DESIGNING SHANGHAI,
OR WHY EAST IS THE NEW WEST

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I am finishing this essay in Barcelona's architecturally exceptional and at the same time serene Omm hotel. The city has been so completely covered with design hotels - there seems to be one on every corner - that sometimes I wonder if Catalonians sold their souls in the process. As my guide, I am using a little booklet from anothertravelguide.com which came complements of my airBaltic flight I took to Tallinn (the capital of Estonia) a few weeks ago. In Tallinn every café and lounge plays Fashion TV and people dress accordingly - so I feel I can trust this guide. I am planning to go later to Ommsession which, according to my guide, is a »cult nightclub of the moment, located at the Omm hotel.« Interestingly, the guide which comes courtesy of a discount airline, also informs me about the dress code at Ommsession which is nothing but discont: »gucci+prada+lanvin+balenciaga.« However, it is Sunday, so I hope that I will be let in my Calvin Klein and Hugo Boss cloves plus my leather jacket, which is at least as interesting as what the best luxury brands in the World can deliver. Except, just as some of the most cutting edge design and thinking today, it does not come from an older Western metropolis. Instead, it comes from a place, which until this decade was definitely outside, on the margins of contemporary culture - Bulgaria. It also could have been from Peru, Thailand, Turkey, or another formerly "provincial" place.

So what about Shanghai? Where does it fit in relation to design wave and design innovation, which have swapped the planet in the last ten years? [1] When I started coming to China, making my first trip there in October 2004, one thing which I did not expect to find was that the new consumer spaces built recently - restaurants, multi-function entertainment/retail spaces, hotels, malls, etc. - not only featured stylish contemporary design but in fact often were at the very cutting edge of global design and

lifestyle trends. For instance, if I think about the most remarkable meal I had in this decade, it was not in Madrid, New York or Paris. It was in a restaurant located in Hangzhou, a city that is about three hours by train from Shanghai. The design of space and the design of food were both remarkable. And the most interesting café design I have experienced in this decade was Future Perfect in Shanghai.

The city is also working hard to develop itself as a key player in design and other creative industries worldwide. So while today the hotel in which you are staying after you Easyjet or Jetblue flight was probably designed somewhere else rather than Shanghai, this is likely to change in years to come. It is likely that before long »made in Shanghai« may acquire the same status as »made in Denmark« or »made in Italy« are today.

It is 10:35am, September 15, 2006. I am walking towards Shanghai Exhibition Center to attend 2006 Shanghai Design Biennial. Exhibition Center was build in the 1950s in the Stalinist style, and its architecture which is not unlike the nineteenth century eclecticism - Gothic meets Renaissance meets Arab Mosque meets Classicism - provides a surreal contrast to the Design Biennial which is completely Now and State-of the art: lectures on everything from sustainable architecture to brand management, and a separate show of New Lines in Italian Design. What makes the scene even more surreal is what outside Shanghai Exhibition Center. Imposing in its day, today it is overshadowed by high-rises of the 1980s and 1990s. They are arrogant, even aggressive, and some of them are fine examples of a particular unintentional Chinese post-modernism: steel and glass structures capped with some traditional Chinese motif apparently slapped there by the clients.[2]

Of course, you see such contrasts in China every day, but still, even after living in Shanghai for over two months, this particular Russian doll in a Chinese style - state of the art design products and trends circa 2007 - inside Communist mid twentieth century eclecticism - inside the forest of steel and glass post-modern high-rises - remains one of the most striking real-life montages I have experienced in the city. The three layers of

this doll summarize the three eras of consumer culture in China over last half a century: first, non-existing (during Mao era); second, when the architecture and goods have been imported from the West and other countries in Asia to a China (many of the goods actually being assembled in China); and third which is now, with China rapidly developing its own design and creative industries and beginning to export them.

If we don't count Chinese food, first major Chinese cultural export of the second part of the 20th century was Chinese cinema (the Fifth Generation filmmakers of the 1980s). Next, in the 1990s, it was the turn of contemporary Chinese art. Using their academic training which artists in the West no longer have, Chinese realist painters were able to create unique cultural products not available anywhere else in the global cultural market. Given what I have seen in Shanghai, I expect that design, architecture, fashion, hi-level (as opposed to inexpensive and non-designed) cuisine, and media will start to be exported next.

Currently US, Japan and Korea remain are three key exporters of media and lifestyle trends worldwide, including films, computer games, mange, street clothing styles, and music. It will probably take at least a few years before they will be joined by China. In architecture, for instance, MA Design, or MAD, has been recognized as the first Chinese architects to act internationally.[3] At the time of this writing (November 2007), none of their projects abroad were yet completed. These projects under construction or in proposal stage include The Absolute Towers in Toronto; Denmark Pavilion, a villa in Denmark; KBH Kunsthal (a large art space also in Denmark), Al Rostamai Group headquarters in Dubai, and Mongolia Private Meadow Club, a villa in inner Mongolia.

I enter Shanghai Exhibition Center and go through the exhibition. At the one end of the hall I encounter a big publicity poster which one may see only in China - communist rhetoric and iconography which seemingly effortlessly were adopted to promote the new vision of China as the economic and cultural super-power of the new century. The texts on the poster read »EXPO 2010 Shanghai China« and »Better City, Better Life«; the background is a panorama of Shanghai. The panorama is rendered from a bird's view,

and all we see are modern high-rises and blocks. No details from the past are visible. The panorama is rendered in this particular red color, which had become the communist brand since 1917 October Revolution in Russia. But, just as it is the case in China today in general, there no other visible traces of Communist iconography in exhibition itself. Instead, I see a mash-up of French, Japanese, Italian, Australian and local design firms showing their products and services, all eager to make contacts and acquire new clients and contracts.

Off to 3rd floor of the Friendship Hall where Opening Ceremony and International Design Conference of Shanghai Design Biennial 2006 are in progress. The interior design of the conference hall, with its very large curtains arranged in decorative folds reminds me of Socialist Realist paintings from the middle of the twentieth century depicting Communist Party congresses. However, just as it was the case on the exhibition floor, there is nothing outdated or nostalgic in the speeches I am hearing today. The presentation from Hartmut Esslinger, the founder of Frog Design, is entitled »China 2010: From Production Champion to Global Brand Player.« I am also treated to »Hitachi Experience Design for the Next Society« (obviously, from Hitachi). But most telling are the presentations from the Chinese officials themselves who confidently talk about converting Shanghai from an industrial city to China's center for design and creative industries.

This is second decade of the globalization, and the countries which until a few years ago were thought of as "emerging markets" have fully emerged. For instance, India'a middle class is projected to increase from 50 million people in 2005 to 583 million people in 2025. As a percentage of India's population, middle class will grow from from 5% to 41%. Accordingly, only between 2006 and 2008 the retail space in India' seven biggest cities has trippled. [4] By 2007, eight of the twenty largest companies in the world were Chinese, and only seven were American. [5] In the words of Brian Redican writing for December 2007 / January 2008 issue of Monocle, high-speed development "is now occuring in countries such as India, Brazil, Russia, Chile and the Chech Republic, and potentially even in Afrika. And because this development has now

reached a critical mass, it is this that is driving the global economy rather than what is happening in North America or Western Europe." [6].

Given most most growth in consumer markets worldwide is now taking place in Asia, the stakes are very high. Not surpisingly, every major Asian city, including Shanghai, is now fiercely competing to become the center for creative industries in Asia. If you check the calendar of global design events on Core77 web site, you will see that it is dominated by design weeks and design conferences in Asia.[7] For instance, just for the period of November-December 2007, I found the following: Gwangju Design Biennale 2007 (South Korea), Pune Design Festival (India), Singapore Design Festival 2007 (Singapore), Guangzhou Design Week 2007 (China), Design Korea (Korea), UMO2007: Designing for User Experience (India), Business of Design Week 2007 (Hong Kong), EcoDesign 2007 (Japan), Design with India (India). This push to develop design and creative industries also includes building new museums of contemporary art and hosting biennales. Shanghai, for instance, has three separate museums of contemporary art: MOCA Shanghai at People's Park, Duolun Museum of Modern Art, and Zendai Museum of Modern Art in Pudong.

This emphasis on developing global creative industries throughout Asia goes hand in hand with the wide use of contemporary design at home. People living in Asia's big cities are surrounded by contemporary design. In this respect, Asia and Scandinavia are similar: what for us is design for them is a way of life. Of course, there is one very big diffirence: with the exception of Singapore and Japan, the rest of Asian countries have much smaller per capita income when Scandinavian countries. Consequently, significant parts of the populations can't afford to shop or eat in modern malls and other recently built urban spaces which feature contemporary design. In fact, in China the pricing of western chains such as MacDonald and Starbucks put them in the up market category. Thus, a visit to one of these places signifies status and prestige - opposite of what it means in the USA. And as far shopping in modern organised retail spaces in general, in 2007 only appoximately 20% of the population of China were shoping in such places as opposed to neighboorhood kiosks and traditional bazaars (in the same

year this figure was 40% for Southeast Asia and only 5% in India). [8] And here lies the key difference between design culture in Scandinavia and China. While Sweden's global brands IKEA and H&M are bringing the local values - modern design affordable for everybody - to the rest of the world, you can also find them in most Swedish homes. In contrast, at present the majority of Chinese can't afford to have a lunch in one of the new shining malls.

Despite these economic differences, I have a feeling that Asian countries, including China, are ahead of both Europe and North America in understanding the importance of design for economic successes and branding. This seems to be understood equally well not only by the governments of these countries and city officials but also by owners of small businesses such as cafes and hair salons. Today in the West, with the visible exception of Scandinavian countries, contemporary design sensibility is still only used selectively and it commands a significant price premium. But in Asia, be it Bangkok, Singapore or Shanghai - contemporary design is used for all newly built urban spaces and consumer products sold at all price levels.

The actual design aesthetics are also different. The space design in the West - be in Madrid, Oslo, or Copenhagen - tries to projects images of dignity, exclusivity, and middle age sophistication, i.e. lots of grey, black, and white and monochrome surfaces with no images). But in China and South East Asia the aesthetics which in the West is reserved for youth culture - bright colors, dynamic geometric patterns and lots of large, wall-size photographic images - are used everywhere. As a result, rather than signifying stability and exclusivity, new spaces in Asia speak of youth, dynamism, energy, and readiness for change.

In Bangkok all taxis are painted in pink, yellow, or blue; Bangkok Airways brands itself as "Asia's boutique airline" and lets all customers use its lounges; a bank office, a post office or a copy center located in a new mall feature colorful and sometimes truly cutting-edge design - something you would expect to see at a design show rather than in a mall. (Yes, the famous Bed Supperclub is also a fabulous space definitely worth

visiting, but with its all white palette it is looking very 1990s in comparison to bright palette used in new Bangkok spaces). And contemporary Thai home designs which are sold at special malls set up by governments to promote local design are, in my view, better than what you will find in Armani Casa or Alessi stores or on Philip Stark or Karim Rashid web sites.

A telling picture of how each county treats design is to compare the plastic trays used in its airports when you go through security. In the fall of 2007 I have passed through many airports in Europe, Australia, and Asia and the differences were quite clear. In San Diego where I started the appearance of the trays was not too attractive. In Amsterdam Schiphol Airport the trays were in bright colors but still felt cheap. In Oslo the same plastic trays were much more sophisticated, their clear shapes and muted colors making a good advertising for Scandinavian design. But it was Singapore Changi Airport that topped it all. Its trays were clearly an avant-garde design statement - something you expect to find in MOMA design collection rather than the airport security area. Accordingly, this understanding of design was also extended to the whole airport experience which since its opening in received over 250 awards including best airport in the world. Taking my baggage through the security line was non-stressful and in fact, given the politeness and friendly smiles of the security personnel, I could say that it pleasant. The security personnel was smiling and welcoming - a complete opposite from the stress-producing, rude and aggressive manners of security in USA airports.

Another good way to see the difference in the use of design between East and West is to compare shopping malls. Similarly to Bangkok or Singapore, in Shanghai and other major cities in China which I visited new consumer spaces also have better than comparable spaces anywhere in North America or Europe. The businesses which in Europe and North America will be today given standard template design receive original and higher quality design in Shanghai - better materials and finishes, better ambience, more refined and coordinated relationships between colors and shapes, and interesting lights. For example, compare food courts in American malls with the restaurant design

in new malls in Shanghai. In Shanghai you may mistake fast food places for fancy restaurants (and the quality of food is also much better than in USA malls).

Unless people spend some time in Shanghai, they are usually surprised to hear when I tell me that in Shanghai design is used more widely and often more inventively that in the West. It seems that our unconscious image of China is still of grey "ant-design" Mao's China. Another reason is how Western media presents China. Media coverage - as well as cultural and artistic discussions and presentations of China in the West - focuses on the unprecedented scale and speed of economic development, rather on the concrete details of this development. And while Western art museums are truly obsessed with China, with yet another exhibition of contemporary Chinese art opening every month, visitors to these exhibitions are more likely to see artistic critique of this economic development by very skilful realist Chinese painters, rather than the actual photographs of a typical new mall, food court, a train station or other newly built spaces. And even Wallpaper magazine which aims to cover the latest in »design, interiors, fashion, art and lifestyle« trends around the world, sometimes follows the common stereotype. While talking about the growing economic importance of » 'creative industries' - media, design, the performing arts,« an article in its October 2007 issue referred to China as »powering along quite nicely with its old-fashioned non-creative economic motor.« [9]

Why did Asia embrace "design" and "experience economy" to a larger extent than other parts of the world? The reasons for the emphasis on and wide acceptance of contemporary space design in Asia are multiple. (I don't want to pretend that I understand them all, but here are a few candidates.) One has to do with the importance of "face" in Asia, i.e. projecting the image of being successful, trendy, smart, etc. through material signifiers. For instance, according to the director of Nokia research center in Beijing, main motivators behind the sales of mobiles in India and China are "individuality, exclusivity, originality, uniqueness, glamour, status, distinction, esteem, prominence, celebrity." In his summary, "It's all about image and setting trends, having

the latest designs, being unique and owning the most exclusive products they can" - and this goes for all consumers and not just the rich ones. [10]

Another reason may have to do with the different living conditions in Asia and the West. Nowhere in the world people dress as imaginatively and obsessively as in Tokyo. Young people spend %90 of their income on cloves; and %40 of middle age women in Tokyo owe at least one Vuitton bag (a real one). This correlates to people's particular living conditions in Tokyo - they live in tiny places, which do not offer possibilities to establish and present to others one's identity through home design and large possessions. Similarly, in most other Asian cities people's investment in clothes, accessories and their aspects of their appearances correlates well with their minimal living conditions. (This correlation may also explain why people in Russia and Eastern Europe also invested in dressing up more than people in the West. During the Soviet period people had no control over public spaces controlled by the governments, they could not compete via "big items" such as houses or cars, and their apartments were also usually quite small and of poor quality. Consequently, possessing and showing off expensive western clothing served as the main marker of prestige. This may explain why today in Riga all cafes show Fashion TV and why Moscow may be competing with Tokyo in terms of being obsessed with expensive Italian and French designer clothes and accessories.)

The importance of "face" and small living quarters, however, does not explain why Asia so willingly embraces design aesthetics that are new, hip, and non-traditional. Therefore, I think that the main reason is different and it has to do with timing. In the West most spaces you encounter have been built before the present decade, and unless they have been recently innovated, their design reflects the style of the decade in which they were built. Which also means that they are likely to have standard template-design or no design at all - since until the middle of the 1990s design was not part of the mental landscape of most companies and businesses. It was not something you understood, cared about, or invested into.

In contrast, many countries in Asia including China (just as Eastern Europe) only started to fiercely build new leisure and consumer spaces in the second part of the 1990s. In other parts, they "came of age" at the same time when design and brandscaping (establishing a brand through unique designed spaces) started to get wide acceptance (Wallpaper magazine launched in 1996; Collete, the first "curated" design store, opened in Paris in the same year; Guggenheim Bilbao opened in 1997). At the same time, more citizens in these countries started to travel (just as in Europe, Asia now has dozens of new discount airlines) as well as more tourists started coming. Since a large proportion of consumer spaces in Asia have only were build in 2000s, it is only to be expected that these spaces will feature latest technologies and latest sensibilities and values - which includes investments in original, "fresh," and "avant-garde" design (i.e., design which is conceptual, ironic, attracting attention to itself).

This difference in design due to timing is even more visible when you compare the cities in Western Europe and Eastern Europe. The capitals of East European countries received infusion of capital in previous and this decade from Western companies and EU. Also, after the collapse of pro-Soviet communist governments in 1990, a younger generation was able to better take advantage of a new "wild west capitalism" in these countries; similarly, Western and newly emerged private companies would often prefer to hire younger people who don't have old "communist mentality." As a result, the decision makers, the politicians and business owners in the East are often much younger than in the West. Therefore, since the new consumer and civil structures in Eastern Europe - airports, shopping malls, restaurants, offices, hotels, museums, theatres - are all just a few years old at best, and the decision makers, the clients, and the designers themselves are often younger than their counterparts in the West (the same also applies to China), new spaces in the East often look much more contemporary and innovative than their Western counter-parts.

For instance, when I visited Riga (the capital of Latvia) in the May 2004, with the exception of the old town which already was highly polished, the rest of the city still looked to me more Soviet than Western. When I was in Riga again in January 2006, I

could hardly recognize the city. Everything was shiny and new, and everything was built to the very latest standard - including bus station, which looked more like an airport. In contrast, when I visit Brussels or Basel, they look distinctly 1950s. And some parts, such as Brussels central train station, look and feel like a communist Moscow when I was growing up there. (Brussels airport that I passed through in October 2007 was not so impressive either, even though it had enough signs proudly proclaiming "Welcome to Europe.")

The most beautiful new airport I have seen in this decade was Baiyun International Airport in Guangzhou (China) which opened in 2004, while the most depressing, non-modern, and ill-kept are some of the terminals at JFK and LAX (New York and Los Angeles, respectively). It seems that in terms of design and service, East and West have changed places. To put this briefly: "East is the new West." Or: "the margin is the new center." The typical food places in new shopping malls in Shanghai and other Asian cities have better design than the first class lounges of many Western airports which appear to not have been updated since the 1980s. The same often goes for the use of IT technology: Singapore and Tallinn have free Wi-Fi practically everywhere in the city and it is set up by city agencies, i.e. top-down rather as bottom-up. In 2007 Estonia (which until 1990 was a part of the Soviet Union) was the first country ever to have successfully conducted national elections electronically (i.e., people were voting over Internet). In 2007 EU survey ranked Slovenia 2nd among 31 European countries for the efficiency of its e-government systems [11], while Singapore was ranked by Forbes as 1st among all countries the world for business.

In contrast, while spending a month in Sydney in the end of 2008 I could hardly find any cafes with Wi-Fi. The mid-level business hotel where I checked in after my arrival was charging $20/day for Internet use. Submitting Australian business visa application took many hours and multiple phone calls to the official in the immigration agency who himself had no idea why the government web site kept refusing to accept my application. When I went to take an obligatory chest X-Ray as a part of my application, I was asked to provide an address so they can send the results. I asked naively why they

don't want to send the results directly to immigration office? If we send it to immigration, they will definitely loose it, confidently told me the clerk.

Can we explain these differences in design, service, and infrastructure by comparing GDP per capita in the West (North America, Western Europe, Japan, Singapore) and the East (Eastern Europe, Russia, China, India, and Southeast Asia)? Indeed, the consumers who visit new urban malls in Asia have relatively higher incomes (in relation to other people in their countries) than whose visiting the malls in West. That is, comparing to many others - often living in rural areas - they make good salaries and live consumer lifestyles. Therefore, we may conclude that the more upscale architecture of new shopping malls including their food areas is because they are geared towards middle and upper classes. Indeed, my Chinese friends told me the kids who hang out in Shanghai's new malls - having meals, drinking coffee, chatting - are usually the only children of their well-off parents who give them anything they want.

But this reasoning does not explain things completely. For example, the largest and definitely quite luxurious and sophisticated shopping center in Riga's city center is built around the train station. In fact, it took me a while to find the actual train station as it was completely integrated into the shopping complex, which extends over the length of the largest square in Riga. Now, train stations supposedly receive people from all income levels, and in fact people with money are more likely to drive or fly. What was even more unexpected was Riga's bus station. Certainly, a typical bus station in North America of Western Europe is as far from cutting-edge design and urban sophistication as you can get. So imagine how I was shocked than I entered a brightly lighted space very clean space featuring modern electronic displays monitors, funky orange furniture, and other details, which you may expect to find in Scandinavian airports. I had to check the schedules to convince myself that this was indeed a bus terminal, with buses going between Riga and small towns elsewhere in Latvia. I think that these examples show the wider use of contemporary design and more upscale look of spaces in developing economies of the East (both Eastern Europe and Asia) in comparison to the similar places in the West is not just due to different demographics of the consumers whom

developers these spaces. Often, it is a reflection of a different attitude to design shared by developers, people who work in these spaces, and consumers. This attitude is summarized well in the words of the organizers of The Great Indoors 2007 design conference: »The interior seems to be the only place in which people still dream of a better future.. the interiors of hotels, shops and restaurants have evolved into the new epicentres of human imagination." [12]

Smart design, of course, is not just about using good lighting and quality materials, and thinking about how to create comfortable spaces, which have ambience and atmosphere using variety of means. And it is definitely not about simply putting iconic design objects in the interior - be they lights, chairs, or glassware (of course, we all have seen enough designed spaces which only do this). Ultimately, smart design is about fresh thinking: not taking anything for granted, and re-thinking every convention and every detail of space, an object, or a process. From this point of view, the best example of such fresh thinking which I encountered in my extensive travels over the last few years also involved a bus terminal in Bangkok - more precisely, it was a modern café near bus terminal. Once again, I did not expect to find anything sophisticated right next to the bus terminal. In this case, the café had very nice interior design and dozens of teas on offer, and the waiters had fashionable uniforms. But what was really amazing is that it featured a dozen of new large iMacs with free Internet access that was elegantly integrated into the interior. How come I have never seen such a café in California? It certainly does not cost much to buy a set of iMacs for a café - but why did nobody thought about it?

Shanghai certainly has many examples of great designed spaces for consumers built in the last few years - hotels, clubs, bars, restaurants, spas. My favorites spaces - as of September 2006 - were PIER 1 complex, Future Perfect café, the lobby area and the fitness room at The Regent hotel Shanghai, South Beauty restaurant across from Shanghai Exhibition Center, Japanese restaurant Shintori, and Bar Rouge at Bund 18. (If you visit Shanghai and want to check these and other new spaces that inevitably were built since my last visit, you can find information at www.smartshanghai.com.) A

particular feature of Shanghai urban texture that separates from other Asian cites is the abundance of beautiful Art Deco villas in city central French Concession area - and designers and developers understand the uniqueness of this quite well. Some of most special spaces in Shanghai are located in these renovated villas. For instance, the owner of Yongfo Elite restaurant spend two years sourcing objects all over Asia to decorate the restaurant located in a beautiful French villa which a spacious garden. In 2004 Yongfo Elite was a runner up for the best club in a world in a rating by Wallpaper magazine.)

Western media coverage in the West usually focuses on impressive super-large new construction such as CCTV building by Rem Koolhaus in Bejing or Shanghai World Financial Center in Pudong, and it is also fond of talking about the demolitions of old neighborhoods to create space for new developments. Such demolitions certainly took place. However, walking through the center of Shanghai you get a very different picture - every old villa is painstakingly restored and converted to a new use (a private residence, a restaurant, a café, a bar, a boutique, a spa, etc).

Similar to Bangkok stores which sell the work of local designers, Shanghai has its own store Younik which sells innovative work by Shanghai-based fashion designers; it also has a design store/gallery which puts exhibitions of cutting edge furniture and design a la New York's Moss (both stores are located in Bund area on the river where a number of buildings from the beginning of the twentieth century were converted into upscale restaurants, bars, and boutiques). However, what in all my explorations of design culture in Shanghai was by far most interesting were not the consumer or exhibition spaces but the spaces which creative professionals themselves. Following the new emphasis on making Shanghai into a design center, every district in the city has created a hub for creative industries. (Shanghai also has technology parks focused on animation and other media industries but they located outside of the city's center.) The hubs which I visited - Bridge 8, X2 creative center, The New Factories -were all created by retrofitting existing older groups of buildings. In each case, the result was some of the most interesting urban design I ever saw. While keeping the original industrial

buildings largely intact, the architects added smart details - unexpected passages, outdoor lighting systems, surfaces featuring interesting materials and patterns, bold signage and over-size typography. They also added cafes and other social spaces. Certainly, in many cities in the West older buildings were similarly transformed into spaces for creative industries, but all the ones I visited in Berlin, New York, Moscow, Los Angeles, and elsewhere feature utilitarian design with minimal changes to the existing architecture. It seems that in the West the high-concept design and resources spend on reinterpreting older buildings destined for paying consumers usually does not extend to buildings which house creative industry professionals. (This is different in the case of some of the newly built architectural projects which house creative industries - for instance, a remarkable set of buildings in Culver City in Los Angeles by Eric Moss, or the recent Inter_ActiveCorp headquarters, on West 18th Street in New York by Frank Gehry.)

In Shanghai, however, the same high-concept design and resources spend on reinterpreting older buildings as new consumer spaces have been applied for retrofitting the buildings which are to house designers themselves. In fact, design-wise, I find these creative hubs even more daring and original than my favorite cafes, restaurants and hotel lobbies in the city. But what ultimately makes these hubs stand apart from even most innovative consumer spaces in Shanghai and elsewhere is not just their creative architecture. It is their content. The buildings are animated by all the activity and creative energy of the inhabitants inside. Rather than wondering customers and bored sales personnel, you see people working on computers behind the glass walls intensively working on an architectural design. In cafes as well, you are sitting next to designers, architects, photographers, and model agents discussing their current projects. These people are there to work rather than to serve you, and the energy of creative work animates the spaces in a way which - I am sorry to say this - is beyond anything architecture and design could do on their own.

Bridge 8 (converted over the course of 2004, it was by 2006 the most developed our the spaces I visited) houses over 50 creative companies in the areas of design,

architecture, advertising, marketing, and consulting for creative industries (data from September 2006). The companies are from China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, UK, France, USA, Australia, and Italy. Ep700 also houses more than 50 companies with the focus on film, TV, and cartoons production, photography, advertising, and software design. Besides containing various design companies, New Factories complex also includes a spacious Anken Warehouse where individual creative professionals can rent desks, with all support functions - IT, printing, conference, secretarial and translation services, and travel - already provided.

These creative hubs in Shanghai are not only about production of culture, however. Today countless cities around the world feature descendants of Paris's Collette - design store / café / bar / gallery combos. In many cities you can also find the complexes of buildings - often former factories or other industrial buildings - which have been converted into the hubs for creative industries. What I have not encountered in all my travels is these two functions being combined a single place that is given an outstanding design and where professional, rather than consumer spaces, are the center of attention. But this is exactly what has been done at The New Factories, X2 creative center, and Bridge 8 in Shanghai. The companies devoted to architecture, commercial design (stores, boutiques, galleries, showrooms, clubs, hotels, restaurants, lounges, bars), marketing, catering, event management, etc. exist next to the kinds of spaces they design - i.e. galleries, restaurants, bars, and clubs. Architecturally, visually, experientially, the two types of spaces are placed on the same level. To put this in another way, we can say that in these buildings Wallpaper meets Frame. (Established in 1996, Wallpaper has become the most authoritative consumer guide to the new universe of designed experiences - »the stuff which surrounds you,« as the journal has originally called it. Frame, on other hand, is the equally influential magazine among professional designers that discussed latest outstanding examples of space design from the professional's perspective).[13]

In each of these complexes, the majority of spaces are given to professional clients but there are also at least a few spaces oriented to consumers. Along with dozens of

creative companies and a large open space where individual designers can rent desks, The New Factories complex features restaurants, boutiques, a club, and an the world's first Elite Bar by a biggest modeling agency in the world - Elite Models. X2 creative center also has an art galleries and a state-of-the art large club Absolute House. And the earliest and most developed (at the time of my research) Bridge 8 has two spas, a café, a restaurant, a number of design shops, and a large and architecturally interesting club Fabrique.

Clearly, these included »service economy« spaces - spas, bars, restaurants - are first of all geared towards the professionals working in these complexes and the clients visiting them. Thus, the designers and other creative professionals also act as the earliest consumer »cadres« who can appreciate and in fact (given their frequent international travel to other word centers for creative industries) expect smart bars, lounges, restaurants, spaces and design galleries. These producers of design experiences, in other words, are also the default consumers of the products of their labor, with other tourists and locals to follow.

It is interesting to compare the hubs for creative industries - Bridge 9, X2 creative center and The New Factories - with the spaces which house artist studios and art galleries: 798 art distinct in Being and "art industry park" (yes, this is the official name) at 50 Moganshan Road in Shanghai. The former area contains hundreds of artists studious and the latter also has dozens, and as result they became one-stop destinations for visiting curators and collectors of contemporary art. These spaces are also conversions of former factories and they also house creative professionals - in this case, artists and craftsmen. But with many galleries and many artist studios deliberately keeping the doors open and welcoming visitors, these »art factories« are explicitly oriented towards outside consumers. The artists do no buy each other works - it is the visitors who do this. In contrast, Bridge 9 and other creative hubs in Shanghai are first of all spaces for professional work, with cafes, restaurants, spas, design art bookstores and spaces to service professionals themselves.

Every year Business Week (which in my view provides the most comprehensive global coverage of design trends today via its web site www.businessweek.com/innovate/) gives prestigious industrial design awards. When in 2005 the editors looked at awards statistics over the previous five years, it was not surprising that Apple was well ahead of other companies. After all, Apple is commonly recognized today as the world leader in industrial design, and its head of design Jonathan Ives is often called the best industrial designer working today). However, another company turned out to be ahead of Apple. This company was Samsung. As Business Week writers noted, » No region of the world has embraced design more emphatically than Asia. Japanese companies first showed the power of design in the 1980s. Korean corporations [Samsung, LG] followed and began to brand themselves through design in the 1990s. And now Taiwanese and Chinese manufacturers are racing to use design to establish their names on the global scene... in 2005, Asian companies, led by Samsung, used design to leapfrog from invisible equipment suppliers to name brands on a global scale." [14]

Back in Omm hotel in Barcelona, feeling tired, I close my Apple Powerbook 2.2 GHz Intel Core Duo and put away my iPhone. The small but perfectly legible print imprinted on the Powerbook's bottom side says »Designed by Apple in California. Assembled in China.« I wonder how many years it will be before my laptop label will have the same information in reverse: »Designed in Shanghai. Assembled in the US.« I imagine the future - maybe 25 years from now - there Asia and Eastern Europe dominate both knowledge and creative economies worldwide, with North America reduced to the role of a third world country used for manufacturing and outsourcing by Asians. (Of course, since California where I live will do fine: since California is already a part of Pacific Rim, it will continue to prosper along with the rest of Asia). I picture the former industrial buildings in the East Coast of the USA, which were converted to designed condos, restaurants, hotels, and malls in the 2000s; they are now being converted back to manufacturing plants. As for The Central Park in New York, it is now used to grow crops.

Meanwhile, in Beijing, Koolhaus's CCTV Headquarters skyscraper now appears as small and as archaic as the 1950s Shanghai Exhibiting Center appears today in comparison to 1990s hi-rises next to it. But this last image is not mine. It comes form the project by MAD architects entitled Bejing 2050. They propose a gigantic (from today's point of view) floating island over CBD (Central Business District). In line with the current design sensibilities, MAD imagines their floating island as a kind of shining super-blob. The island is so big that CCTV building looks like a small mushroom under a tree.

According to project description by MAD, the island will contain a variety of spaces: »Digital Studios, multimedia business centres, theatres, restaurants, libraries, tourists attractions, exhibitions, gyms, and even a man-made lake are elevated above CBD, and interconnected horizontally.« It is telling that this list begins with »design studious« Clearly, in 2050 design is supposed to be central to the identity of a city. In fact, the floating island in Beijing 2050 appears to be a scaled-up model of X2 creative space, New Factories, or Bridge 8 as they already exist today - combining professional design offices with the spaces there the products, services and experiences being designed in these offices are offered for sale. And if today artists' studios function as highly desirable cultural commodities used to attract tourists, gentrify city areas and raise their real estate values, it is easy to imagine that by 2050 the designer's workplaces may have even higher cultural prestige. With creative economy gradually becoming larger and larger part of the total economy, and designers being identified with the most important capital today - the ability to innovate - it will be only logical to imagine designers studios themselves being put on display. Thus, I can see »digital studious« in Beijing 2050 floating cloud having completely glass walls, with the people working inside being put on display as the most obvious sign of the China's leadership in creative industries.

NOTES:

1. This essay - both the analysis and particular buildings and space described - is based on my own research in Shanghai conducted in June 2005, June-July 2006, and September 2006 (10 weeks total). I have chosen the spaces, which in my view were most interesting - visually but also theoretically - as of end of September 2006. Given the continuous growth and development of Shanghai, certainly new equally interesting spaces exist now and it is also likely that some of the spaces I am describing were given new functions or new design.

2. They house most hi-end shopping malls in the city, which are still (at least as of September 2006) are empty of customers - which is surprising given that China's market for luxury goods is now third in the world. (I wonder if they counted all the fake Louis Vuitton bags that are being carried by seemingly at least half of all women in Shanghai).

3. My list of MAD' projects is from the exhibition MAD in China, Danish Architecture Center, Copenhagen, November 2007.

4. M. Mahanama, "Bazar Behavior," CFO (September 2007), 32, 34.

5. Brian Redican, "Emracing China," Monocle, volume 1, issue 9 (December 2007 / January 2008), p.82.

6. Ibid.

7. http://www.core77.com/calendar/), accessed November 18, 2007.

8. Mahanama, "Bazar Behavior," 33.

9. Kevin Braddock, "The New Uncreativesm," Wallpaper (October 2007), p. 189.

10. Jyri Salomaa, presentation at the X|Media|Lab, School of Art, Design, and Media (ADM), Nanyang Technology University (NTU), September 28, 2007.

11. Tobias Grey, "Slovenia," Monocle, volume 1, issue 9 (December 2007 / January 2008), p. 182.

12. http://www.the-great-indoors.com/conference/, accessed November 18, 2007.

13. "Space design" is the term that in the middle of 2000s started to replace the older term "interior design."

14. http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/05_27/b3941401.htm.