

Asian Centrality & the New Geopolitics of Place:

Between F A S T and S L O W Asian Space

John Van Tao Szto
Jubilee Arts Center

Centrality, Globalization, Virtual Environment and New Asian Geographies of Power

1.1 *centrality: telematics and globalization.* Saskia Saasen calls for a reconfiguration of the notion of centrality --"specifically that in advanced economic systems, not on matters such as the boundaries of cities or what cities actually are."¹ These economies are seen resting on the advances from both technical and scientific inputs. Her definition relates to two major sets of dynamics: 1) the impact of telematics, computer networks and telecommu-
nications, and 2) economic globalization. Stephen Graham refers to telematics as:

*"the shape of macro-electronics-based computer networks."*²

He further defines telematics as involving digital technologies which initiate information and transaction flows between microcomputers and computerized equipment. The new capabilities of telematics enables a "cultural revolution" in global infrastructure networks by helping to undermine the natural monopoly characteristic of urban infrastructures, so allowing private firms to operate profitably. (Fig.1) gives an example of the application of telematics to urban infrastructure in the UK.³ Manuel Castells on the other hand defines globalization as:

¹ Saskia Saasen. "Reconfiguring Centrality." *Anywise*. Ed. Cynthia Davidson (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), 131

² Stephen Graham & Simon Marion. "Telematics & the Convergence of Urban Infrastructure: Implications for Cities." *Town Planning Review* 65 (3)1994, 234.

³ Ibid.

*"the processes by which human activity in its different dimensions becomes selectively and asymmetrically organized in interactive networks of performance that function on a planetary scale in real time."*⁴

The spatial correlates of this new economic system engenders new questions in defining what constitutes centrality today in an economic system engenders new questions in defining what constitutes centrality today in an economic system in which 1) a share of transactions occur through technologies that neutralize distance and place on a global scale and 2) centrality has historically been embodied in a certain type of built environment and urban form.⁵ This particular transformation or the organization of spaces of the economy, produces a disembedding of identities. Saskia Sassen refers to these centers as global cities --the locations for key global processes ranging from international finance and immigration.⁶

1.2 Architecture and power. Architecture occupies a prominent position because it bears the potential to express social relations and power structures at certain critical moments in crystallized forms:

*"as physical frame to all human activity and because of its experiential qualities that engage everybody, architecture constitutes an essential part of the human experience. It expresses cultural values and is firmly grounded in material and daily life. Its connection to the everyday world is so substantial that if it can never be derived from worldly associations; neither can it transcend them."*⁷

Sharon Zukin sees two cultural products emerging from the the urban landscape: architecture and urban form. In a market economy, design and form relate to space in different ways: as a geographical or topographical

⁴ Manuel Castells, "Globalization, Flows & Identity: The New Challenge of Design," in *Reflections in Architectural Practices in the 90's*. (NY: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996).

⁵ Sassen, "Reconfiguring Centrality,"

⁶ Saskia Sassen. *Global Cities: New York, London, Tokyo*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996),

⁷ Sharon Zukin. "Landscapes of Power: from To Disney World" *from The Cultures of Cities*. (Berkeley: University of California, 1991).

constraint, and as a commodity. By the same token, they give both material and symbolic form to the opposition between market and place:

*"the market's constant pressure to reproduce variety contradicts the constant pressure on place to reproduce variety contradicts the constant pressure on place to reproduce stability. While most people really want to enjoy the pleasures of fine buildings, good stores, and beautiful urban spaces, the processes that create them make the city more abstract, more dependent on international capital flows, and more responsive to the organization of production."*⁸

1.3 *Cybercities and Virtual Environment.* Both the machine of the Machine City and the computer of CyberCity are metaphors that become ingrained in the way we represent and imagine the modern city in west and now east. Deleuze has maintained the disciplinary control that was one a function of the modern city employing machines of production, are now inhabited by "space of flows" defined by global networks of computers --a free-floating membrane of connectivity and control encircling the globe in ultra-speed fashion and enabling a new economic order of multinational corporations to arise. These spaces of flow involve the postmodern body which is surrounded and bombarded with incoherent fragments of time and space, for in CyberCity we seem to be continuously in motion --bit driving the freeways, shopping at the mall, or pushing carts through supermarket aisles.

1.4 *Globalization and the 'Golden Arch.'* In a recent volume, *Golden Arches East: McDonald's East*, editor James L. Watson documents the impact of Golden Arch architecture in five globalized Asian settings: Beijing, Hk, Taipei, Seoul and Japan (fig. 2). The research demonstrates that the "decorated American hamburger shed" of consumption, i.e., the Golden Arch, is not only a sign of transnational fast food commodification, but reciprocally and culturally impacts Asian culture with western values; these values are egalitarianism, kinship changes, the increased values of children, the various meanings of customer service, eating as a political act, and subverted meanings of "fast" in fast food.⁹ MacDonald's has become

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ James L. Watson. "Transnationalism, Localization & Fast Food in East Asia." (), 135.

such a saturated symbol, with contradictory meanings that the golden arch stand for something greater than "the sum of its corporate parts."¹⁰ Often seen as agents of cultural imperialism, George Ritzer describes the process of "McDonaldization" in his book *The McDonaldization of Society*; this process can be described further as:

*"the process by which the principles of the fast food restaurant are coming to dominate more and more sectors of...society."*¹¹

1.5 Asian centrality, power and architecture? Asia, as the fifth most rapidly growing urban zone, contains three quarters of the world's rural population and nearly half of its urban dwellers --undergoing a tripling of its population from 1955 to 1990. With demographic growth heavily influenced by rapid growth in China and India, there have also been dramatic expansion in southeast Asia and a first and second generation of "tigers" which have been responsible for economic changes that have produced some of the world's most visible architectural monuments to prosperity. With the networks of major international business centers in new geographies of centrality --many in Asia, i.e., Beijing, Shanghai, HK, Seoul, Tokyo and Taipei, what is the architecture of these dematerialized forms of centrality? And in light of local tradition, nature, technology, and globalization, what would a new Asian architecture of centrality be like -- especially China?

Critical Geopolitics & Global Diaspora:

Asia Bound and the Logic of Western Up Capitalist Architecture

In the past, western capital was used globally as a colonial instrument to reinforce the political boundaries in the 19th century to shape the burgeoning working classes into nation-states. International capital today, on the other hand is concerned with expanding markets. Capital no longer sees architecture as anything other than the functional accommodation of its infrastructure. Peter Eisenman, in another article, "Eleven Points of Knowledge and Wisdom" points out for us that "this condition can be seen

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ George Ritzer. *The McDonaldization of Society*.

in Seoul, Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur, Shanghai and many cities of the East where architecture has been reduced to infrastructure."¹² Inter-national capital has created a condition in both East and West called geopolitics. The *Economist* says that the modernization of China is likely to be "the most earth-shaking public event in the lifetime of those living today."¹³ The Asian countries -- especially China are hungry for monuments to their fast --rising prosperity. In fact, 35% of KPF's work consists of commissions in Asia while RTKL reports that 30 percent of its work is outside of the US, half in Asia. Of the world's 10 tallest buildings finished in the 1990's or under construction, only one is in this country --the others in Asia. Asia's upward economics are matched with western style "see-through" upward skyscrapers.¹⁴ This Asian "Babylonian Tower" syndrome can be seen in an article which was printed in the Wall Street Journal(fig. 3) to produce a Western vertical FAST architecture in Asia.

The Evolution of the Asian Skyscraper: Hypercomplexity & Contra-diction?

3.1 *Universalizing High Tech?* The skyscraper constitutes the quintessential building type of the late twentieth century, from its significant early develop-ments in American cities including Chicago and New York to recent projects in Asia that underscore the changing social, political and economic landscapes at the end of this century. In the literature on skyscrapers, the economic and political matrix that informs much current architectural analysis is deeply evident. Instead of a concentration on matters of form or technology, numerous recent writers have pointed to zoning and other governmental regulations, the bottom-line mentality of real estate markets and construction costs versus profit margins, and the va-garies of corporate identity and personal ego as factors that have all played a major role in the genesis of the skyscraper during the course of this century. Patrons' commitment to design quality not for its own sake but because of a belief in its profitability further bespeaks the economic underpinning of developments in this building

¹² Peter Eisenman. "Critical Architecture in a Geopolitical World." *Anywise*, Ed. Cynthia Davidson.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Philip Langdon. "Asia Bound," *PA* March 1994, 45.

type, especially during the past fifty years. At the same time, the technological motivation behind the skyscraper --its hallmark at the outset of the century --has continued to evolve with increasingly lighter and more economical frameworks. Whether structure is exploited, as in the vocabulary of High Tech, or masked with heavy cladding reflecting historicizing impulses, the push toward creating every-greater height records seems to continue unabated, especially in designs for cities such as Kuala Lumpur that are at present key sites for the evolving economic crucible of the turn into the next century.¹⁵

3.2 Hypercomplexity and Contradiction? The universalization of the skyscrapers that dominate these newurbans of centrality in the twentieth century -- especially in new Asian urban centers marks the end of an era: local and "pure" cultural identities as the evocation as difference by the juxtaposition of cultures now gives way to a dispersed heterogeneity.¹⁶ Borders, fragments, cultures and hy-brids interpenetrate and redefine the urban space everywhere. However, as Henri Lefebvre points out in his analysis of "social space," this is not a simple juxta-position that leads to the disappearance of the "local" space:" the worldwide does not abolish the local." The combinations, superpositions, and even collisions in question do not lead to the absorption of the local, but to the creation of "innu-merable places" within the urban space, resulting in a hypercomplexity that is crisscrossed by a myriad of currents. The analysis of urban space thus becomes further complicated as a result of such interprenetrations and superimpositions that subject each fragment to a host of contradictory social relationships.¹⁷

Deconstructing Global Occidentalism: A 21st Century Authentic Asian Space?

4.1 Annihilating Asia's Architectural Past? Nelson Chen has commented that "the preoccupation with Western-style architecture has resulted in an architectural Chernobyl --an uncontrolled fallout of conflicting building

¹⁵ Elizabeth A. T. Smith. "Reexamining Architecture & Its History at the End of the Century," in *At The End of the Century: 100 Years of Architecture*, 93-94.

¹⁶ Zeynep Celik. "Cultural Intersection: Re-visionary Architecture in the 20th c." in *The End of the Century: 100 Years of Architecture*, 93-94.

¹⁷ Ibid.

styles and contradictory land uses." Given China's several leap forwards from a Confucian/imperial society into a communist/society can China's present leap into modernization, or any "developing country" for that matter allow it to preserve structures from its non-renewable past? What of the architectural gems of the past in Bangkok, Saigon, Shanghai and Cambodia? If countries in the early stages of modernization need to assess more seriously the relationship between the past, as well as a city's distinctiveness how can this be achieved if Asian architectural commissions are awarded to American firms with no understanding of Asian's traditional or colonial past?¹⁸

4.2 *1990s: Global carpetbagging in Asia?* For American architects, the 1990s have brought back the boom of the 1980s until the recent Asian crisis. Driven by ego, one-upmanship and a desire to showcase surging economic growth, Asian developers have been paying a premium to brand-name U.S. architects for over-the-top designs of tall buildings. And given the paucity of megaprojects in this country, American architects have been given "carpetbagging privileges" never imagined globally.¹⁹ Known as being skyscraper specialists, American architects have been living out of suitcases in tall-building boomtowns like Singapore; Kuala Lumpur; Malaysia; Shanghai, China, and Seoul, South Korea.²⁰

Inserting Identity & Ethnography:

Modern and S L O W Asian Space?

5.1 *Inserting Identity: Modern and Asian?* Peter G. Rowe, Dean of Harvard's GSD has raised the question of whether the rapid industrialization taking place in the Pacific Asian region is a distinctly Asian phenomenon or "whether they are largely a matter of satisfying demands for urban expansion within the generically modern realm of internationally available contemporary building practices."²¹ In a forthcoming book entitled, *Asia Modern, 1998 (Costa and Nolan)*, Rowe seeks to address and to expand the standard western cultural definition of what modernity is deemed to be in order to account for the modernization and

18 Langdon, "Asia Bound,"

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.

21 From Harvard GSD Website.

urbanization which is occurring so rapidly all over Asia. Choosing to focus primarily on Chinese or Chinese-dominated cities and urban areas such as Singapore, HK, Taipei, Shanghai, Beijing, Dalian and Suzhou, with occasional references to Seoul, Tokyo and Kuala Lumpur, Rowe's analyses includes an overall morphology of urban-regional development and urban planning, as well as matters of urban-architectural expression. Seeking for a "Third Way," emerging from the insertion of national and local "identity" or ethnography, which is concomitant with the modernization, industrialization and urbanization of the east, Rowe's particular explication of Ken Frampton's earlier "critical regionalism" is also a search for regional and local differences to inform and influence contemporary architectural expression.²²

5.2 Ethnography and Etymology in Architecture. Quatremere addressed the question of the relationship between Egyptian and Chinese culture --or ethnography in his memoir as well as the more general issue of origins that was embedded in de Guignes's thesis that supported the traditionalist monogenetist view of Egypt as the cradle of civilization by drawing a parallel between Egyptian hieroglyphics and Chinese ideograms. Because China was both ancient and exotic, determining its historical position in relation to Egypt was almost as imperative as determining that of Greece. De Pauw, who began the preliminary discourse to his *Recherches philosophiques sur les Chinois et les Egyptiens* proposes the following:

"In this work we propose to examine how far the ancient Egyptians resembled the modern Chinese, and in what points they differed from them. It is necessary on all such matters to enter into very considerable discussions; for those, who trust entirely to appearances, are in danger of experiencing continual illusions." ²³

Concerning origins, De Pauw was determined that Egyptian architecture derived from a cave while Greek Architecture derived from a hut, while maintaining that:

²² Ibid.

²³ Sylvia Lanvin. *Quatremere De Quincy & The Invention of a Modern Language of Architecture.* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992),

"the Chinese evidently imitated the form of their tents. From all that we can learn of their primitive state, they were originally Nomades, or Scenites, like all the Tartars; and consequently encamped with their flocks, previous to their settlement in towns. This, without doubt gave rise to the singular construction of their present dwellings, whereby the roofs remain after the walls are thrown down, because they have no connexion with the timber-work. An inclosure of masonry had been made in the manner around the tents, to contain the cattle; and such was certainly the first step, leading from a pastoral and wandering life towards fixed habitations." ²⁴

Delirious Asian Space and the Future of Confucian States: From "dirty Realism" to the "grid" to the Asian Crisis

7.1 Dirty Realism: Chaos and Asian Space. Wong Chong Thai has cited Fredric Jameson's recent references to the East region area, i.e., Japan and China, to construct a theory of future space which involves an ethnographic interest in the non-West by 1) first expanding the boundaries of knowledge and 2) secondly by transforming it.²⁵ While regionalist positions are critical of the conventional hierarchies that privilege the modern over the traditional and the international over the local, their interest lies more in finding a reconciliatory middle term that questions the very systems of privilege. Thai's focus on the imaginary East/West construction in which the East is rendered voiceless and left to be judged by an authority located elsewhere, explores notions of incoherence, chaos, and randomness that are often associated with the architectural and urban spaces of the East.²⁶ Arguing that "all implications of some eternal future are deemphasized and replaced by an experimentation and invention for the here and now,"²⁷ he concludes that unprecedented historical and cultural connections and collusions in these spaces enable the subjects to move freely and "take flight into uncharted and unpredicted territories."²⁸

7.2 Asian space and the possibility of reversed "dystopia." Jameson's observations regarding the proliferation of buildings and infrastructural

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Wong Chong Thai. "Cacophany: Gratification or Invocation" in *Postcolonial Space(s)*. Ed. G. B. Nalbant (NY: Princeton Architectural Press, 1997), 131-139.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

development of all kinds, together with the affluence and seemingly wanton consumption in China, has moved Jameson "to reverse the notion of dystopia."²⁹ Jameson finds it hard to imagine a reality of in which:

*"the dystopian imagination meant a sort of pessimism (a catastrophe equal to the worst of the bad) the new Chinese landscape is a dystopia of wealth in which a one-quarter billion people are wantonly consuming and building. The catastrophe befalling unto the earth as a result of such consumption is inconceivable to him."*³⁰

Jameson has thought in a Hegelian manner that the despotic Asian mode is now the supplement or the "other" to the now defunct and dissolved North American civil society --but rather a new compensatory space --a space that is the geographical other within a landscape of enclaves, each enclave being formed out of a particular groups' separatist interest and demand.³¹

7.3 Reimagining East/West Subjectivities. This form of spatiality, which Jameson claims is the result of a new micro-politics, will materially affect the future of America, if it has not already done so. This compensatory space provides a sense of "no-man's land," absorbing various multiple yet incommensurate subjectivities. This compensatory space allows the old "bourgeois subject to reimagine and reassume him or herself. On the contrary, it is the "space of urban infinite space, where corporate property has somehow abolished the older individual private property without becoming public."³²

7.4. Referencing Japanese Space. Referring to the landmark of the "obligatory Japanese reference" --of Japanese space, whose success the West admires and fears, Jameson views "Japan as the future's benchmark whose image and reference America needs to compulsively imitate: "³³ Viewing the east as an internal critique of the West's own logocentricism, his analysis which is directed towards the logic of late capitalism and the postmodern dissolution of the civil society in the West. Seeing the East as the opportunity to provide "potentially redemptive spaces" for the West to

²⁹ Frederic Jameson. "The Uses of Apocalypse," in *Anyway*, ed. Cynthia Davidson (NY: Rizzoli, 1994), 40-41.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

imitate." However, Wong Chong Thai criticizes Jameson's formulation which leaves the East as a passive force and voice, "always to be judged by an authority located elsewhere."³⁴

7.5 *Delirious Asian space and the grid.* Rem Koolhaas has observed that the "rigid, undifferentiated grid of service cores found in *Delirious New York* enables a spatiality that fosters a randomness, a freedom, and a differentiation found so often in Tokyo.³⁵ Tokyo for Koolhaas seems to have been reduced, condensed, and contained by Koolhaas's grid.

Furthermore, the predicate suggests that the East is incoherent, chaotic, and random --a perceived cacaphony that makes no sense to the symbolic world. I would argue that despite his reductive notion of Eastern spaces instigated by fear and fascination, Jameson offers the possibility of uncovering and revealing a current cross-cultural phenomenon that has material affect on the production of architecture. If the perceived chaos of the East is true how can it offer itself within the present forms of production and knowledge? If the amorphous, random, and the chaotic imply a diversity of disjunctive parts that appear and disappear, condense and disperse over time and space. Wong Chong Thai further expands on the notion of chaos, randomness and amorphousness in the East, by referring to Gilles Deleuze's interpretation of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz.³⁶ Quoting Deleuze:

*"Chaos would be the sum of all possibles, that is, all individual essences insofar as each tends to existence on its own account; but the screen only allows compossibles - -and only the best combination of compossibles to be sifted through."*³⁷

Unlike Koolhaas's grid imposed onto an undifferentiated mass, we need to run Jameson's earlier assertion around. Koolhaas's grid, instead of opposing the active force of chaos (which Jameson associates with the East), exemplifies Koolhaas's failure to prevent chaos from taking over.³⁸ Indeed,

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Rem Koolhaas. "Architecture & Globalization." GSD News (Winter/Spring, 1994), 47-48.

³⁶ Gilles Deleuze. *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, trans. Tom Cooley (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 77.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

this may have been his intention. In this way, the grid becomes a cog in the chaotic Asian machine.³⁹ Differences between the grid and chaos can, at some levels, become seemingly seamless, whereby chaos subsequently absorbs and overcomes the grid to reduce into onto member in the sum of all possibles. Chance, coincidence, accident and reason bring autonomous singularities together not to reconcile their differences. Though such a possibility exists, but to allow a nexus where new possibles and intentions and all implications of some external future are deemphasized and replaced by an experimentation and invention for the here and now.⁴⁰

7.6 *Asian Crisis.*

Since Asia's currencies collapsed and its stock markets nose-dived this past fall, American architects have been biting their nails hard. In firms nationwide, phones that rang daily like cash registers with calls from new Asian clients fell ominously silent. As 1997 drew to a close, many firms principals found themselves scurrying to Asia to meet with clients, taking measure of the turmoil, and slave outstanding fees. Most architects returned home predicting that the region's crisis would get worse—and stay bad for a while – before it improves."I don't think we've seen the peak of developers stopping work," ventures Patrick McLearn, executive vice president for Asia/Pacific practice at HOK.⁴¹

7.7 *Real Estate Woes.* Real estate woes across much of Asia were the chief causes of the area's disasters. Developers in Asia were borrowing and building too much, and American architects were feasting on the excess. Apart from huge public investments in infrastructure, most private construction hasn't been for growth-generating factors and plants, but for speculative office buildings, hotels, mixed-use centers, high-rise condominiums, and new towns, recklessly financed with debt. Some of Asia's biggest banks, abbetted by lazy or corrupt regulators, had anywhere from 10 percent to 35 percent of their loans out on heedless property deals. After years of "miraculous growth" rates of 6 percent to 12 percent in Asia's national economies, signs of regional troubles ahead were clear by last spring: Inflation kicked in and growth of exports and gross domestic product roundly fell in countries throughout the Pacific Rim. With

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid.

41 Patrick MacLeamy in "Is Asia's Boom Over?"

the current crash in Asia, firms have developed multiple portfolios spread across multiple countries. For now, architects in the US are looking at their work in Taiwan, HK and also Singapore, whose health seems intact by current Asian standards. China will push ahead because their giant country is "insulated" from the vicissitudes of regulated capitalism in the rest of Asia. However, many familiar with the region still site the area's strengths in technology and its increasingly well-educated populations as groundwork for future growth.⁴²

"Modern China is the product of conjoining of modernist discourses originating in the West and native institutions...historical social conditions...and native reaction-formation...Therefore, any diagnosis of power in contemporary China is a critique neither simply of the West nor of China's tradition, but of their offspring: China's modernity." ⁴³

-- Mayfair M.H. Yang

Pudong: Placeless Cities and Virtual Empty Space

9.1 *Post-Mao Chinese Urbanization*. China has been the most spectacular example of the Asian miracle; Shanghai now rivals Hong Kong in construction activity. According to the latest United Nations global report on urbanization, the nations with the most rapid economic growth are Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan and China, with Japan, Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand close behind. China's place in this list has been secured by the decision to declare Shanghai as an "economic zone" or open city in 1983. By 1990, many leaders from Shanghai had risen to top positions in the national government and were able to direct re-development projects to their city, and to generate a new, high-technology centre, or electronic city within the city east of the Huangpu river. Between the time it had been designated an open city and 1993, Shanghai's population increased from 6.27 million in the urban core, to 12.87 million including greater Shanghai

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Mayfair. M.H. Yang. "Mass Media and Transnational Subjectivity in Shanghai: Notes on (RE) Cosmpolitanism in a Chinese Metropolis" in *Ungrounded Empires: The Multicultural Politics of Modern Chinese Transnationalism*.(NY: Routledge, 1992), 292.

as well, with a transient population of two million not included in this figure. This represents a doubling time of one decade, and the architectural result is chaotic, uncontrolled growth spreading out into the rural hinterland.⁴⁴

9.2 Chinese Virtual Vertical Cities. The new electronic city that is exploding into life across the river from the old neo-classical centre of Shanghai is known as Pudong. It is quite possibly the largest construction site the world has ever witnessed. Brooding over it all are the two red balls of the Oriental Pearl Television tower which hover on their steel tripod structure. Imagine Canary Wharf, downtown Manhattan and central Frankfurt distilled into a Chinese context and you have some idea of the scale of the enterprise; Pudong is intended to raise Shanghai's profile on the world financial stage so that it will rival Hong Kong and eventually Tokyo and New York as well. If the late 1980s was the era of the Asian "tigers," the late 1990s must surely belong to China. Already the governing power in Hong Kong, it will soon enter the economic super league, seizing a place among the world's top five trading powers. Officials in Shanghai boast further that by the turn of the century, the city will be home to at least a dozen conglomerates that will warrant a listing in the Fortune Top 500 Companies.⁴⁵

9.3 The Reappearance of Shanghai. In 1992, the masterplan competition for the Lujiazui financial district in Pudong involved top Richard Rogers, Toyo Ito, Dominique Perrault and others were asked to participate including the four Shanghai Design Institutes. In a stroke of diplomacy the authorities concluded that all of the four of the locally submitted proposals had merit.⁴⁶ In a decision that showed diplomatic, if not architectural acumen, the best aspects of each were combined and the result was accepted as the final masterplan-- eliminating the need for any of the international submissions. As the design consultations took place, as many as 50 plots of land had already been sold and were under construction.⁴⁷

9.4 Virtual Empty Pudong.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Anthony Yeh. "Pudong: Remaking Shanghai as a World City," 278.

⁴⁶ Grand Sung. "Shanghai Express." *Architectural Record*, v183 n7.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

With the value of the Japanese yen and other Asian currencies continuing to fall, China's promise to maintain the value of the yuan is imposing a higher and higher cost on the Chinese economy, because a strong yuan makes Chinese exports more expensive than those of competing Asian countries. Yet if China does devalue, it could set off another round of beggar-thy-neighbor currency devaluations, making the Asia crisis much worse by scaring off investors and further lowering consumer confidence. Because of the extreme damage a devaluation could do to the rest of Asia, China is under intense pressure from the United States and other nations to maintain the yuan's value. It also must consider how much a devalued yuan would discourage direct foreign investment in China, which is already declining as members of the large Chinese diaspora pull back their investments in China to cover losses related to the Asian contagion. Meanwhile, Pudong, China's new financial center remains 70 percent vacant.⁴⁸

A New Wave of Chinese Architecture: Between F A S T and S L O W Chinese Space

3.1 *Avante-garde or arriere-garde: SLOW Space.* In an article, "Postmodern Constraints," Frederic Jameson points out that there is a definite retrogression built into the project itself where it is underscored by the slogan of an arriere-garde, or rearguard action, whose untimely status is further emphasized by Frampton's insistence that whatever Critical Regionalism turns out to be, in its various regions of possibility, it must necessarily remain a "marginal practice."

With the avante-garde it shares and seeks to out-troop the vulgar bourgeois conception of progress, yet retains a belief in the possibilities of a liberating dimension to technology and scientific development. At the same time, its arriere-garde, and its concomitant "slow space," resists forms of "progress" such as global modernization, corporate hegemony and the universal standardization of commodities and life-styles. In its historiography:

⁴⁸ Bay Fang and Frank McCoy. "China's New Threat to the World: To Save Itself, China May Worsen Asian Crisis." *US News & World Report*, Aug. 17/ Aug/ 24th 1998.

"[critical regionalism] seeks a certain deeper historical logic in the past of this system, if not its future: a rearguard retains overtones of a collective resistance, and not the anarchy of trans-avant-garde pluralism that characterizes many of the postmodern ideologies of Difference.as such." ⁴⁹

3.2 Architectures of resistance? Alan Colquhoun postulates that regionalism's goal is to correlate cultural codes and patterns and geographical patterns and technology.⁵⁰ Like critical regionalism, it reflects a partial moment in history and in particular expression the pathos of a situation in which the possibility of a radical alternative to late capitalist technologies has decisively receded. By qualifying the old term "regionalism" with the term "architect," Alexander Tzonis and Liane Lefaivre have "tried to preempt any imputation of repressive nostalgia."⁵¹ Critical means two things:

1) "resistance against the appropriation of a way of life and a bond of human relations by alien economic and power interests." 2) "creates a resistance against the merely nostalgic return of the past by removing regional elements from their natural contexts so as to defamiliarize them and create an effect of estrangement." ⁵²

Jameson correctly points out that Frampton's proposal is a geopolitical one:

"it seeks to mobilize a pluralism of 'regional styles' (a term selected, no doubt, in order to forestall the unwanted connotations of the terms national and international alike), with a view toward resisting the standardizations of a henceforth global late capitalism and corporatism, whose 'vernacular' is as omnipresent as its power over local decisions." ⁵³

3.3 Three Chinese Architects:

⁴⁹ Alan Colquhoun. "The Concept of Regionalism" in *Postcolonial Spaces*. (NY: Princeton Architectural Press, 1997).

⁵⁰ Alexander Tzonis. "Why Critical Regionalism Today?" (NY: Princeton Architectural Press, 1997), 492, in *Architecture & Urbanism #236* (May 1990): 22-23.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Frederic Jameson. "Postmodern Constraints," 254.

⁵³ Jonathan Arac. "Chinese Postmodernism: Toward a Global Context." in *Boundary 224:3*, 1997.

The Crisis of the Object and the Search for the Other

The demise of the modern utopia, the failure of the project of the historical avant-garde, and finally, the institutionalization of the modern language of architecture together prepared the situation for the dismissal of the historical avant-garde: the post-modernist's giant leap back became an esteem for archaism which is the common denominator of Venturi's populism, Jenck's symbolism and Krier's interest in the tectonics of the classical architecture. Rossi stresses the import of typological and morphological structures and their role understanding and transforming the city. For Rossi, any intervention in the city's fabric is modified by two constants: First, by those buildings whose history is experienced in the present (meaning that certain buildings could work for different functions and yet maintain the autonomy of their original structure, or fabric). Second, by those sites or buildings that could be called critical zones, sites that integrate the individual and collective memories of the city. These two constants are essential for Rossi's discourse on type and for the architecture of monument and cemetery. Resisting the commodification of architecture enforced by the building industry, Rossi disappoints popular expectation from a particular building type. In his Il Palazzo hotel in Fukuoka, Japan, where the adjacent river would have encouraged both the conventional wisdom and the corporate architecture to provide each room with vast exposure to its scenic surrounding, Rossi cancels this expectation and instead refers to the excluded windows by recessions made on the surface of the wall facing the river. Whereas Rossi's Japanese project breaks the ice of the "grand plan," his vision of a fragmented city is a critique of Krier's belief that the "whole" still sustains the truth. While Rossi's analogical architecture undermines the postmodernist acceptance of the gap between signifier and signified, in neorationalist architecture, metaphysics harks back through the empty floating structure of type, and through the square-shaped window frame, a Rossian device to open a different vista into the horizon of humanism. Ironically, Rossi's work moves from index to sign, from objectification to figuration, charging his forms with tactile and semantic potentialities. It is not far-fetched to associate this later body with the work of de Chirico's paintings; in Rossi's work one finds the cynical criticism that one would find in surrealism. The structuralist's intention to pacify the subject became the point of

departure for post-structuralist discourse. According to poststructuralists, the problem of subject is not inclusive to the discourse of the Enlightenment; it rests primarily in the textual structure of Western metaphysics.

3.1 IM Pei and Fragrant Hill .

Fragrant Hill shares with Rossi's hotel an architecture heavily on historical allusion. Situated in an old imperial hunting preserve some twenty-five miles northwest of Beijing, was unlike anything he had done before. There was no trace of the sculptural abstraction that had distinguished NCAR, the Dallas City Hall, and the Everson Museum. Nor was there anything of the relentless geometry or crisp planarity of the East Building of the National Gallery. This low-lying structure zigged and zagged across its site and was embellished with all sorts of what appeared to be un-Pei-like ornament. Diamond-shaped bits of masonry were scattered across the facade: lattice-work screens shaded interior hallways: and the windows in the offwhite-walls were given dark geometric outlines of an almost graphic power. Far from being a revival, or even a reference to the architecture of the past, the design of Fragrant Hill was based on a rigorous distillation of what Pei felt were the best elements of a continuing tradition in Chinese architecture, one that had been stalled but not stopped by nearly a century of political upheaval and warfare. His real aim was to pick up that lost thread of continuity and use it in the weaving of an architectural aesthetic for contemporary China. As a way of persuading the Chinese of the appropriateness of his unexpected design, Pei turned to collage, superimposing an image of the hotel type on a traditional landscape drawing. And so, whereas western postmodernism is characterized by myth, fiction and kitsch, Chinese postmodernism can be characterized by collage, bioclimaticism, etymology and Tao. ⁵⁴

3..2 Ken Yeang and the Bioclimactic Skyscraper

Around 1890, the term "skyscraper" was coined to describe "the multi-story office building type" which was being built predominantly in the central areas of Chicago and New York in the USA. As a peculiarly American invention, along with

⁵⁴ Ibid.

the movie palace and the fast-food restaurant, some people regard it to be one of America's greatest inventions because of its worldwide impact on our contemporary urban human habitat. In China, pagodas, which were tall structures were built. Skyscrapers, however, did not evolve from their four or five-story predecessors which were simply "walk-up" buildings: the skyscraper is considered to be a unique building typology. Clearly, if designers can find no historical precedents for the new skyscrapers that are fervently being built in Tokyo, China or Germany, for example, how are they to design the tall building in these places far removed from North America? To answer these aforesaid questions, Yeang has adopted a bioclimatic approach to the tower. Bioclimatology is the study of the relationship between climate and life, particularly the effects of climate on the health and activity of living things: this approach offers the unique solution of focusing on the relationship between the architectural form and its environmental performance in relation to the climate of the place. The resulting built form then illustrates how an understanding of the environmental aspects of design that already influence the culture and life of that locality can contribute to architectural expression. At the same time the approach helps minimise dependence on non-renewable energy sources. The proposition of replanning and re-building all of today's cities on a clean slate, based on ecological principles, may mean whole-scale waste of the existing building stock and infrastructure. It is clear that skyscrapers will continue to be built regardless of current piecemeal achievements of ecological proponents.⁵⁵

3.4.2 China Tower no. 1 This hotel tower's design is part of a continuing investigation of the use of wind as an ambient bioclimatic component. It explores the use of the predominant north-easterly and south-easterly winds. In the middle of the tower (oval in plan) is an atrium. The tower's aerodynamic shape is oriented so that the tip of the oval faces towards the prevailing wind which is then ducted through ceiling plenums to ventilate the inner parts of the building. The wind is controlled by adjustable louvres that are externally sensor-controlled and monitored. A wind-powered generator is situated at the top of the building; the electricity

⁵⁵ Ibid.

produced is stored in batteries and provides water heating, lighting for the main and escape stairs, and emergency lighting.⁵⁶

3.4.3 China Tower no. 2. Two up-market apartment towers facing the sea. Most floors have four apartment units; others have three with the remaining space used as skycourts and communal spaces in the sky. All the apartments have external walls on three sides and large balconies, with moveable typhoon shutters, facing the sea. Lift lobbies and staircases are naturally ventilated and the top floor houses penthouse swimming pools, sundeck and wind-powered generators.⁵⁷

3.4 John Szto: Theotextual Symbolics and a late 20th c. hut

3.4.1 The Chinese recluse poets. Chinese recluses poets might well have felt at home in the primitive hut of Heraclitus, and the desert fathers would no doubt have cherished the notion of “living on ferns and dew,” yet each group withdrew for different reasons. Nevertheless, as the Oriental and Occidental recluse drew closer to the collective life of culture, or of cities, these sharp differences in purpose diminished. When seclusion took on a social dimension, it became soft. It lost the edge that had come first from the uncertainty of physical survival and later from the condition of tabula rasa that seclusion had afforded. Here every condition and thought could be considered and reconsidered, literally from the ground up.⁵⁸

3.4.2 A 20th c. hut. This “Meditation Chamber” -- a room for quiet meditative reflection, contemplation and introspection is situated in Sutton Place, on NY’s upper east side. While this particular client’s hectic “worldly” fast-tracked corporate schedule requires an equally fast-paced lifestyle which often involves taking work home, a solitary “prayer closet” for emotional and spiritual rejuvenation in the city is necessary. The “sacred hut” adjacent to the changing room, the space for sleeping and the library itself forms a triadic relationship with all three spaces and serves as a spiritual “loci” for an urban saint in an urban apartment. While the “room”

56 Ibid.

57 Yung-Ho Chuang. "Yuan" in *Slow Spaces*. (NY: Monacelli Press, 1998), 347-354.

58 Ibid.

59 Ann Cline. "Habitations." *A Hut of One's Own: Life Outside the Circle of Architecture*. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997),

60 Ibid.

(which is actually an alcove) is small, it is small enough to accommodate a desk with a wall of storage space.⁵⁹

3.4.3 The Tao of Theotextual Cosmology. The design by virtue of its materiality marks the transition and boundary between the sacrum and the profanum. The structure of the meditation cell encompasses amongst other things allusions to the Asian body, the cosmic metaphysical zones which includes the divisions of reality into the earth, the sky and the heavens, as well as the stages of creation as recorded in the sacred narrative found in the Book of Genesis. The desk, analagous to a “sacred mountain” represents man and his vocation --his work, his life as set against a literal “window” on the metaphorical world. The position of the desk with respect to the “room” divides space and time into two realms: that which is of this earth and is temporal, and that which is of the heavens and is eternal. In fact, the materiality of these two realms is contrasted in keeping with the Johan-nine dictum that “flesh gives birth to flesh, and spirit gives birth to spirit.”⁶⁰
