in the process, imaginatively turning it into a towering, and dark urban landscape of science fiction – begging the question: Will we lose it again, before we even could enjoy its full bloom?

Recently debaters have, in a budding critique of the boom of consumerism, mediatization and marketization in authoritarian China, located a forlorn and Huxlean 'brave new world' in New China of today. In a much similar vein, and in a general critique of the globalized economy, Fredric Jameson (1998) delineates a gloomy situation where "a new relationship to the future as a space of necessary expectation of revenue and capital accumulation" (1998: 185) has appeared. Jameson traces a structural reorganization of time itself into a kind of futures market, and concludes: "this is now the final link in the chain which leads from finance capital through land speculation to aesthetics and cultural production itself, or in other words, in our context to architecture" (Ibid). This systemic analysis, attributing to finance capital an agency that impregnates all realms of cultural production – commercialized media and architecture included – however runs the risk of obscuring the genuine possibility of a responsible relationship to our projections and enactments of the future, and hence to the future itself. I would like to round this up by taking my cue from Simone de Beauvoir in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*

Just as infinity spread out before my gaze contracts above my head into a blue ceiling so my transcendence heaps up in the distance the opaque thickness of the future; but between sky and earth there is a perceptual field with its forms and colors; and it is in the interval which separates me today from an unforeseeable future that there are meanings and ends toward which to direct my acts. (1947/1948: 121)

The future is thus always an aspect of the lived present which also incorporates the past (in terms of individual and collective memories), as well as acts, bodily movements and performances (Crang 2001; Lagerkvist 2007, forthcoming). Social time is, as Jon May and Nigel Thrift argue, *made and lived simultaneously* (2001: 5). 'The future' is not only a dream of an other world – it is a project which is put to work in the living present through our conscious acts (de Beauvoir 1947/1948; Adam 2004a, 2004b, 2005). Seemingly looking into the future in a skyline, attributing science fiction qualities to a place, experiencing and enacting 'the future' in a cityscape saturated by department stores and screens, and assuming that media space possesses futurity etc. is the work of imagination and intentionality. But bestowing futurity to a place or phenomenon is also a social practice, which implies an *ethical and political choice*. As China enters into our daily lives through globalized commodities, and as the country fully achieves our attention during for example the Olympic Games, and when Shanghai will display its globality and modernity at the World Exposition of 2010, it is worth remembering one memory of the future in the city, which seems lost now, or at least kept off-limits: the futurity of the 1920s and 30s when diverse opinions were expressed, and when social movements were using the space of Shanghai as their refuge for envisioning a different future. The important question to raise in relation to the Chinese authoritarian market dictatorship is obviously: Is this the future that we want?

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