



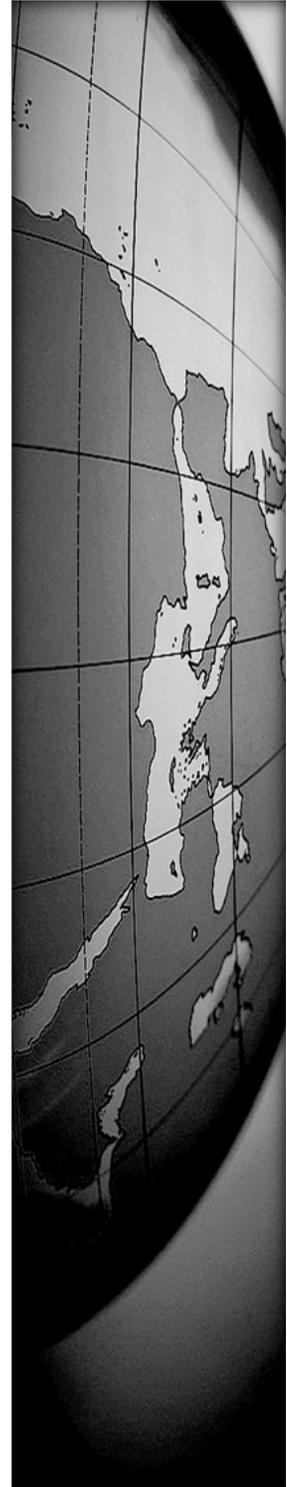
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DESTINATION CULTURE: *How Globalization makes all Cities Look the Same*

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**Destination Culture: How Globalization Makes All Cities Look the Same\***

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## **Introduction**

Debates about the effects of globalization during the past few years often focus on the question of whether the rapid migrations of people, images, and capital have reduced differences between national cultures, or just given them a wider territory and more means of expression. Skeptics argue that this is an age-old question that can never be resolved. In every era, trade routes and travelers have carried new ideas and materials across great distances, permitting indigenous groups to create fusions that gradually grow into new historical traditions. From this point of view, current global trends are neither stranger nor more innovative than “native” weavers who integrate imported dyes into traditional rug patterns or musicians who learn to play traditional instruments in a foreign rhythm. What is new in our age, though, is the erosion of material production as the major source of cities’ and nations’ authentic cultural identity and the rise of the idea that cultural *creativity* can renew their distinction. When the same idea, though, is applied in many cities of the world, it results in an all too visible homogenization.<sup>1</sup>

Homogenization is visible, first of all, in the concentration of new cultural and commercial development projects in city centers. High-rise, high-status corporate office towers are intended to be symbols of economic modernization, marking each city’s competitive position in a global race for financial investment. To make these sites more attractive to both corporate tenants and affluent local residents, developers combine office space with expensive shops and leisure landscapes. Although cities like New York, London, and Tokyo have the largest concentrations of corporate headquarters and luxury stores, the expansion of financial credit for property development in recent years has brought the same development ideas—and the same conspicuous textual allusions and iconic corporate logos inevitable affixed to downtown

architectural trophies -- to other cities across the globe. Homogenization, then, is attendant to strategic visions of urban growth - and shared by elites who have the economic and political power to impose them on urban public spaces.<sup>2</sup>

Whether or not politicians acknowledge it, the universal effect of redeveloping the city center is to move poor residents and workers far away from it; to block their traditional means of self-support support – be it black-markets trade, the selling of illegal substances, bartering, prostitution, and begging. The poor are thus deprived of public spaces long crucial to surviving in the margins of urban societies. Through redevelopment, the wealthy and powerful can regulate the movement of everyone using police, private guards, and security devices to “clean-up the streets.” All cities become--within the limits of their policing, and of city dwellers’ willingness to internalize control--safer and less strange to outsiders’ eyes: those of tourists, expatriates, media producers, and affluent consumers – the very people these developers want to attract to their respective city.<sup>3</sup>

These upscale development strategies are born out of desperation. For years, economists and public officials have declared that the shift away from manufacturing and toward designing products heralds a new global division of labor, with workers in formerly industrial cities and nations developing “higher” skills, with appropriately higher educations and wages. During the first few decades of this structural change—from the 1970s to the 1990s—the loss of jobs in textile, steel, and automobile production in the most economically developed nations was supposed to be balanced by the creation of new, high tech jobs, with financial and other services leading the new economy: Silicon Valley would replace Detroit, and the powers of Wall Street would devolve to every bank or local office licensed to sell stocks and bonds. The rapid growth of lower - and higher – level industries in some less developed countries, has created an

economic drain in previously dominant industrial regions, and has sowed doubt about the expected progress toward a new stage of development for all. In cultural terms, the distinction enjoyed by these early industrial regions as makers of national wealth and pace-setters for the world, has diminished with the outsourcing of traditional jobs. Products that once signified “national” and “local” accomplishment are now made in other places.

This has led to some confusion. Is a silk scarf from the Parisian fashion house Hermès, properly speaking, no longer “French” if it is made in China? Is a computer “American” if the components come from China and are assembled in Mexico? Certainly the local communities whose lifeblood flowed through the mill and the factory no longer found in these products a source of pride. For those political and business leaders who wanted to retain the prestige and the reputation for creativity that these products had endowed, the label “Made in France” or “Made in the USA” was revised to focus on the activity of conception.

At the same time, luxury products permeated what came to be known as a “global consumer culture.” Cheap airline tickets in the 1960s and 1970s had made it possible for even middle-class tourists to travel to Paris and capture an authentic souvenir of that city by buying an Hermès scarf or a bottle of Dior perfume; by the 1980s, though, the worldwide marketing of luxury products by rapidly expanding branded stores made both the local and the national identity of these products weaker. Shoppers could buy “Hermès” in New York or Tokyo as well as Paris, and eventually they could buy Hermès products in different Hermès stores in a single big city, as well as in nearby department stores. This could, indeed, be one criterion of a “global city”: offering more than two Hermès stores where the luxury brand is sold.

These changes were crystallized in the 1980s by the rise of the marketing paradigm we know as branding. Cities as well as corporations struggled to create a distinctive image or brand

that would appeal in a larger, more democratic, and more fiercely competitive marketplace. Just as consumer goods corporations proclaimed that the barely perceptible differences between their products were signifiers of their distinctive identity, so the cities where these goods were designed and sold marketed themselves to the rest of the world as creative capitals. To some degree this was true, since the disposable income generated by the symbolic economy of finance, media, food, and fashion produced a large market for all kinds of creative work. Tourists and investors became patrons and customers for creative workers in art, theater, music, and other cultural expressions and performances, as well as in cultural institutions like art museums and commercial spaces like art galleries and auction houses, and even the cultural display of stores. For all these reasons, competition between the largest cities to be global financial capitals spilled over into a branding competition to become, as former mayor Rudolph Giuliani said about New York, the “cultural capital of the world.”<sup>4</sup>

Today, the public imagery of branding connects cities’ financial activity and cultural creativity, and tourism and economic growth. While financial elites and elected officials changed market rules in favor of a dangerous deregulation, they also promoted facilities for cultural consumption. The result, by the 1990s, was that the physical landscape of global cities did not separate creativity from consumption. Moreover, the symbolic landscape of financial trading, art auctions, fashion shows, and hipster bars promoted not just an image of individuals vying to show off their excessive wealth but of cities engaging in a similar competition for both wealthy and trendy consumers, makers of art and buyers of multi-million-dollar apartments, luxury-suite and backpacker tourists.<sup>5</sup>

Smaller cities do not want to be excluded from these global games. If they don’t house major capital markets and can’t draw the action of big auction houses, they compete for a place

on the global cultural circuit by developing art fairs, film festivals, and even Cow Parades where painted fiberglass cows, or bison, or moose—depending on a city’s chosen symbol—are installed on the streets. Other events promote the creativity of local cultural industries. More than 150 cities, from New York to Rio de Janeiro, hold an annual or a semi-annual Fashion Week, and Design Festivals for the furniture trade stretch from London to Ljubljana. Modern art museums have replaced factories as a symbol of collective wealth and a source of pride; every city wants a “McGuggenheim.” Even the Midwestern region around Gary, Indiana, long overwhelmed by Chicago’s dominance and tormented in recent years by the collapse of the U.S. steel industry, has sent an economic development committee to Bilbao to investigate how another former steelmaking city could be revitalized by an art museum. Keeping ahead of the competition is expensive, though, and officials of even the biggest cities complain when they realize that they can never do enough to maintain their city’s lead. “We see ourselves as being in a competitive race with other cities from around the world,” Daniel Doctoroff, the former New York City deputy mayor for economic development, recently said to a meeting of high-level cultural administrators and CEOs. “Many of [them] are trying to copy us, whether deliberately, or in some cases, unintentionally....They’re stealing our cultural institutions. There’s a Guggenheim all over the world now.”<sup>6</sup>

Certainly cultural competition is not the only way to explain the overwhelming force of standardization in global cities and would-be global contenders. In the early 1960s, the urbanist Jane Jacobs blamed the twentieth-century modernizers who worshipped progress and planned to rebuild all cities with right angles and straight lines. As architects and urban planners, they developed the intellectual tools and aesthetic styles that resulted in homogenized superblocks and high-rise towers, creating what Jacobs called “the great blight of dullness.” Alternatively, from

an economic point of view, the geographer David Harvey sees the homogenization of cities resulting from the actions of investors, who tend to withdraw capital from one area or type of investment and shift it to another in a concerted effort to maximize profits. If developers can make more money and have less political interference by building ranch homes in the suburbs, they'll do so; but when that becomes too difficult or costly, they'll switch to building loft-apartments downtown. Concerted development strategies are shaped on the one hand by mostly cooperative or occasionally recalcitrant local elected officials and on the other by the global investment portfolios that have grown enormously in recent years. Whether they are sovereign funds of foreign countries or transnational real estate investment trusts, they target an increasingly wide range of buildings and construction projects, all tending to make the centers of cities more expensive and driving poorer residents to the periphery.<sup>7</sup>

Like everyone else, investors, developers, and officials are also influenced by the flow of ideas and strategies—"traveling ideas," as the urban planning researchers Malcolm Tait and Ole Jensen, call them. These ideas may respond to specific demands in one city or another, or they may just stir people's interest. When they are applied in one city after another, though, they lead to "McGuggenization." Often developers choose a competitive response that copies what others are doing if that has proven to get media attention, local government's support, or higher sale prices for the finished product. As a result, star architects like Richard Meier are hired to design a new apartment house in a poor location in Brooklyn, Zaha Hadid is invited to submit her ideas for re-envisioning an urban district in Bilbao, and teams of foreign architects are brought in to create entire new city centers in London's Docklands, Shanghai's Pudong or Dubai. Both traveling ideas and competitive strategies are seriously promoted by business and professional groups that lobby for them in meetings with colleagues around the world, leading to cities in

different regions sharing the same strategy. The net result is a treadmill of competition that enforces homogenization. Because it's difficult to come up with new ideas, competition condemns cities to create ever more places that aim to be distinctive, but look just the same. Like the aspirational consumption of contemporary consumers who buy high-status goods in the hope of expressing the high status they would like to have, cities engage in aspirational production, producing more modern art museums, arts festivals, hipster districts, and cafés—all because they want to be *different*.<sup>8</sup>

The value of these outposts of difference is nearly always calculated in financial terms: property values, business and tax revenues, or even nonprofit ventures. When the artists Christo and Jeanne-Claude installed hundreds of bright orange flags in Central Park in the middle of winter in 2005, New York City tourism officials estimated that four million visitors came to see *The Gates* and bought so many souvenirs to benefit local nonprofit arts and environmental organizations that they poured \$250 million into the city's economy. For this reason, the officials and the media judged the event to be a great success--though Central Park was already attracting more visitors than any other city park in the country. As beautiful as the installation was, *The Gates* did not confirm New York's uniqueness. It was only one of Christo and Jeanne-Claude's many well-known projects that the artists have created since the 1970s by wrapping huge swathes of fabric around notable sites, from Berlin's Reichstag to Sydney's Little Bay. *The Gates* was a high-class variation on the Cow Parade, a temporary version of Guggenheim Bilbao, a way to place the Christo brand for a few weeks in New York City. Moreover, the apparent success of *The Gates* encouraged the New York city government to repeat the experience of installing large-scale public art with the specially designed and built waterfalls of Olafur Eliasson in summer, 2008, and several months later—in a transparent exercise of corporate

branding—the installation in Central Park once again of the Chanel Mobile Art Container, designed by the celebrated architect Zaha Hadid, and circulating around Hong Kong, Tokyo, New York, London, Moscow, and Paris.<sup>9</sup>

These cultural strategies do bring several important benefits to elected officials. First, they suggest that all cities can be winners. Second, unlike old smokestacks and docks, they're clean. Third, like shopping centers and Business Improvement Districts, they make people feel safe, and they create a sense of belonging. *The Gates*, the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, and the Cow Parade, as Jean Baudrillard once wrote about the Centre Pompidou in Paris, are a part of the “hypermarket of culture” that keeps people enthralled, “in a state of integrated mass.” As a result, public art installations, modern art museums, and festivals have become a pervasive and an influential part of cities’ toolkit to encourage entrepreneurial innovation and creativity, cleanse public spaces of visible signs of moral decay, and compete with other capitals of the symbolic economy of finance, media, art, and tourism.<sup>10</sup>

Cultural strategies of redevelopment aim to resolve local problems of economic renewal and social integration. But whether they also create traveling ideas that migrate around the world, or respond to the same structural needs, or just inspire imitation, they are repeated so often, they reduce each city’s distinctive look and feel. Regardless of how spectacular or creative the desired effect, the net result for a mobile tourist or observer who can sample cultures around the world is an unintended standardization. Any development strategy can benefit local artists and workers by creating jobs and better access to consumption opportunities. Other local residents, though, may suffer when their local markets for food and day labor are displaced, their homes are removed, and local polyglot institutions that they have created—both formal and informal—are overwhelmed by the single dominant rhetoric of “global urbanism.”<sup>11</sup>

Cities have focused these development efforts on three generic cultural spaces: the mass culture space of shopping and entertainment, the high culture space of modern art museums, and the hip culture space of “creative” and artists’ districts. We can sample these by traveling around the world, from Times Square in New York to the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao and 50 Moganshan Lu, a cultural hub in Shanghai.

### **The Sterilization of Times Square**

During most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Manhattan’s Times Square developed a worldwide reputation as a vibrant entertainment center—featuring everything from Broadway shows and movie theaters to bright neon lights, billboard advertisements, and milling crowds—at all hours of the day and night. At the beginning of the century, its cosmopolitan aura enabled New Yorkers to call it, with some exaggeration, “the crossroads of the world.” In terms of national aspirations, Times Square was both the geographical and metaphorical center of American popular culture. Men and women gathered there to read the latest headlines spooling off the huge, electric Motogram sign, and it was in Times Square that Alfred Eisenstadt took his famous photograph, published in *Life* magazine, of a sailor sweeping a young woman off her feet and kissing her to celebrate the end of World War II. Times Square continued to draw visitors, including families with children, through the 1960s. But as a heavily traveled, carnivalesque area of the city, it also drew men and women looking for casual encounters with strangers, often involving the rough trade of sex and drugs. Because private real estate developers showed no interest in the area, the city government proposed several different projects, none of which attracted much attention—until the 1980s, when corporate investors planned to build skyscraper offices that would erase the district’s historic roughness and neon glitter, as well as its seediness.

This plan stirred so much opposition that the project was delayed for several years, until potential financing disappeared in the stock market's decline after 1987.<sup>12</sup>

Much of the opposition came from the men and women who supported historic preservation and led many of the city's cultural institutions. Spearheaded by the Municipal Art Society, opponents campaigned to protect the historic authenticity of Times Square by aesthetic means: by preserving its *look*. They proposed a law requiring each building in the district to wear a large illuminated sign on its façade—making each building, in effect, a giant electronic billboard. Broadway theaters, threatened with being sold by those who owned the land on which they stood and swallowed up by new office development, inspired another new law. This law enabled theater owners to sell “air rights,” important for the opportunity they offer to build a much taller building on the site, to owners of nearby properties. The sale of air rights would protect the concentration of low-rise theater buildings on the side streets while skyscrapers rose on the broad avenues around them, beginning on Broadway itself. At the same time, the New York City Police Department began vigorous sweeps of the sidewalks and porno shops, removing the pimps, hustlers, and hyperventilating, overwhelmingly male customers who made 42<sup>nd</sup> Street after dark so menacing, especially to women. For added force, the city government condemned properties occupied by pornographic shops that refused to change their stock or close, using the law of eminent domain to seize them “for the public good” and sell them to real estate developers who would replace them with less troublesome businesses.

The combination of “aesthetic legislation,” policing, and eminent domain prepared Times Square for a change of popular culture, one that relied, not coincidentally, on the Disney Company. The well-known New York architect Robert A. M. Stern linked these strategies, for he both served on Disney's corporate board and oversaw a local planning study of how to

preserve the Broadway theater district. Stern recalls noting, when passing through Times Square one day in the late 1980s, how many people, especially women, came to matinee performances at the area's theaters by chartered bus from their homes in the suburbs. He then came up—so he recalls—with the idea of building attractions that would make Times Square safe enough for these visitors to feel at home there. Luckily, by the early 1990s, the Disney Company was also thinking about expanding their business by producing shows for the commercial theater that would feature their film characters and theme park rides. Placing Disney on Broadway, then, was an attractive prospect for both the urban planners and the corporation.

Locating Disney in Times Square suggested a healthy synergy between the family-oriented popular culture of Disney entertainment and the moral renewal the city government desired. With new laws protecting space in the district for legitimate Broadway theaters, private developers began to plan new entertainment facilities for corporate tenants who wanted to be near the Disney beachhead. In the 1990s, when Disney still seemed an invincible corporate giant with universal popular appeal, the company opened a Disney store on Times Square and renovated a historic theater, the New Amsterdam, next door, for the premiere of “Beauty and the Beast.” They were soon joined by the youth-oriented cable music network MTV and a slew of themed restaurants, bars, and performance spaces with well-known brand names--from Madame Tussaud's Wax Museum and Virgin Megastore to B. B. King's Blues Club and a Hello, Kitty store.

By financial measures, the new Times Square has been a rousing success. Every year, 26 million visitors come to gawk at the bright lights, eat at the restaurants, shop at Toys ‘R’ Us, and, if they can afford \$100 tickets, go to the theater. The area's impact, according to the Times Square Alliance, a local business group, equals the combined economies of Bolivia and Panama.

Entertainment is not the only type of business represented in Times Square. While the cultural attractions bring crowds that fill the area from 42<sup>nd</sup> to 50<sup>th</sup> Street, day and night, Times Square is ringed by corporate office towers for the main job-providing sectors of the city's symbolic economy—media and finance—just the types of businesses that are most vulnerable to global financial downturns. The headquarters of Condé Nast, the Hearst Corporation, and the New York Times are near Times Square, as well as the headquarters of NASDAQ, and the late, lamented offices of Lehman Brothers and Morgan Stanley, as well as many corporate law firms. Media and entertainment may either keep the district bright despite financial retrenchment, or decline as they did during the Great Depression, when the commercial theaters of 42<sup>nd</sup> Street degenerated into burlesque houses and cheap movie theaters.

From the beginning of its renewal in the 1990s, though, Times Square has suffered from a homogenized plastic entertainment culture. Critics have complained bitterly of “Disneyfication”—a bland, mind-numbing sameness of corporate brand names, bad food, and banal entertainment. Branches of transnational businesses like Madame Tussaud's deny the unique location, detaching it from the city's history and from the area's pop culture roots in live performance. Despite pulsating neon billboards and crowds that make the asphalt ripple with expectation, Times Square has become a fast food franchise of popular entertainment. It represents a standardized consumer culture that, despite the prominence of its live-action events, like the dropping of a glittering ball from the top of the Times Tower on New Year's Eve, risks being a cliché.

## Guggenheim Bilbao

Beginning in the 1960s, when the French government planned to create the Pompidou Center of Modern Art, in Paris, modern art museums have been asked to fulfill three different roles: magnet of urban redevelopment, symbol of national prestige, and energizer of human capital in terms of creativity and innovation. The museums are nearly always located on land that has lost its industrial uses and its economic value—often on the waterfront—and the acquisition of this land is financed by the state.

In Paris, the state planned to locate the Centre Pompidou on a *terrain vague* of low-rent, dilapidated housing, small workshops, and cheap shops between the not-yet-gentrified Marais and the not-yet-demolished wholesale food markets of les Halles: the *plateau Beaubourg*. Through an international competition, a state-appointed commission chose a startling industrial design that exposed pipes and other parts of the building's structure. Painted in bright colors, the structural elements were intended to represent a set of progressive programs and institutions that would propel Paris (and, by extension, France) to become a dominant player on international modern art and music circuits.

It wasn't only the design to challenge French tradition. By awarding the commission to the young British architect Richard Rogers and the Italian Renzo – both foreigners - a precedent was set for going outside national borders to showcase the client's innovation. Since this strategy was quickly copied by other clients around the world, it lent a great deal of prestige to architectural innovation – those with rising reputations thus became known as “starchitects” – global celebrities whose signature styles were becoming brand names. By the 1990s, when local leaders in Bilbao and Hong Kong planned large cultural districts on the waterfront, their thoughts

turned to how these cultural facilities and their designers could help their city to achieve, retain, and expand a presence in global financial markets.<sup>13</sup>

New cultural districts indeed attract media attention. An increasing number of art magazines, travel guides, and Internet websites dedicated to cities and leisure promote new cultural scenes as places of style and status. Although the public may have no idea of what art, exactly, is showcased in the new facilities, they hear the “buzz” about them. Lower air fares, more free time, and a stronger emphasis on individual mobility encourage cultural tourism, especially among the wealthy, highly educated men and women who likely collect such experiences as signs of their distinction. Young people, even from overseas, are attuned to the emergence of these cultural districts, and to individual cultural institutions, in a way that locals are not. The big open space in front of the Pompidou Center has been filled with tourists and buskers, young people and break dancers, many of them not French, from the time the museum opened. Meanwhile, the big open space in front of the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao is generally empty except for tourists.

Unlike the Pompidou Center, which is owned and run by the French government, Guggenheim Bilbao is an outpost of the global chain of Guggenheim museums. Conceived as an attention-getting symbol of the city’s triple goal--breaking loose from declining industries, cleaning the detritus of steel mills and shipyards from the waterfront, and carrying out a bloodless counter-terrorist campaign against Basque separatists, the museum had many local uses. But, like the corporate leaders of the Disney Company who decided to set up shop in Times Square, the director of the Guggenheim Museum, based in Manhattan, was already primed for expansion. Since the mid 1980s, Thomas Krens had planned to open several branches in other cities of the world as well as sponsor a new Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art

(MassMoCA) in North Adams, a declining industrial town in the Berkshire Mountains of New England. The Guggenheim Museum had more art works than it had exhibition space to show them; many recently acquired works and installations were so large they required galleries of their own.

Like the Times Square project, the revitalization of Bilbao's industrial waterfront embodied a desired synergy between the strategies of Basque business leaders and urban planners and of Krens, a cultural entrepreneur. Like Times Square, the Pompidou Center, and other new cultural districts around the world, Guggenheim Bilbao would be joined by new shops and upscale apartment houses that would raise property values. But unlike most other cities, Bilbao had a broader, more ambitious strategy to modernize urban infrastructure by organizing competitions for the design of subways, bridges, and airport terminals. The main point, though, was the same: to join the best of global design and local fabrication to craft a set of new urban symbols. This represented an extraordinary break from the inwardness of local traditions toward an outward-looking tourist economy.<sup>14</sup>

With both the selection of art inside the galleries and the design of the museum in relation to the wider urban context, Guggenheim Bilbao has challenged traditional Basque identity. The architect Frank Gehry intended the curved, silver-color titanium panels of the museum's façade to represent the waves of the Nervion River and to suggest the toughness of the blast furnaces that used to be nearby. But the museum's sinuous shape and flashy reflections of light could just as well suggest a cosmopolitan glamour—the glamour of the actress Marilyn Monroe, as Herbert Muschamp, the late architecture critic of the *New York Times*, wrote when he visited the museum at its opening in 1997. The building suggests an “American style of freedom,” Muschamp says. “That style is voluptuous, emotional, intuitive and exhibitionist.” Nothing could be farther from

either traditional Biskaian culture or attitudes in Bilbao, a city that in the past had rejected both the minimalist steel sculptures of the American artist Richard Serra and the work of modern Basque artist Jorge Oteiza.<sup>15</sup>

Since the shipyards and steel mills had not yet been demolished when Muschamp wrote this, it was easier for him then than it would be for a visitor today to say that Gehry was inspired by Bilbao's 19<sup>th</sup>-century industrial power. But Gehry transformed the city's industrial heritage into an abstract form, and the museum itself replaced a factory that, by some accounts, was still in working order. These material transformations of the built environment represent the museum's dominant position in the city, where it both overlooks the city center and takes the major share of the regional government's cultural funding. It is also important to note that all the exhibitions feature work by overseas artists. This is perhaps a good thing for Bilbao, a historically inward looking city in a separatist province, where the local Fine Arts Museum has an excellent collection of historical local work but lacks a strong modern art collection. Yet it defies the goal of integrating the new cultural district with local artists. Related to this issue, the museum receives more visits from tourists than from local residents. Ticket prices are high for people in Bilbao, where the youth unemployment rate is 60 percent. Hotel prices are also high for Spanish tourists. Visitors tend to come once, stay one or two nights, and leave without seeing the rest of the city.<sup>16</sup>

Business and political leaders in Bilbao have been praised for taking their future into their hands by welcoming change and developing a cultural strategy of revitalization. But exactly the same vision has shaped strategies in quite a few other cities. From Melbourne to Manchester, hopes for cultural-led redevelopment have led to an endless series of waterfront cultural centers, cultural festivals, and cultural competitions. The European Union promotes these aspirations by

funding the annual selection of a European Capital of Culture, which, like the Olympics, goads each city to rebuild its old industrial districts with flagship cultural projects. In a similar sort of competition—but without the regional supports--Asian cities develop their own flagship cultural projects.<sup>17</sup>

But the repetition of these projects raises serious questions. Does it lead to the imposition of a single mold of creativity—one that excludes traditional artists? Does it exclude local residents because they are neither producers nor consumers of art that wins the attention of global gatekeepers, like art and lifestyle magazines, or of overseas investors? In the nineteenth century, industrial Bilbao was closely connected to European bankers and English factories that invested in its steel mills and shipyards. But today's modern art museums are, in many ways, incubators of a new globalization. They are not just sources of pleasure and learning, but technologies of power that force urban cultures to open up to the outside, adapt to transnational markets, and become more cosmopolitan in a single, recognized way. We meet these issues again in Shanghai.<sup>18</sup>

### **Shanghai Chic: 50 Moganshan Lu**

Less monumental in size than a cultural district but equally ambitious in its vision of the future, the “creative hub” is an effort to remake the production side of urban culture. The hub is an intentional cluster of artists and designers in a neighborhood or a building complex. Sometimes it is subsidized by the state, like the creative hubs sponsored by the London Development Agency since 2004, but often it emerges as a spontaneous cluster of young artists, musicians, and performers, like the artists' districts of SoHo (Manhattan), Williamsburg (Brooklyn), and Hoxton (London), as well as the short-lived “Silicon Alley” of lower Manhattan.

Many cities have the material requirements for these clusters to form: low-rent areas of formerly industrial, or even office, buildings that are near to both financial and media firms that will buy creative work, often on a free-lance basis, and to low-price shops, bars, and restaurants, whose ethnic and working class cultures provide a diversity of source material and a feeling of authenticity. From the viewpoint of young cultural workers, sharing the streets with immigrants and workers helps to create a neo-Bohemia of creative energy. It also reproduces the edginess of the city's traditional unexpected encounters with strangers—and Strangeness: new cultural production thrives on the jagged edges of uneven development, in areas that have not yet been sanitized or Disneyfied.<sup>19</sup>

These lessons have been taken by entrepreneurial business and political leaders in the rapidly growing economies of Asia, especially in cities like Shanghai where old industries are moving out and relocating to lower-cost regions of China, and city and district officials want to encourage new types of development. Though it is risky for local governments to support new art, which may be critical of the party and state, they may support cultural hubs as evidence of their city's, and China's, creativity. A small number of creative hubs formed in Beijing and Shanghai during the 1990s and early 2000s on the initiative of individual artists

In Shanghai, the artist Xue Song moved into studio space in a vacant, 1930s-era factory complex at 50 Moganshan Lu, near the Suzhou River, owned by Shangtex, a large textile and apparel holding company that had moved to a new development zone on the Pudong side of the river, near the airport. Not only artists, but also business and political leaders saw the site's potential as a cultural hub, especially in light of the success of Factory 798, a complex of artists' studios and galleries that had opened in Beijing in 2001 and quickly spurred the development of a hip area of galleries, cafés, and boutiques. Artists in Shanghai, attracted by the cheap rents and

location in the center of a rapidly growing, cosmopolitan city, rapidly moved into the Shangtex site; they were joined by individual cultural entrepreneurs from Europe and the United States who opened galleries of contemporary Chinese art, displaying work that until recently had not only been discouraged but even banned by government and party leaders. This work now appeared to be a positive attraction for foreign tourists and investors, who were as eager to “discover” new Chinese artists in gritty industrial surroundings in Shanghai as to find the work of other artists in similar surroundings in SoHo or the East End. Shangtex became an eager patron—or landlord—of new artists, for the company prides itself on its innovative union of technology and fashion to produce new synthetic fibers for the clothing industry. Moreover, 50 Moganshan Lu enjoyed the support of local party and government officials. In 2002, the Municipal Economic Committee named the 21-building complex an official industrial park; two years later, this title was changed to “art industrial park.”<sup>20</sup>

Building a creative hub at 50 Moganshan Lu suits Shanghai’s ambition to become a global city that surpasses its close competitors--Hong Kong and Beijing—as both a financial and a cultural center, a capital of the symbolic economy. Spaces are occupied by a variety of creative concerns: art galleries, graphic arts, architects’, and design studios, and TV and film production facilities. Not surprisingly, the hub’s self-claimed branding strategy capitalizes on aesthetic and spatial representations that originated in the United States and have migrated to Europe and Asia: its slogan is “Suzhou creek/Soho/loft.” As the hub’s website states, these connections “embody that M50 [50 Moganshan Lu] is an integration of history, culture, art, vogue [sic], and originality.” A meeting ground between the old loft buildings of Manhattan’s SoHo and the new titanium marvel of Guggenheim Bilbao, Moganshan Lu is intended to upgrade the polluted waterfront, show a good way to re-use old buildings rather than tear them

down, and bring technology together with art. To justify the effort, the management evokes not just the appearance, but the *experience* of authenticity: “The shabby factory buildings contain certain value, because the naked steel structure as well as the old brick walls and the mottled concrete make people feel the trueness and perfection of being existent.” Urban culture can’t get more ambitious than this.<sup>21</sup>

Moganshan Lu has proved to be popular with artists and tourists from overseas as well as from different regions of China. Visits are recommended by foreign guidebooks and websites dedicated to Shanghai, to the art world, and to tourism. The afternoon that I visited, a few foreign tourists were eating lunch in the small café and looking around the open galleries, although when there are special exhibitions, several hundred visitors may come by in a single day. Some of the artists who show their work there come from Hong Kong and Taiwan; they find the cost of living lower on the mainland, and they have access in Shanghai to an international market. While a portion of the art is traditional in style, much more is almost shockingly modern and ironic, making parodies of Maoist-era artifacts and poses or suggesting that some of the more blatant results of the booming consumer society in China are as grotesque as the bourgeois capitalists caricatured by the German Expressionists of the early 1900s.

The danger is that 50 Moganshan Lu is not successful enough either to complement or to counter Shanghai’s aggressive demolition of old buildings and districts. Although the city government aims to clean the Suzhou River and develop a pedestrian-friendly, green zone along its banks, construction crews continue to work day and night—tearing down factories like 50 Moganshan Lu and destroying the old city that grew up around them during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Neither do creative hubs like Moganshan Lu benefit all artists. Some individual artists have become very successful; their work commands high prices and sells mainly to foreign tourists

and at auctions overseas. But other artists find it hard to pay even the low rents at 50 Moganshan Lu. Since land prices are very high in the center of the city, most artists cannot afford to live there. Some artists have moved their studios to less expensive space on the edge of the city, preferring to use Moganshan Lu as gallery space to sell their work.<sup>22</sup>

### **Some final notes concerning the future of the Cityscape**

New York, Bilbao, and Shanghai have different types of market economies and are governed by different political institutions. Their cultures, though cosmopolitan, have different roots and forms of expression. But business and political leaders in these cities, like so many others around the world, have been persuaded that culture will restore a sense of distinction that will make them desirable and competitive. The measure of culture is difficult to determine. Benefits, if not financial, are impossible to calculate. The question that suffuses their efforts, though, is whether the pursuit of distinction ends in homogenization. Globalization may turn out to be a cruel Darwinian evolution, selecting certain elements of cities (as well as languages and musical traditions) for preservation while blending others into hybrid, fusion, or “global” forms.

This may be a top-down view of globalization. For city dwellers who eke out their existence day by day, such changes in the palette of urban life may expand some while reducing other opportunities for material survival. They may receive financial compensation for jobs and housing lost, and adapt to new surroundings. Is the “authentic” character of cities, then, only a fiction spun for the aesthetic tastes of highly educated, mobile consumers of places? Or is it a set of historical overlays, unexpected encounters, and incompatible materials that create a dense urban patchwork of cultural identities? Rebuilding the centers of cities produces an instantly recognizable corporate zone with cultural amenities for a discerning “global eye” while gradually

ringing the city with densely packed new districts for migrants—both the airport clusters of industrial zones, office parks, and hotels and the apartment towers for those who cannot afford to live in the center. It is too soon to know whether these places will re-create the local patterns that made the centers of cities so diverse and lively, or if their scale and design—and the small numbers of small shops and individual traders—will impose another kind of homogeneity.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> For a contrary view, that contemporary globalization has not increased standardization but has instead diffused originality and uniqueness, see Tyler Cowen, *Creative Destruction: How Globalization is Changing the World's Cultures* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002).

<sup>2</sup> See Anthony D. King, *Spaces of Global Cultures: Architecture, Urbanism, Identity* (London: Routledge, 2004).

<sup>3</sup> David Harvey, "The Right to the City." *New Left Review* 53 (September-October 2008), <http://www.newleftreview.org>; Stephen Graham, ed., *Cities, War, and Terrorism: Towards an Urban Geopolitics* (Malden MA and Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2004); Don Mitchell, *The Right to the City: Social Justice and the Fight for Public Space* (New York: Guilford Press, 2003).

<sup>4</sup> On the emergence of branding in the 1970s as a new strategy for promoting cities, which is based on public-private partnerships and connected to substantive changes in public policy and governance, see Miriam Greenberg, *Branding New York: How a City in Crisis Was Sold to the World* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

<sup>5</sup> Did not separate creativity from consumption: Herbert Muschamp, "Architecture: Remodeling New York for the Bourgeoisie," *New York Times*, September 24, 1995. Competition for arty, trendy, and culture-savvy tourists: Greg Richards and Julie Wilson, eds., *Tourism, Creativity and Development* (Milton Park UK and New York: Routledge, 2008).

<sup>6</sup> Gary, Indiana: personal communication, Gary, November 2006. Doctoroff in "Creative New York," April 2006, <http://www.nycfuture.org>, accessed June 2006; <http://www.cowparade.com>; Eric Wilson, "The Sun Never Sets on the Runway," *New York Times*, September 8, 2008; Monica Khemsurov, "Design on Tour," *T: The New York Times Style Magazine*, September 21, 2008.

<sup>7</sup> Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Random House, 1961); David Harvey, *Spaces of Capital: Towards a Critical Geography* (New York: Routledge, 2001); Kevin Fox Gotham, "The Secondary Circuit of Capital Reconsidered: Globalization and the U.S. Real Estate Sector," *American Journal of Sociology* 112, 1 (2006): 231-75.

<sup>8</sup> Malcolm Tait and Ole B. Jensen, "Travelling Ideas, Power and Place: The Cases of Urban Villages and Business Improvement Districts," *International Planning Studies* 12, 2 (2007): 107-27; Paul J. DiMaggio and Walter Powell, "The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Organizational Fields," *American Sociological Review* 48 (1983): 147-60.

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.christojeanneclaude.net/tg.shtml>; <http://www.nycwaterfalls.org>; <http://www.chanel-mobileart.com>.

<sup>10</sup> Jean Baudrillard, "The Beaubourg-Effect: Implosion and Deterrence," *October* 20 (Spring 1982):8.

<sup>11</sup> "Global urbanism" from King, *Spaces of Global Cultures*.

<sup>12</sup> William R. Taylor, ed., *Inventing Times Square: Commerce and Culture at the Crossroads of the World* (New York: Russell Sage, 1991); Lynne B. Sagalyn, *Times Square Roulette* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2001); Sharon Zukin, *The Cultures of Cities* (Oxford and Cambridge MA: Blackwell, 1995); Marshall Berman, *On the Town: One Hundred Years of Spectacle in Times Square* (New York: Random House, 2006).

<sup>13</sup> On the globalization of the practices of the most widely sought architects, see Donald McNeill, *The Global Architect* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

<sup>14</sup> The museum has sparked a never-ending debate about the costs and benefits of art-and-tourism-led revitalization in Bilbao. See Lorenzo Vicario and P. Manuel Martinez Monje, "Another 'Guggenheim Effect'? Central City Projects and Gentrification in Bilbao," in *Gentrification in a Global Context*, ed. Rowland Atkinson and Gary

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Bridge (London: Routledge, 2005), pp. 151-67; Joseba Zulaika, *Cronica de Una Seduccion: el Museo Guggenheim Bilbao* (Madrid: Nerea, 1997). On North Adams, see Zukin, *Cultures of Cities*.

<sup>15</sup> Herbert Muschamp, "The Miracle in Bilbao," *New York Times*, September 7, 1997; Joseba Zulaika, "Tough Beauty: Bilbao as Ruin, Architecture and Allegory," in Joan Ramon Resina, ed., *Iberian Cities* (New York and London: Routledge, 2001), pp.1-17.

<sup>16</sup> The social and economic benefits of tourist visits are not clear. See Beatriz Plaza, "Evaluating the Influence of a Large Cultural Artifact in the Attraction of Tourism," *Urban Affairs Review* 36 (2000): 264-74 and "The Return on Investment of the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 30 (2006): 452-67; Denny Lee, "Bilbao Ten Years Later," Travel Section, *New York Times*, September 23, 2007. Guggenheim Bilbao takes 80 percent of the regional government's budget for museums: Zulaika, "Tough Beauty," p. 12.

<sup>17</sup> Lily Kong, "Cultural Icons and Urban Development in Asia: Economic Imperative, National Identity, and Global City Status," *Political Geography* 26 (2007): 383-404.

<sup>18</sup> On the use of new art museums to promote economic development, see Graeme Evans, "Hard Branding the Cultural City" From Prado to Prada," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 27 (2003): 417-40; Chris Hamnett and Noam Shoal, "Museums as Flagships of Urban Development," in *Cities and Visitors*, ed. Lily M. Hoffman, Susan S. Fainstein, and Dennis R. Judd (Malden MA and Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), pp. 219-36; George Yudice, *The Expediency of Culture* (Durham NC and London: Duke University Press, 2003). On the franchise effect and economic globalization in Bilbao, see Donald McNeill, "McGuggenization? National Identity and Globalisation in the Basque Country," *Political Geography* 19 (2000): 473-94.

<sup>19</sup> Sharon Zukin, *Loft Living: Culture and Capital in Urban Change*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New Brunswick NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1989); Richard Lloyd, *Neo-Bohemia: Art and Commerce in the Post-Industrial City* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Michael Indergaard, *Silicon Alley: The Rise and Fall of a New Media District* (New York: Routledge, 2004); Andy C. Pratt, "Urban Regeneration: From the Arts 'Feel Good' Factor to the Cultural Economy: A Case Study of Hoxton, England," *Urban Studies*, forthcoming.

<sup>20</sup> Wang Jie, "Shanghai SoHo—50 Moganshan Road," <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/citylife>, August 29, 2006; <http://www.shangtex.biz/en/>.

<sup>21</sup> [www.m50.com](http://www.m50.com).

<sup>22</sup> In Beijing, high rents and real estate development have had a similar effect on Factory 798 (Henri Benaim, *Rendering Modernity: 798, an avant-garde art district in Beijing*, senior thesis, Department of East Asian Studies, Yale College, 2006). On Shanghainese artists and the international art market, see Charlotte Higgins, "Is Chinese Art Kicking Butt...Or Kissing It?" *The Guardian*, November 9, 2004. There are different types of cultural hub in Shanghai. Some, like Bridge 8 in Luwan, offer commercial space for architects' offices and graphic artists' studios, many with transnational affiliations; across the street, Tianzigang offers storefront art galleries, upscale artisans' shops, cafés, and boutiques that are immediately legible to mobile "creative" tourists with upstairs space for artists' studios. Still others, like Yifei Originality Street, in Pudong, offer a Disney-like entertainment zone that combines creative production and various sorts of cultural consumption: "Theme pubs, restaurants, art shops and nightclubs have also been set up along the street, which features landscape lighting on trees and walls, with a central plaza" (Yang Li Fei, "Chen's Creative Cluster Opens," *Shanghai Daily*, October 10, 2007).