

Taking Baudrillard to the fair:  
Exhibiting China in the World at the Shanghai Expo.

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Abstract:

Scholars have recently paid increasing attention to China's "mega events" as a form of image management striving to influence future world order. In this paper I examine China's recent world fair, *Expo 2010 Shanghai China*, and argue that we need to move beyond the reading of mega events as simple representation and ideology and read it also as simulation and simulacra. Reading the Chinese world fair as a simulacrum of world order can provide different ways of relating "the West" to its "other country" China. I examine this relation through asking what it means to be the fair: Where is the world fair? When is the world fair? Who is the world fair? Reading the world/fair as simulacrum disrupts the fair's notions of inside and outside, now and then, subject and object to the point where these terms are no longer workable.

Keywords: World Fairs, Expo 2010, China, simulacra

Bio:

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## INTRODUCTION

China's rise in the global economy and politics is commonly considered to pose one of the greatest challenges to the current world order and to modernity as we know it. This way of understanding China's role in international politics has its roots in an imagination of Chinese experience as radically different to that of Western modernity – as the "other country."<sup>1</sup> In recent years a key Chinese strategy for negotiating both its claims to particularism and to being a modern great power has been through the public diplomacy of "mega events," including the 2008 Beijing Olympics, the 2009 anniversary of the Founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC), and *Expo 2010 Shanghai China*. The success of Chinese mega events in altering international opinion is debatable.<sup>2</sup> As symbols of a changing Chinese identity and outlook they have nonetheless come to be understood as an important aspect of Chinese "image management."<sup>3</sup> In this paper I argue that we need to take the next step and understand China's mega events not only on the level of representation and ideology, but also on the level of simulation and simulacra.<sup>4</sup> I moreover argue that a consequence of such a reading is that we need to stop imagining China as the "other country."

Mega event genres came about in Western industrializing capitalist countries engaged in nation building and imperial consolidation of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>5</sup> Maurice Roche has connected mega events as phenomenon to "a temporal world view framed in terms of 'progress,' the assumed responsibility to build a diffuse western 'civilization,' and the assumed capacity to do so by actively 'making history.'"<sup>6</sup> He has further suggested "mega-events are potentially memorable because they are a *special* kind of time-structuring institution in modernity."<sup>7</sup> Like Roche, I examine how time and modernity are negotiated by a mega event, but rather than looking for this time-shaping capacity in the scale and cyclical occurrence of events I examine one particular event – China's own world fair, *Expo 2010 Shanghai China*, or "Expo 2010."

Expo 2010 took place from 1 May to 31 October 2010, in the tradition of scientific and industrial world fairs following on from the *Great Exhibition of Industries of All Nations* that was held in London in 1851. World fairs have been described as instrumental in creating the distinction between reality and representation, a dualism that has become central to the way we capture the modern world.<sup>8</sup> Expo 2010 has been read in China to symbolize the greatness and international significance of China – indeed, it was the largest, most expensive, and most visited of its kind.<sup>9</sup> The 73 million visitors who passed through the Expo in Shanghai during the six months it was officially open as world fair would be even greater if one counted the subsequent visitors attracted to the site's permanent monuments (the Chinese national pavilion for example has been turned into a permanent museum) and to the online version of Expo 2010, where one's avatar can stroll through a virtual 3D replica of the site, visit pavilions and partake in numerous exhibitions as well as interact with other visitors.

Based on published text and multimedia, as well as participant observation at the Shanghai Expo and its virtual counterpart, this paper explores what happens when we read the world fair – symbol of modernity – through the work of Jean Baudrillard – symbol of postmodernity. I suggest that we read Expo 2010 not only as an exercise of

nation-building, but as an event of worlding, by which I mean that it shapes not only the imaginary of a particular state or nation, but of the world as a holistic unit. Expo 2010 could easily be read as a representation of the world, as mimicry or a fake version of the real world beyond its gates. I read it instead as simulation, a concept that will be explained and explored throughout this paper.

My key claim is that the world fair is everywhere, that in fact the world is a fair, and that this has serious consequences for the study thereof. The reading of the world fair as simulacrum shows how we may be mistaken to imagine Chinese experience as radically other to that of Western modernity, or postmodernity for that matter. It provides a different way of thinking about space, time and subjectivity. Importantly, I argue that Baudrillard, who is often accused of being intellectually uncritical or irresponsible,<sup>10</sup> can help us think differently about intellectual strategy in our study of such a simulacral world fair.

The first part of this paper outlines Baudrillard's discussions of the simulacrum and uses this discussion to interrogate the "being" of the world fair. It argues that the fair is not a fake copy of a "real" world, but that as simulation it marks the breakdown of the distinction of the copy from the original, of the fair from the world. If part one asks *where* the fair is, arguing that fairness is everywhere, anywhere and nowhere, the second part asks *when* the fair is. It shows that the fair works through recycling, revival and reuse. The third part of this paper asks *who* is the fair through an exploration of what happens to subjectivity in the interactive technologies of the fair. It examines how our simulation as subjects and objects of interactive technologies breaks both of these categories down. It argues that being in the world fair turns us into simulacral avatars, circulated in virtual hyper-reality. The fourth part of this paper concludes through asking how to be fair in such a simulacral world fair. Here, I argue that thinking the world in terms of its simulacral fairness does not need to rob us of intellectual strategy, but that we can draw on Baudrillard to think of theory as challenge.

## TO BE SIMULACRAL, OR WHERE IS THE FAIR?

Jean Baudrillard introduces his *Simulacra and Simulation* with a (recycled) fable where an imperial cartographer draws "a map so detailed that it ends up covering the territory exactly" only to see it gradually fall into ruin. Today, Baudrillard argues, simulation is no longer that of territory, referential being or substance:

It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal. The territory no longer precedes the map, nor does it survive it ... But it is no longer a question of either maps or territories. Something has disappeared: the sovereign difference, between one and the other, that constituted the charm of abstraction.<sup>11</sup>

What has been lost, he argues, is metaphysics: "No more mirror of being and appearances, of the real and its concept."<sup>12</sup> Crucially, this is not a question of imitation, duplication or even parody, but of substitution. As a consequence the real will never again have a chance to produce itself, but is replaced by a "hyperreal" where there is no distinction between the real and the imaginary, "leaving room only

for the orbital recurrence of models and for the simulated generation of differences."<sup>13</sup> What is at stake in Baudrillard's analysis, then, is the reality principle:

To dissimulate is to pretend not to have what one has. To simulate is to feign to have what one doesn't have. One implies a presence, the other an absence. But it is more complicated than that because simulating is not pretending ...

Therefore, pretending, or dissimulating, leaves the principle of reality intact: the difference is always clear, it is simply masked, whereas simulation threatens the difference between the 'true' and the 'false,' the 'real' and the 'imaginary'.<sup>14</sup>

In few places is the question of the real and the imaginary, the true and the false, the original and the fake as pertinent and as sensitive as in contemporary China. The lack of respect in China for copyright is a frequent bone of contention in its foreign relations. Domestic relations have been shaken in recent years by the "tainted milk" scandal, where a number of infants were killed and hundreds of thousands fell ill from ingesting "fake" milk powder containing melamine.<sup>15</sup> In IR, voices are raised that worry about Westerners underestimating the "China threat" because China may be faking it, "a wolf in sheep's clothing."<sup>16</sup>

Expo 2010 was a highly controlled space, yet it too had its own associated scandals of fakery. Some suggested that Expo 2010's mascot, Haibao, was a resurrection of American cartoon character Gumby, dubbing it "The Gumbygate scandal."<sup>17</sup> The Chinese national pavilion was exposed to similar allegations of plagiarism, facing claims that it looked a lot like the Japanese pavilion from the 1992 Seville Expo, and equally similar to the Canadians pavilion at Montreal in 1967. The biggest diplomatic scandal, nonetheless, surrounded the promotional tune *Waiting for You* which was officially written for Expo 2010, its video featuring all-Chinese superstars like Jackie Chan and Yao Ming. A scandal erupted as it was revealed to bare an uncanny resemblance to Mayo Okamoto's 1997 Japanese hit *Stay the Way You Are*. The irony was not lost on foreign commentators, with one commentator noting: "If the Shanghai Expo is the ultimate showcase of an economy roaring to world dominance, then the organizers have selected a theme song that perfectly captures China on the cusp of the 21st century: strident, stirring — and ripped off."<sup>18</sup> The composer of the fair tune first starkly denied plagiarism allegations. Expo 2010 organizers thereafter suspended all use of the song citing "copyright reasons" and after "a flurry of face-saving efforts" Expo 2010 organizers, without admitting any problematic recycling, asked if they could please use the Japanese' work. The Japanese songwriter, whose practically forgotten tune had suddenly returned to the top of Japanese charts, selflessly acquiesced.<sup>19</sup>

These revelations of scandalous fakery, whether on the low level of song writing or the high level of lethal state violence, are typically understood as a form of resistance. They are taken to reveal the *real* state of affairs. Some commentators extrapolate fakery to a "Chinese characteristic," the resistance to which is a resistance to power. In a short film on Chinese netizens and state power, blogger Wang Xiaofeng comments on Chinese fakes, with video shots of the Expo interspersed:

China is a country who likes to make fake things. Lying is a virtue (*meide* 美德) of the Chinese. This is evident in all kind of matters. Statistical numbers are

fake (*jia de* 假的) and whatever we create, even the good things, are fake. They [the PRC government] must say that some other countries are worse than China, to make common people (*laobaixing* 老百姓) think that China is the best place to live in (*zuihao de guojia* 最好的国家). The existence of mainstream media is based on this process of the never-ending creation of fake. And the government itself is constantly creating this 'fake'. If you go to remote places in China you discover very shocking realities, people can't even find something to eat, but you still think this country is a great country. So when you want to know the facts and get information you are actually challenging power. They are afraid of this.<sup>20</sup>

The claim of the denouncers of scandalous fakery is that reality is being masked, and the purpose of denunciation is to reveal this reality through exposing fakery. My claim in this paper, which I will substantiate throughout, is that the distinction between the real and the fake is disappearing in a system of self-referential signs. Through this process, "the whole system becomes weightless, it is no longer itself anything but a gigantic simulacrum – not unreal, but a simulacrum, that is to say never exchanged for the real, but exchanged for itself, in an uninterrupted circuit without reference or circumference."<sup>21</sup> In this respect, simulation is very different from representation.<sup>22</sup> The latter implies an equivalence of the sign and the real – even if it is a utopian equivalence. Simulation, on the contrary:

[S]tems from the Utopia of the principle of equivalence, from the radical negation of the sign as value, from the sign as the reversion and death sentence of every reference. Whereas representation attempts to absorb simulation by interpreting it as a false representation, simulation envelops the whole edifice of representation itself as a simulacrum.<sup>23</sup>

Baudrillard explains this in terms of successive phases of the image,<sup>24</sup> to which I will refer back throughout this paper:

- [1] it is the reflection of a profound reality ...
  - [2] it masks and denatures a profound reality ...
  - [3] it masks the absence of a profound reality ...
  - [4] it has no relation to any reality whatsoever: it is its own pure simulacrum ...
- <sup>25</sup>

The shift "from signs that dissimulate something to signs that dissimulate that there is nothing" is crucial because the real is no longer what it once was. This is the meaning of simulacra, and its key significance is that in place of "the truth" we have a myriad of truths taking the shape of signs of reality and myths of origin.<sup>26</sup>

Baudrillard uses the example of Disneyland to model the "entangled orders of simulacra" because he sees it primarily as a play of illusions and fantasy.<sup>27</sup> The adults' parallel to Disneyland in the contemporary era is the world fair, the most recent, the biggest, the most expensive and the most visited of which, again, was Expo 2010. Like Disneyland, Expo 2010 is built up of fantasy and as one of its feature books announces "100 years of Expo dream."<sup>28</sup> At the same time, as will be seen in this paper, Expo 2010 involves truth claims in an explicit way that Disneyland never has,

which makes it pertinent to examining both 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> phase images and those of the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> phase.

Expo 2010 was constructed as a simulacrum of the world in ways that mix dreams with truth claims (and the claims that the dreams are indeed the true dreams of humanity and that these dreams will come true).<sup>29</sup> Just like Disneyland, the Expo is ideological: digest of the Chinese way of life, panegyric of Chinese values, idealized transposition of a contradictory reality. Nonetheless, the "Chineseness" of Expo 2010 can be overemphasized in a format which is all about recycling,<sup>30</sup> as Penelope Harvey writes:

In many ways the form of the great exhibitions has been maintained despite the changing economic, social and political circumstances. Nation states displayed cultural artefacts and technological expertise in their individual pavilions, seeking to educate and entertain the visiting public.

The obligations of the organizers of a fair with universal status are less concerned with the actual bringing together of exhibitors from all over the globe than with enacting a theme that simultaneously promotes the unity of mankind and the uniqueness of individual societies.<sup>31</sup>

The nation state has been the key cultural, political and economic unit through which both IR and world fairs have traditionally told the tale of global community, and Expo 2010 recycles this conceptualization. The spatial organization of the Expo sites, in Shanghai and online, is a starkly visual simulacrum of the purported organization of the international state system. Essentialised culture is encapsulated in the spatial containers that are Expo pavilions, which in turn are encapsulated in continents or regions, which in turn are a subdivision of the neatly bounded and mapped world fair. These mappings are presented as neutral and innocent, helpful and real – some lines on a surface, fair and square.<sup>32</sup>

This particular model depends on a metaphor of scale by which the international community reproduces the form of its constituent parts: "Both part and whole function as self-contained, coherent, bounded entities which are mutual transformations of each other through simple principles of aggregation and disaggregation."<sup>33</sup> This imaginary reproduces units that differ from each other, but through a difference that is one of equivalence. Whether we think of these units as natural or culturally constructed, they are defined by precise boundaries in temporal, spatial and cultural terms, they are distinct but equivalent entities. This model of equivalence by difference was highly visible at Expo 2010 as at previous world fairs.<sup>34</sup> The world fair appears as a taxonomisation of equivalent national units with their own pavilion, listing in official guidebooks and dedicated day of cultural display. The official Opening Celebration of Expo 2010 saw the parading of national flags, carried by Chinese youth made up to look as repetitions and copies of each other.<sup>35</sup>

In this way Expo 2010 recycled the form of Expo 1992 in Seville on which Penelope Harvey writes:

The Expo provided a concrete instance of endless replication, a cultural artefact built as if to demonstrate the possibilities and limitations of an entirely

consumerist world. Thus there was the appearance of choice, of multiple perspectives, yet the cultural forms on show were nevertheless clearly reformulations and repetitions of each other and of previous events. Sameness and familiarity undermined the promise of difference.<sup>36</sup>

What we learn from Baudrillard is that this second phase ideology moreover "functions as a cover for a simulation of the third order [or phase]: Disneyland exists in order to hide that it is the 'real' country, all of 'real' America that is Disneyland."<sup>37</sup> The world fair, in this vein, exists in order to hide that it is the "real" world, all of the "real" world that is the fair. The presentation of the Expo world as imaginary and as a dream functions to make us think that the rest is real. The world fair takes us further than Disneyland does, as it is not content with a country, but must simulate the world – always striving to be more inclusive, with Expo 2010 priding itself on including pavilions of more countries than ever before, an inclusion which cost the PRC government large sums in the form of subsidies.<sup>38</sup> In this way Expo 2010 marks a shift from ideological nation-building to worlding by simulation. Shanghai, China and the world that surround the Expo are no longer real, but hyperreal, belonging now to the order of simulation: "It is no longer a question of a false representation of reality (ideology) but of concealing the fact that the real is no longer real, and thus of saving the reality principle."<sup>39</sup>

The relation between Baudrillard's different phases or orders – those that dissimulate something and those that dissimulate that there is nothing – comes to the fore in the hyper-awareness and self-reflexivity of Expo 2010, as it had begun to do in previous world fairs.<sup>40</sup> There were frequent references to the self-representations of previous world fairs, in TV programs, books and in the "Expo museum" at Expo 2010.<sup>41</sup> In many instances of its replication, the world fair reflected on itself as the exhibition of the exhibition of the exhibition without end, as world fair exhibiting world fair. Key emblems, monuments and mascots of previous fairs were brought together with the effect of appearing as self-referential signs, as copies of copies, representations of representations without original, signifiers of signifiers without signifieds.<sup>42</sup> In this way "[t]he exhibition represents the world, provides contexts and connections for an understanding of external realities, but its reflexivity simultaneously confuses or confounds the distinction of insider/outsider, representation and reality."<sup>43</sup> The implication is one of implosion of the careful construct and of moving to the fourth phase: "it has no relation to any reality whatsoever: it is its own pure simulacrum."<sup>44</sup> Therefore, we must take the step beyond understanding how the exhibition represents the world and grapple with how the exhibition *is* the world, and the world the exhibition.

Reading the Expo through Baudrillard turns the world into fair and the fair into the world. As I will continue to show throughout this paper, the distinction between one as real or original and the other as fake or copy can no longer be upheld. *All we have are versions or layers of world/fair, all simulacra.* This is why I argue with this paper that *we need to take the step and study it as such*, rather than limit ourselves to reading China's mega events purely on the level of representation and ideology, upholding the reality principle. The layers of simulacra are all world/fair, but cannot *be* the fair in a fully present way because Baudrillard, and others with him, have upset the dichotomization of presence and absence.<sup>45</sup> For this reason, the relation between



the layers of simulacra is not that of a coherent system, of stable exchange or of dialectics. The world/fair is simultaneously nowhere and now here.

#### TO BE RECYCLED, OR WHEN IS THE FAIR?

I have asked in the previous section *where* the fair is and argued that "fairness" is everywhere and anywhere – that the world/fair is simultaneously nowhere and now here. I turn next to the temporality of simulacra in this formulation to ask *when* the fair is. Looking for the world/fair somewhere and sometime beyond the dichotomization of presence and absence I argue that the fair works through recycling, revival and reuse, that as a rem(a)inder, it is not new.

What better place to start than with beginnings and origins? "We require a visible past, a visible continuum, a visible myth of origin, which reassures us about our end. Because finally we have never believed in them."<sup>46</sup> Beginnings were certainly important to displays of China at Expo 2010. Throughout the Chinese national pavilion and dozens of Chinese regional pavilions, China is described as the origin of the world, echoing wider media and academic discourse in China. Various Chinese regional pavilions tell us that this is where the first bird flew and the first fire burnt. These pavilions also pride China for figuring as the origin of (Chinese) civilization. I use brackets here because there is some discrepancy or ambiguity in terms of communicating such messages to Chinese speaking and English speaking audiences. In the Gansu province case, for example, which circles around its "long history" of more than 8000 years of civilization, a sign that reads in English "Dadiwan Site in Qin'an County Believed to Start the Chinese Civilization" in Chinese language simply reads "Civilization begins – Qin'an Dadiwan" (*wenming zhaoqi* 文明肇启). This kind of slippage between these terms appears throughout Expo 2010 and make Chinese civilization appear coterminous with civilization as such.

This exhuming of "Chinese civilization" functioned as a cover for a simulation of the second phase, as an ideological tool that served to make the "5000 years of uninterrupted Chinese civilization" appear real. This uninterrupted history is part of the shift in legitimization of communist party rule from socialism to nationalism and "Chinese characteristics."<sup>47</sup> Most importantly, however, this exhumation took pride of place because of a dream, "behind this defunct power that it tries to annex, of an order that would have had nothing to do with it, and it dreams of it because it exterminated it by exhuming it as its own past."<sup>48</sup> IR scholars are performing this same exhuming ritual when we dream of the emerging "Chinese school" of IR theory as a radical alternative to "the West."<sup>49</sup>

The fascination with this Chinese school resembles that which Baudrillard describes of Renaissance Christians with American Indians. At the beginning of the Christian colonizing movement existed an instance of bewilderment at "the very possibility of escaping the universal law of the Gospel."<sup>50</sup> In this bewilderment we could either admit to the lack of universality of the Law, or exterminate the evidence to the contrary. The conversion or simple discovery of these different beings is usually enough, for the Renaissance Christians as for scholars of IR, to slowly exterminate them.

This tactic of discovery and conversion as a form of violent extermination of others has been acknowledged elsewhere in IR scholarship<sup>51</sup> and it remains a tactic in PRC policy towards its "internal others" in areas like Tibet and Xinjiang.<sup>52</sup> Chinese policy towards its ethnic minorities is presented as proof of the superiority of Chinese civilization: it produces *more* ethnics than the ethnics themselves were able to do – since the PRC state provides modern healthcare and "scientific development"<sup>53</sup> and exempts ethnic minorities from the one child policy. Moreover the PRC state produces *more ethnic* ethnics than they themselves had mustered. This promotion of Chinese ethnic minorities through their regional pavilions lies at the heart of Expo 2010, a base from which the Chinese national pavilion rises. Everywhere, the ethnic is exotically reproduced, recycled and rescreened. Everywhere happy, colorful and anachronistic ethnics sing, dance and rejoice in the greatness of the motherland.<sup>54</sup> This overproduction is a means of destruction, a "promotion" and "rescue" which forms another step to their symbolic extermination.

Nonetheless, the Expo is highly self-aware in its use of time. It frequently uses clocks, hourglasses and pendula to mark the countdown to horror scenarios of planetary destruction in order to drum home its purported message of "Better city, Better life." In places it moreover explicitly favors "recycling" over "linearity." The theme pavilion "City being" uses similar metaphors to Baudrillard to conceive of time, that of biological life cycles, metabolism, circulation and recycling. These are said to be key to the proper functioning of the system. This pavilion is evocatively constructed as a sewerage system interspersed with circulating billboard messages of interconnection. It is explicit about its rejection of linear models, as in a pair of diagrammatical signs of which the first reads "A linear model will result in excessive pollution and waste," and the second reads "A cyclical model will feature greater recycling and less waste."

In this way Expo 2010, like Baudrillard, engages directly with claims to the end of history:

History will not come to an end – since the leftovers, all the leftovers – the Church, communism, ethnic groups, conflicts, ideologies – are indefinitely recyclable ... History has only wrenched itself from cyclical time to fall into the order of the recyclable.<sup>55</sup>

Through these examples we can see the world/fair engaged in different phases of simulation, which can be understood as dissimulating something, but also as dissimulating that there is nothing. In places, the world/fair appears unreflexive, as attempting to reinstate the reality of its teleological progress. In other aspects, however, its reflexive hyper-aware recycling seems to show how "it has no relation to any reality whatsoever: it is its own pure simulacrum."<sup>56</sup> Not only, then, can the world no longer be represented (repri'zentid) by the fair, but more importantly it can no longer be fairly re-presented (rē 'prezəntid), it can no longer be made present in time and space as some full or complete presence. As such, it is not enough to remain in our analyses thereof within a simple framework of representation and ideology, but we need to take the next step and start analyzing China's mega events also as simulacra. The world/fair is simultaneously nowhere and now here. The world/fair is recycled.

## TO BE SCREENED, OR WHO IS THE FAIR?

Having asked in previous sections *where* and *when* the fair is I turn to the question of *who* is the fair. What happens to subjectivity in the interactive technologies of the world/fair? I argue that in an order of recycling, the technologies that make us simultaneously subjects and objects make the distinction between subject and object untenable with the effect of making these categories unworkable.

It is clear that our embodiment matters in the world fair as it differentiates between ways of being in the world/fair along lines of class, race, gender and so on. At the Shanghai Expo, where well over 90% of visitors were Chinese, the ability to identify me as a fair-skinned visitor from the outside made me an immediate part of the exhibited exotica (my being fair made me the fair, so to speak. And simultaneously the reverse was true, my fairness positioned me as though outside the fair, observing it/them). But Expo 2010 goes much further in making us part of the fair, through the layers of interactive technologies by which the fair itself emerges.

In the first instance, we are an active part of this emergence, we can plan, steer and shape the world/fair, we are the subjects of its emergence. Visitors are often asked to actively participate in Expo 2010. Indeed, interactivity is a key feature of many pavilions and different layers of the world/fair, and one pavilion is expressly dedicated to displaying it. Here, photographs from Expo 2010 and its preparation, submitted via the Expo 2010 website, are circulated on screens. Participants can also send "blessings and wishes for Expo 2010" from various websites and have them screened in the pavilion, surrounded by cards with wishes and blessings written by its visitors. In a "wishing tree" we are encouraged to write wishes on colorful paper, fold it into airplanes and throw it into a simulated tree. In parallel, the Online Expo 2010 has many venues where one's avatar can leave wishes, such as the commercial *Vanke* pavilion or the *Expo dream home*. On a multimedia display stand visitors to Expo 2010 can arrange various building models and simultaneously a 3D image of its layout will appear on a background wall, surrounded by previous "excellent works." In this way, a sign for the multimedia display tells us, "You could become one of the designers of a future city." In Shanghai's own pavilion at Expo 2010 the "Shanghai forever" image wall, consisting of revolving triangles and more than 15000 photographs featuring Shanghai, is a product of "mass participation and joint creation" (*gongzhong canyu, gongtong chuangzuo* 公众参与, 共同创作) intended to expound the "design conception of 'New horizons forever'" (or in Chinese "Shanghai eternally marches towards new horizon" *Shanghai yongyuan maixiang xin tiandi* 上海永远迈向新天地). Images of images are everywhere and we can be their creators.

Nonetheless, in subjecting the world/fair to our gaze and our actions, we are simultaneously subjected by it. Our bodies are not only *in* the world/fair, they *are* the world fair, simultaneously watching and watched, displaying and displayed. Often our recognition as participants rests on our willingness to take on specific subject positions – tellingly, the English title of the pavilion for popular participation is "Citizens' initiative pavilion," interpellating us as citizens of the mapped state system on display. It is through such citizenship that we are allowed recognition in the world/fair. Indeed, the different layers of simulacra share citizenship regimes as a key

feature, invoked through the passport. At previous world fairs, at the Shanghai Expo, and at the online version of Expo 2010 we can have a passport in which we collect "visa stamps" from the pavilions visited.

At points, we have to actively change ourselves to make us acceptable as subjects in order to have our fair share. Passing through the world/fair we are screened and tested. This screening echoes for the subject/object dichotomy (the who) the collapse we saw in previous sections of the here/there (the where) and the now/then (the when). As Richard Lane has observed with regards to Baudrillard:

[T]here is an interpenetration of the screen metaphor with the notion of everything being on the surface here, including the 'friendly' surveillance which simultaneously shows the people under surveillance on television screens, which leads to a collapsing of perspectival space (the removal of the 'gap' or distance both spatially and temporally between the viewer and the viewed).<sup>57</sup>

Here interpenetration is total, including of architectural and geographical space. The layers of simulacra cannot be separated. All of Expo 2010, the Shanghai Expo and its virtual replica, Shanghai, China, all of the world/fair are indistinguishable "as a total functional screen of activities."<sup>58</sup>

In this way all of the world/fair operates through screening, in every sense of the word. Our participation in the citizenship regimes of the world/fair is conditional: at Expo 2010 I met a travel guide who was visiting the world/fair with 60 tourists from Beijing. While her group went into the *Pavilion of future* to get "visa stamps" in their Expo passports, she waited ticketless outside, stopped at the border because she had not paid the fare. Simultaneously, producing a "real" passport meant one could jump pavilion queues to certain pavilions at Expo 2010.

Indeed, the world/fair is most helpful in persuading us that we can (and should) adjust our selves to pass its screening. In a book dedicated to Expo etiquette<sup>59</sup> prospective visitors to the world/fair are most helpfully taught how to modify their behavior and their bodies. Chinese readers can learn amongst other things how to greet, walk, shake hands, sit, queue and care for their personal hygiene in a polite manner. They can read about how to go to karaoke, drink coffee with foreigners and host them in their home according to global decorum. In an appendix we find a taxonomy of etiquette, outlining customs country by country, from the US to Egypt.<sup>60</sup> One drawn image, for example, shows one man (who we can assume, from the big nose in profile, represents a Westerner) who sits nicely at his table with one glass and one plate on which he is attacking a square (perhaps a piece of toast) with his knife and fork. He looks with bewilderment and a hint of fear at another man or boy who smiles a big smile as he carries his second plate to the table, where he has already assembled two glasses various fruits and one more plate overflowing with food (in the mish-mash of which we can identify various fruits, a whole fish, a crab and some shrimp). The picture's caption instructs its Chinese readers the civilized manner of partaking of the fare of the fair through a rhyming slogan: "Big eyes, small stomach, cannot finish the delicious fare" (*yan da duzi xiao, meiwei chi bu liao* 眼大肚子小, 美味吃不了).<sup>61</sup>

The concluding chapter of the book, on "how to be a refined and well mannered Expo person," clearly conceives of such politeness in terms of the *return* to an original

state. We are encouraged to "utilize the Shanghai Expo as a historical turning point, to make every one of us change into politely speaking Expo people" and after being told about "the Expo's demand on the etiquette of the people of the host country" to "through the Expo make elegant etiquette *return* to China."<sup>62</sup> Thus, being a civilized citizen of the world/fair is not about being more like somebody else, but about being more like your self; it is a question of recycling.

At other points, moving through the world/fair our bodies are more explicitly hijacked by screening, made to do things potentially against our will (and indeed through or in advance thereof), proliferated, taken apart. The Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region case for example shows visitors' images captured and repeatedly displayed on screens. As citizens of the world/fair our bodies are captured and displayed as copy upon copy throughout Expo 2010, media and academic work, including this article.

This hijacking technology is not simply in the hands of states. The corporate pavilion of Siemens powerfully commoditized Chinese cultural heritage and the Chinese national modernization project. Its display was marketed to Chinese audiences under the name *Tianxia yi jia* (天下一家), meaning "All-under-heaven" is like a family, or the world is one. To English language audiences the same pavilion was marketed through the name *We are the world*, a name which aptly brings out the recycling nature of the fair through reviving Michael Jackson's old hit song, but which also showcases the ambiguity of the question "who is the world/fair." The "we" is ambiguous and inside the pavilion the capacity in which "we" become the world/fair is telling. At the pavilion entrance we are photographed and at the end of the guided tour, when we come full circle, we are shown a film that recycles our image. Having measured and analyzed our facial features, our faces pass through a computer program and appear as avatars, transformed, singing along with the Expo 2010 theme tune. A sign at the pavilion reads:

After scanning and capturing the user's facial features, the image will be recorded and transformed into an avatar allowing users to feel as if they are starring in a pre-programmed movie or video ... How will this technology better our lives? Provides an entertaining experience for people to play a role in a movie or become a 'star'. Everyone has the chance to stand in the spotlight.

Our avatars in the virtual version of Expo 2010 are, to some extent at least, a consequence of our volition and choice, albeit screened and monitored with a mandatory Chinese ID number registration. In Siemens's corporate version of "All-under-heave" we are the world/fair without being told in what our stardom will consist. Our avatars are exposed as pre-programmed, as playing a pre-scribed role, and this play has only one script, one where we all sing along with the Chinese tune. From these examples we can see two kinds of technologies operating in the world/fair: ones that represent the world and ones that operate through simulation, "provoking a reflexive awareness of artificiality and simulacra":

The first of these conceives of technology as enabler, and is the concept that lies behind the notion of the Expo as a technology of nationhood. Technology enables a perspective that can produce wholeness from fragmentation. Expo

enables the appearance of the world as a whole, through the revelation of the fragments that are cut from it and the apparent celebration of their differences.<sup>63</sup>

Expo 2010's use of interactive technologies moved away from "representations" of the world as we know it to be. It celebrated instead the possibility of producing a simulated world, copies of copies (dis)interested in an original:

[A] world of images more real than the real, a fascination with the hyper-real, pretensions to realities that were never there in the first place or at least not in such perfect form, concrete manifestations of abstract possibilities [that] produce the essence of life itself as outcome not origin.<sup>64</sup>

The examples discussed here reaffirm a rather sinister side to simulation: "We are living through a movement from an organic, industrial society to a polymorphous, information system – from all work to all play, a deadly game."<sup>65</sup> Through these technologies of the world/fair, not only our concepts of spatiality and temporality, but also our notions of subject and object, are displaced. Being in a simulacral world/fair is simulacral being. As such, we need to move beyond analyses of Chinese "mega events" through concepts of simple representation and reality, and work to understand how they operate through simulation and simulacra. We are copies of copies without original, simulacral avatars in virtual hyper-reality. The Expo is us: our bodies, our dreams, our future.

#### TO BE TACTICAL, OR HOW TO BE FAIR?

This paper has asked what it means to be fair. I have argued that the fair is not a fake copy of a "real" world, but that as simulation it marks the breakdown of the distinctions of the copy from the original, of the fair from the world. The world/fair is everything and nothing, simultaneously nowhere and now here. I have shown that the world/fair works through recycling, revival and reuse that, as a rem(a)inder, is not new. I have further argued that being in the world fair turns us all into simulacral avatars without original, circulated in virtual hyper-reality. All these claims have serious consequences for the study of China in the world.

My reading here shows the problem of thinking of China as the "other country."<sup>66</sup> Baudrillardian simulacra have come to symbolize postmodernity, continental philosophy, late capitalism and an American way of life. All of these terms imply a *where*, *when* and *who*. A key finding of this paper is that the implied answers to those questions are not as straightforward as may at first glance appear.

Reading Expo 2010 as simulacra shows that we cannot locate "China" as an other, in another place and another time, than that of our purported late capitalism or postmodern condition. Importantly, though, through Baudrillard's simulacra we can see how this is not a case of "catching up," of those behind (finally) becoming like us. The point is not that "the others" have now become "the same," so that we can happily apply our "Western theories" and ignore difference. The point is, rather, that reading the world/fair as simulation messes with its notions of inside and outside, now and then, subject and object to the point where these terms are no longer workable. What we end up with is not the many turning into the one, with the convergence of others into the self. Instead, what remains is a fragmented plethora of truth, not the unreal

but the hyper-real. The effect is our own disappearance. The object becomes us, sees us. We see ourselves through the Expo. The Expo is us. My reading here of Expo 2010 as simulacra has examined some of the distinctions implied in the *where*, *when* and *who* of the world/fair, and shows that we may be better off not taking our distinctions so seriously.

But of course the study of the world/fair is serious. We all want to base our work on fair ground, but what happens to fair descriptions when that ground has turned out to be a fairground? In the simulacral world/fair, can we still retain strategy?

Already in his earlier work, Baudrillard had come to the conclusion that in a "hyperrealist" system, "[s]trictly speaking, nothing remains for us to base anything on."<sup>67</sup> In a hyperreal world of simulacra, the weight of information makes modernity (and its space) fall apart. This has shattering implications for meaning: "where we think that information produces meaning, the opposite occurs."<sup>68</sup> Meaning, truth and the real are reversed, that is, they are divested of any universal meaning, which restricts them to local, partial objects.<sup>69</sup> In this age of simulation we have surpassed old versions of uncertainty and made our problem permanent.<sup>70</sup> Recycling and simulation, with what they do to reality, to time and space, demand something from us: we no longer have the choice of advancing, of preserving in the present destruction, or of retreating – but only of facing up to this radical illusion.<sup>71</sup>

In this manner, the uncertainty of the simulated world/fair is not necessarily a cause for pessimism. Coulter has claimed "Baudrillard has long found a radically uncertain and ultimately unknowable world a far more comfortable place to live than one which is predictable. Baudrillard lives, as well as do [*sic*], in a world in a permanent state of reversibility, and he prefers it to a world that is accomplished."<sup>72</sup> I agree with Coulter's sentiment, but think we are better off thinking of Baudrillard's (and our) being in this recycled world as profoundly *uncomfortable*. The question posed is most pertinent to the way we think about the world and our role in worlding:

Does the world have to have meaning, then? That is the real problem. If we could accept this meaninglessness of the world, then we could play with forms, appearances and our impulses, without worrying about their ultimate destination ... Do we absolutely have to choose between meaning and non-meaning? But the point is precisely that we do not want to. The absence of meaning is no doubt intolerable, but it would be just as intolerable to see the world assume a definitive meaning.<sup>73</sup>

This implosion or disappearance of meaning, truth and the real, however, does not mean we cannot have strategy: "Theoretical violence, not truth, is the only resource we have left us."<sup>74</sup> The strategy Baudrillard has developed is a "fatal strategy," one that values uncertainty and where, in contrast to banal theory, the subject is no longer under any illusion of being more cunning than the object.<sup>75</sup> In contrast to the teleological narratives on China in the world – in common approaches of IR theory, in the PRC government's rendition of China's inevitable rise to world leadership, and in the conceptualizations of time and space at Expo 2010 – the world described by Baudrillard is not determined. In this world "everything is antagonistic" rather than harmonious and good will not necessarily triumph over evil.<sup>76</sup>

The strategy, then, is not for theory like in Enlightenment thought to reflect the real, but instead to work as a challenge. The world/fair is not compatible with the "real" that is imposed upon it. Importantly though: "the function of theory is certainly not to reconcile it, but on the contrary, to seduce, to wrest things from their condition, to force them into an over-existence which is incompatible with that of the real."<sup>77</sup> The purpose then of theory is to s(t)imulate the (im)possible in the world/fair. My hope with this article is to take one small step in such a direction and provoke us into thinking of China's "mega events" beyond representation, reality and ideology – to think of them in terms of simulacra.

## NOTES

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1. Rey Chow, "Violence in the Other Country: China as Crisis, Spectacle, and Woman," in Ann Russo, Lourdes Torres and Chandra T. Mohanty, eds., *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press 1991): 81.
2. Wolfram Manzenreiter, "The Beijing Games in the Western Imagination of China: The Weak Power of Soft Power," *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 34 (2010), pp. 29-48.
3. Susan Brownell, *Beijing's Games: What the Olympics Mean to China* (Boulder, CO: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008); Monroe E. Price and Daniel Dayan (eds.), *Owning the Olympics: Narratives of the new China* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press/University of Michigan Library, 2008); Xin Xu, "Modernizing China in the Olympic Spotlight: China's National Identity and the 2008 Beijing Olympiad," *Sociological Review*, 54 (2006), pp. 90-107.
4. Penelope Harvey has begun the work of reading world fairs as simulacra in *Hybrids of Modernity: Anthropology, the Nation State and the Universal Exhibition* (London: Routledge, 1996). Recent publications have hinted at the possibility of such a reading of Chinese mega events. Most notably, Price and Dayan's *Owning the Olympics* takes off in an imaginary of the Beijing Olympics as "spectacle, festival, ritual, and finally as access to truth" and concludes: "Or should we rewrite MacAloon's sequence in a



style inspired by Baudrillard: 'spectacle, festival, ritual, and finally... simulacrum?'" Daniel Dayan, "Beyond Media Events: Disenchantment, Derailment, Disruption," in Price and Dayan, *Owning the Olympics*, p. 400. To the knowledge of the author of this paper none have followed through with an empirical analysis of what such a reading may look like in the Chinese case. At the time of writing, no sustained political analysis of Expo 2010 has been published.

5. Maurice Roche, "Mega-events, Time and Modernity: On Time Structures in Global Society," *Time Society*, 12 (2003), p. 100; Robert W. Rydell, *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions 1876-1916* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), pp. 8, 236.

6. Maurice Roche, "Mega-events, Time and Modernity," p.103. See also Maurice Roche, "Mega-events, culture and modernity: Expos and the origins of public culture," *Cultural Policy*, 5 (1999), pp. 1-31.

7. Roche, "Mega-events, Time and Modernity," p.102.

8. Harvey, *Hybrids*; Mitchell, *Colonizing*.

9. Xinhua, "Premier Wen Declares Shanghai World Expo Closed," 1 November 2010; Xinhua, "Shanghai World Expo wins Worldwide Applause," 31 October 2010; David Barboza, "Shanghai Expo Sets Record With 73 Million Visitors," *The New York Times*, 2 November 2010.

10. For example, Christopher Norris, *Uncritical Theory* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1992).

11. Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 1994 [c1981]), p. 1.

12. Baudrillard, *Simulacra*, p. 2.

13. Baudrillard, *Simulacra*, p. 3.

14. Baudrillard, *Simulacra*, p. 3.

15. Marianne Barriaux, "Three Babies die in new China Milk Scare," AFP, 8 April 2011.

16. Gang Lin, "China's 'Good Neighbor' Diplomacy: A Wolf in Sheep's Clothing?," in *Asia Program Special Report* (Woodrow Wilson international center for scholars, 2005), p. 1.

17. V Saxena, "The Gumbygate Scandal: China's Haibao versus America's Gumby," in *Weird Asia News*, 11 May 2010, accessed 27 March 2011 via from <http://www.weirdasianews.com/2010/05/11/gumbygate-scandal-chinas-haibao-americas-gumby/>.

18. Leo Lewis, "Shanghai Expo Organisers Ripped off Theme Tune from 1997 Japanese hit, say Critics," *The Times*, 28 March 2010.

19. Lewis, "Shanghai".

20. Desiree Marianini and Janek Zdzarski, "Dancing with Shackles on," on Danwei at <http://www.danwei.org/>, last updated and accessed 01 March 2011).

21. Baudrillard, *Simulacra*, pp. 5-6.

22. Problematizing the dichotomizing relationship between the sign and the real is by no means originary with Baudrillard, but has a long and varied tradition from Friedrich W. Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) to Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981 [c1972]).

23. Baudrillard, *Simulacra*, p. 6.

24. There have been recent attempts to marry Baudrillardian temporality with notions of teleological time, for example Chris Hughes, "The recycling of time and the end of history," *International Journal of Baudrillard Studies*, 8 (2011). I show instead in this

paper how Baudrillard thinks of time in terms of recycling, rather than linearity or teleology. As a consequence, we need not read Baudrillard's successive phases of the image as aligned in linear time. Likewise, when Baudrillard writes of the territory "no longer" preceding the map (Baudrillard, *Simulacra*, p.1), or of metaphysics being "lost" (Baudrillard, *Simulacra*, p.2), we need not take this to imply that "once" the real was fully present and true, or that metaphysics was once unproblematically possible. The "era of simulation" (Baudrillard, *Simulacra*, p.2), then, need not be understood as temporally fixed or discreet. Baudrillard's description of the simulacrum as "pure" (Baudrillard, *Simulacra*, p.6) should be similarly qualified, as it is not "pure" in the sense in which the term is commonly used, but is always contaminated by recycling.

25. Baudrillard, *Simulacra*, p. 6.

26. Baudrillard, *Simulacra*, p. 6.

27. Baudrillard, *Simulacra*, p. 12.

28. Shanghai shibohui shiwu xietiaoju, 100 years of Expo Dream [Bai nian shibo meng] (Shanghai: Dongfang chuban zhongxin, 2009).

29. I have shown this in more detail in Astrid Nordin, "Space for the future: Exhibiting China in the world at Expo 2010," at *China's futures - and the World's Future* (Manchester, 11 February 2011).

30. Indeed, this paper, too, works through recycling (of Baudrillard, Harvey, Expo 2010) and intentionally so.

31. Harvey, *Hybrids*, p. 35.

32. Expo Shanghai Online, "Site tour," accessed 11 December 2010 via <http://en.expo.cn/indexn.html>.

33. Harvey, *Hybrids*, p. 50.

34. Harvey, *Hybrids*, p. 51.

35. CCTV Documentary, "The Opening Celebration and Site Opening Ceremony of Expo 2010 Shanghai China" (PRC: CCTV, 2010).

36. Harvey, *Hybrids*, p. 37.

37. Baudrillard, *Simulacra*, p. 12.

38. Xinhua, "Shanghai."

39. Baudrillard, *Simulacra*, pp. 12-13.

40. Harvey, *Hybrids*.

41. Shanghai shibohui shiwu xietiaoju, 100 years.

42. For an example, see Shanghai shibohui shiwu xietiaoju, 100 years.

43. Harvey, *Hybrids*, p. 37.

44. Baudrillard, *Simulacra*, p. 6.

45. This problematic has been discussed among others by Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991 [c1983]); Jacques Derrida, *Of grammatology* (London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976 [c1967]); Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A thousand plateaus : capitalism and schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988 (c1980)).

46. Baudrillard, *Simulacra*, p. 10.

47. Kelvin Cheung, "The futures of Chinese nationalism: Confucianism and China's Nation-building," at *China's futures - and the World's Future* (Manchester, 11 February 2011) and Sébastien Billioud "Confucianism, 'Cultural Tradition,' and Official Discourse in China at the Start of the New Century," in William Callahan and Elena Barabantseva, eds., *China Orders the World? Soft Power, Norms and Foreign Policy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), pp. 144-166.

48. Baudrillard, *Simulacra*, p. 10.

49. This "West," on my understanding, is not real in the first place and the breakdown of any hard line between inside and outside makes such radical dichotomization fall apart. For a call for such a "Chinese school" see Qin Yaqing, "A Chinese School of International Relations Theory: Possibility and Inevitability," in Callahan and Barabantseva, *China Orders the World?*, pp. 25-36.
50. Baudrillard, *Simulacra*, p. 10.
51. Naeem Inayatullah and David L. Blaney, *International relations and the problem of difference* (New York: Routledge, 2004).
52. This is particularly the case in current PRC policy towards the Western "Autonomous Regions" of Tibet and Xinjiang where "splittism" is considered a challenge to the integrity of the PRC state, see Elena Barabantseva, *Overseas Chinese, Ethnic Minorities and Nationalism: De-Centering China* (Oxon: Routledge, 2011).
53. The "Scientific Outlook on Development" (kexue fazhan guan 科学发展观) was ratified into the CCP constitution at the 17th Party Congress in October 2007 as one of the guiding principles of the CCP.
54. See for example Expo Shanghai Online, "Xinjiang pavilion," accessed 19 September 2010 via <http://pavilion.expo.cn/p8006/ssize/index.html>.
55. Gerry Coulter, "Reversibility: Baudrillard's 'One Great Thought,'" *International Journal of Baudrillard Studies* 1 (2) (2004).
56. Baudrillard, *Simulacra*, p. 6.
57. Richard J. Lane, *Jean Baudrillard* (London: Routledge, 2000), p.42.
58. Baudrillard, *Simulacra*, p. 76.
59. Xu Bo, *Shibo liyi [Expo Etiquette]* (Shanghai: Dongfang chuban zhongxin [Eastern publishing centre], 2009).
60. Xu Bo, *Expo Etiquette*, pp. 147-71.
61. Xu Bo, *Expo Etiquette*, p. 62.
62. Xu Bo, *Expo Etiquette*, pp. 141-6, my emphasis.
63. Harvey, *Hybrids*, p. 123.
64. Harvey, *Hybrids*, p. 123.
65. Donna Haraway, *Simians, cyborgs and women: the reinvention of nature* (New York: Chapman and Hall, 1991), p. 161.
66. Chow, "Violence."
67. Jean Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death* (London: SAGE, 1993 [c1976]), p. 4-5.
68. Baudrillard, *Simulacra*, p. 80.
69. Baudrillard, *Simulacra*, p. 180.
70. Jean Baudrillard, "Aids: Virulence or Profylaxis?," in *Screened Out* (New York: Verso, 2002 [c1997]), p. 90.
71. Baudrillard, *Illusion*, p. 122-3.
72. Coulter, "Reversibility." My reading of Baudrillard in this last section owes much to Coulter's reading.
73. Jean Baudrillard, *Impossible Exchange* (New York: Verso, 2001 [c1999]). P. 128.
74. Baudrillard, *Simulacra*, p. 163.
75. Jean Baudrillard, *Fatal Strategies* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1990 [c1983]), p. 181.
76. Baudrillard, *Fatal Strategies*, pp. 162, 182.
77. Jean Baudrillard, *The Ecstasy of Communication* (S. Lotringer (Ed.), New York: Semiotext(e), 1988 [c1987]), p. 98.