



CHINESE MONOPOLY GAME, "UNCLE WANG" OR "RICH THICK MAN."
PHOTO: MARC ANGÉLIL AND CARY SIRESS.

Do Not Pass Go

Guess who put the Master in the Master Plan?

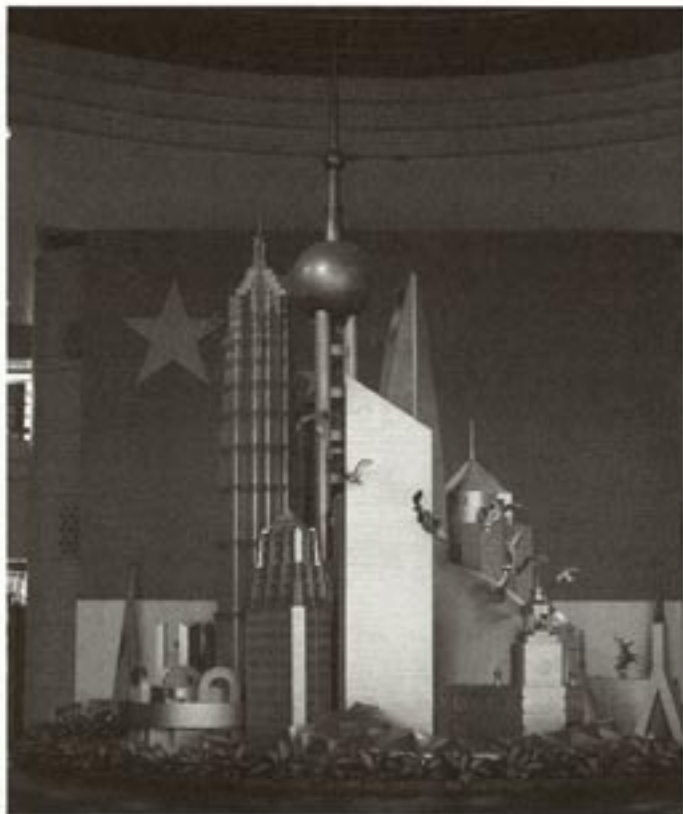
– Barbara Kruger

The writing on the wall of the entrance rotunda, printed in bold letters on a red background in both Chinese and English, unabashedly proclaims, “Better City, Better Life.” As a veritable axiom, the statement can hardly be disputed. It is, however, the suggestive tone of such an avowal that gives one pause. Political dictum and advertising slogan merge into a single sound bite. The ulterior motive is unambiguous: supported by an unwieldy bureaucratic apparatus, the predatory advances of the real estate market are imbued with aura. Accordingly, the staging is perfectly choreographed. No expense is spared in putting up an extensive exhibition, for which its own building serves as the medium for the message. Placed at the mercy of China’s reorientation, architecture and urbanism here become *program* – the planning of a new sense of collective desire.

We are in the center of Shanghai, or more precisely, in the recently completed Urban Planning Exhibition Hall, which offers an affirmative glimpse into the development of a metropolis of approximately 15 million inhabitants. The siting of the building within Shanghai’s municipal core underwrites the enterprise’s value. The urban ensemble exhibits traits of classical composition, for axial and symmetrical arrangements transform the buildings into monuments. Dead center is People’s Square, establishing the foreground for City Hall, which in turn is flanked by two additional structures – the opera house on one side and the above-mentioned exhibition hall on the other. The very fact that opera and planning are set on equal footing hints at a tactical course: processes of urban development, as ruthless as they can be, are most palatable when wrapped nicely in a cushion of culture. That the exhibition building is embellished with postmodern accessories and crowned with pagoda-like motifs points to the fact that what is at issue is a prestige object. But since prestige embodies authority, the question of underlying purpose arises: prestige and authority *for what?*

In the entrance of the exhibition building – part museum,

GILDED SCULPTURE OF BUILT AND AS
OF YET UNREALIZED SKYSCRAPERS OF
THE PUDONG AREA. OPPOSITE PAGE:
MODEL OF EXISTING AND PLANNED
URBAN DEVELOPMENT IN SHANGHAI.
PHOTOS: NICOLE LEUTHOLD.



part convention hall – a formal repertoire is deployed, revealing architectonic hubris raised to the level of spectacle. A golden sculpture dominates the rotunda's center. Existing and future skyscrapers coalesce to form a kitsch trophy of capital that, as symbol of a new China, acknowledges the triumphant advance of the real estate market at the service of the nation's entrepreneurial directive. A Chinese flag as backdrop adds gloss to the glitter of the gold. The sculpture rotates to the drone of music, while a crystal chandelier completes the scene.

Thematically structured, the exhibition is organized on several floors and calibrates Shanghai's urban development under the rubric "Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow." With a brief nod to the past – through full-scale dioramas depicting scenes cast in a bucolic setting replete with wildlife – the principal display is nonetheless dedicated to the future. In the manner of a 19th-century panorama, a 400-square-meter model at 1:500 offers a survey of the Shanghai arena. Here buildings and infrastructure are woven into a fabric of thousands of individual episodes. With an obvious matter-of-factness, the ensemble exudes control. The enormous accumulation of built volumes provides testimony that



Shanghai has effectively swollen to a modern metropolis comprised of, among other typologies, more than 3,000 skyscrapers.¹ The resulting impression is largely colored by the sheer scale of the wager. Under the ideology of a positivistic principle of faith, big numbers stand for progress and success.

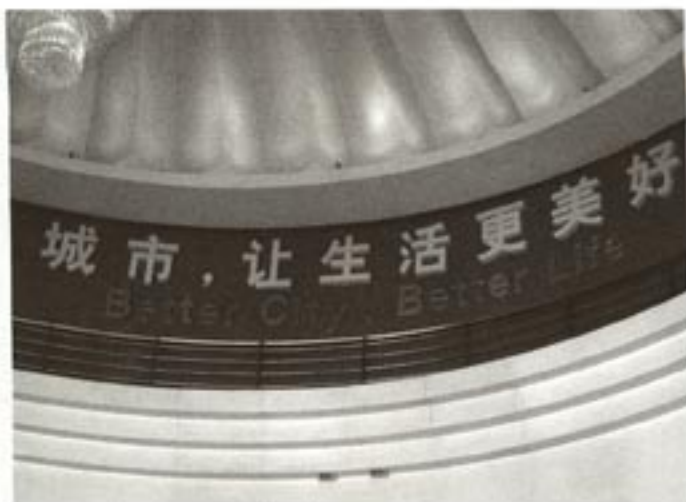
Dominating a considerable share of the exhibition, detailed documentation supplements the urban model on the two floors of the so-called Master Plan Hall. Here concepts of the Urban Planning Institute, the official agency of city management, are presented in countless plans and statistics. Given the task of representing proposed developments, a battalion of workers labors to produce future images of the city. Specifically designed planning instruments, building laws, and zoning regulations aim to secure Shanghai's superiority as financial capital in the Asian market – the objective being to propel it to the status of a "Global City."² The entire enterprise exhibits striking parallels to the board game Monopoly, first introduced in China under the name "Rich Thick Man" in 1937, and subsequently branded "Illegal Monopoly," though, significantly, never banned.

On the Master Plan Hall's particular playing field, entire areas are vacated, restructured, and equipped with infra-

1. Christian A. Thiel, "Monopoly für 11 Millionen," *Hamburger Abendblatt*, October 10, 2000.

2. Zengji Fu, "The State, Capital, and Urban Restructuring in Post-reform Shanghai," in *The New Chinese City*, ed. John R. Logan (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 131-15.

EPGRAM ON THE WALL OF THE
ENTRANCE ROTUNDA OF THE URBAN
PLANNING EXHIBITION HALL.
PHOTO: NICOLE LEUTHOLD.



structure in order to attract foreign investment. Showcase of the scheme is Pudong: declared a special economic zone in 1990, the borough was razed and replaced by a business center – a bastion of capital equivalent in conception to Wall Street in New York, La Défense in Paris, or Shinjuku in Tokyo. In Pudong one finds the life-size versions of the exhibition hall skyscraper sculpture. As in a game of Monopoly, the ensemble is crowned by a hotel, the Grand Hyatt Shanghai, conveniently situated between the 53rd and 87th floors of China's highest skyscraper, the Jin Mao Tower – an SOM export par excellence.

Despite all philanthropic assertions, it is obvious that the master plan – whose authority (and therefore legitimacy) is measured strictly according to profit yielded – is a slave to capital. Indeed, the Urban Planning Exhibition Hall is conceived as a trading floor for real estate where projects are displayed to attract potential buyers, where investors shop for future rights to the city. Shanghai is the commodity exchanged. Thus the program of the exhibition, in an extended sense, is to create surplus value, to increase material assets in the form of property and money, to produce yet further wealth. With no other destination in sight, one wonders whether China is a destined nation or whether it is indeed the destiny of capital that is here at stake.

Although a celebration of the future, the project for new China depends upon the past. At issue is how to capitalize upon the economic worth of the country's heritage in a future-oriented context. This is specifically achieved by the meticulously choreographed sightseeing route staged for the millions of tourists – predominantly of Chinese descent – visiting Shanghai. In effect, the tour links the future to the

past. From the Urban Planning Exhibition Hall, visitors are led to the site of the First National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party. Recently reconstructed as a museum, the building is listed as a key relic under state protection, ultimately providing the main attraction along a pedestrian mall. On display in the museum is another diorama featuring the figure of young Mao Tse-tung among his comrades. While the scene commemorates the founding of the Communist Party, it is presented matter-of-factly as an inevitable outcome of history. The tourist itinerary grants added value to planning, merging the *C* of communism with that of capital – a crossing that potentially raises their respective efficacy to the power of two.

The rise of communist capital signals a passage to a new form of economy.³ By virtue of a unique hybrid, the strong arm of communist bureaucracy – in particular its apparatus of state control – is merged with the capitalist pursuit of profit and allocation of surplus value. Dispersal meets concentration: capital is placed under central command; capital is brought to the service of the state; capital is disciplined. What does this mean for the future of planning? While entrepreneurial development in the West has largely displaced the public agenda of planning, China's appropriation of investor-based models maintains its collective ambition. As the trial product and mothership of this venture, Shanghai's planning program serves a specific cause, upping the ante on national identity to secure an advantage in the global game.

Played out on a world stage, China's command function is cast into "the organizational architecture of the global economic system."⁴ In contrast to the common conception that global economy is necessarily singular, this architecture admits difference: the coexistence of various economic models, such as that implemented in the East and that of the West. But with success being the only choice, China's game plan is predicated on a monopolizing strategy, whereby the opponent's movements are redirected to one's own benefit. Capitalism is made in China to play into the hands of the nation's supremacy across the board.

1. Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share: An Essay on General Economy* (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 123.

4. Saakia Samen, "The Formation of Intercity Geographies of Centrality," in *Shanghai: Architecture and Urbanism for Modern China*, ed. Seng Kuan and Peter Rowe (Munich: Prestel Verlag, 2004), 11.

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