

Archaeo-tainment: Fantasy at the Other End of History

Geremie R. Barmé

There's the Metropolitan Museum in New York: the Sackler Wing with the rescued Egyptian Temple of Dendur in a man-made lake illuminated by natural light and surrounded by rooms crammed with artefacts.

And there's the British Museum in Bloomsbury, the centre of London: its amassed wealth of imperial Egyptology crammed into galleries that make you feel as though you are delving into the depths of the buried past.

Now, there is also the Luxor 'theme-park' hotel/casino in Las Vegas, billed as the Eighth Wonder of the World since its opening in late 1993. The only real artefacts there, however, are a few scarabs, a wooden sarcophagus and varied what-nots in the museum shop next to the lower ground-level replica of King Tut's tomb. But having visited all three 'sites' in the space of a few weeks, I'd say that in the must-see stakes of tourism the Luxor wins hands down.

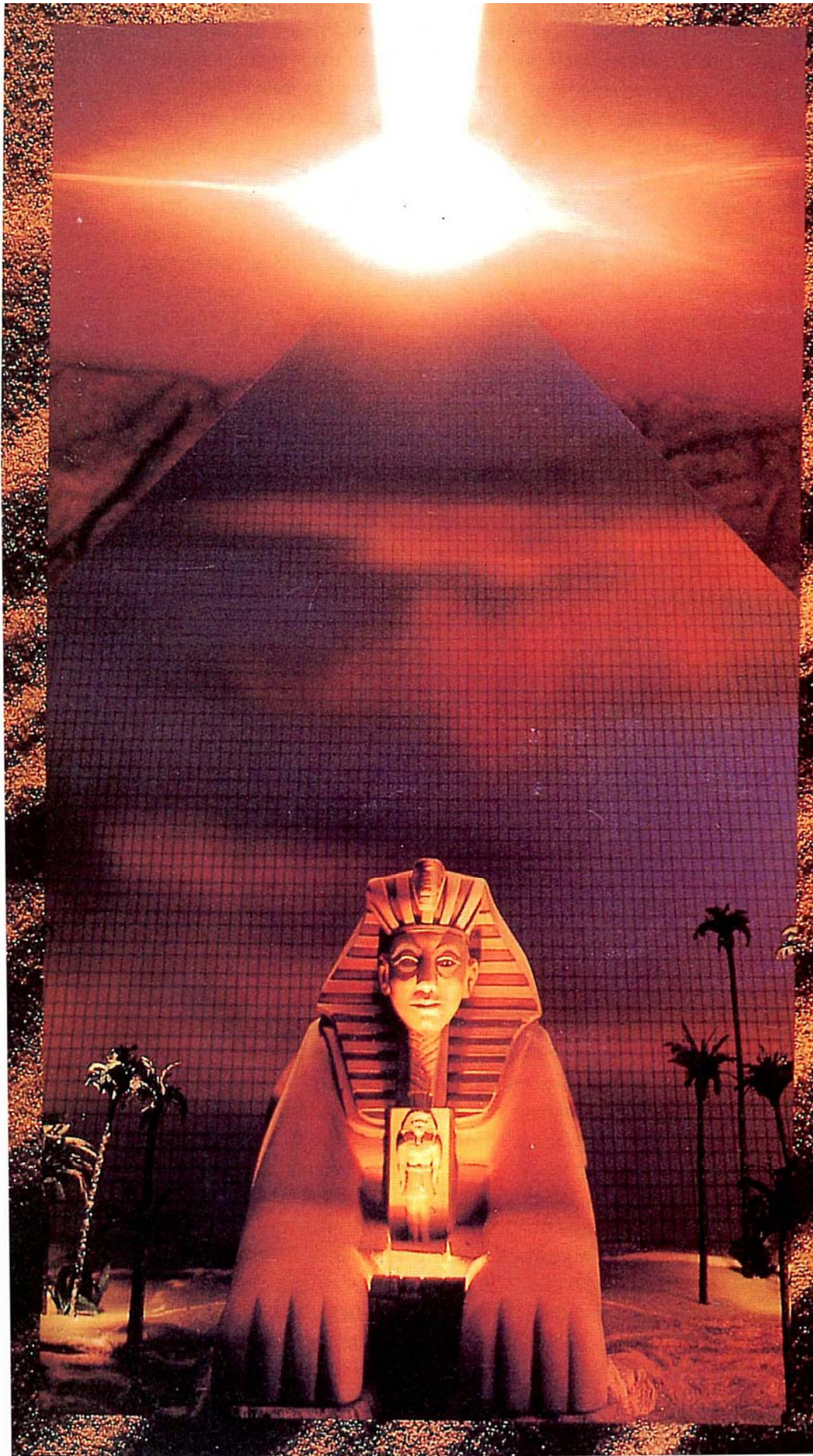
Away with authenticity; abandon the antique. Now you can have virtual reality, virtual experience and, after the fact, you can lose yourself in a reverie of virtual nostalgia. Rather than making the sweaty trek to Giza or having to marvel at the plundered remnants of the past in stuffy museums, you can enjoy 'archaeo-tainment' in a casino/hotel-as-theme-park with all mod-cons and sci-fi fantasy to boot. It's also a post-PC experience: no guilt about breath-damage to the 'glyphics or enjoying the fruits of imperialism.

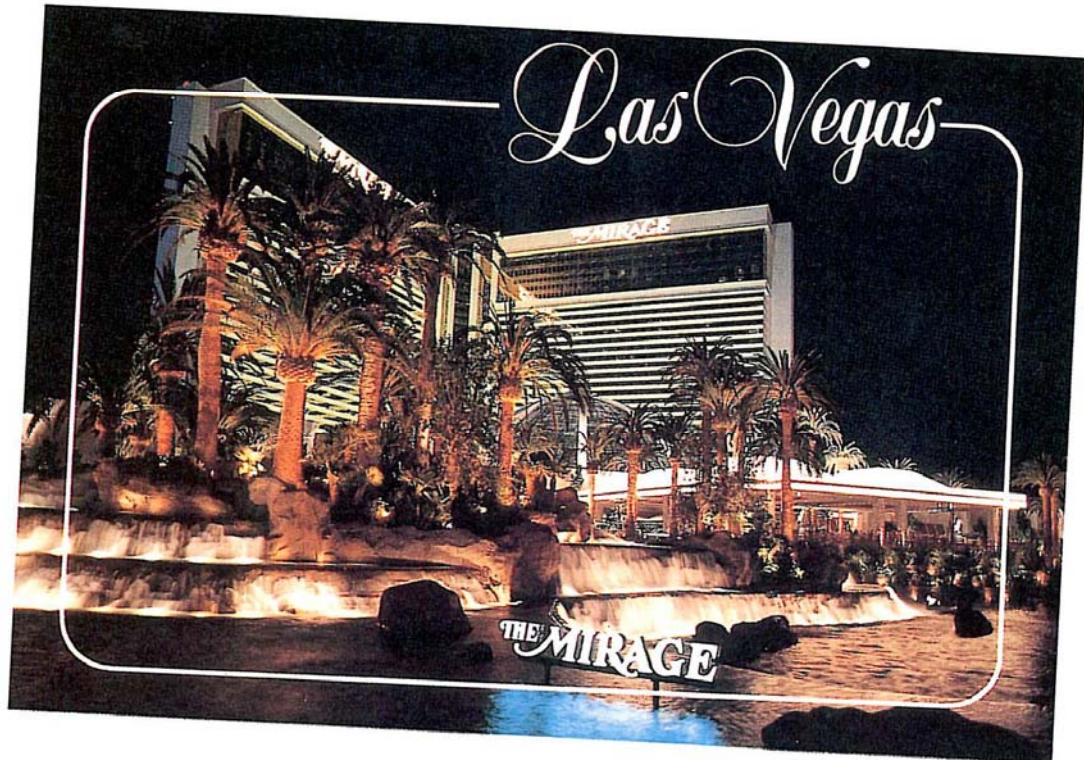
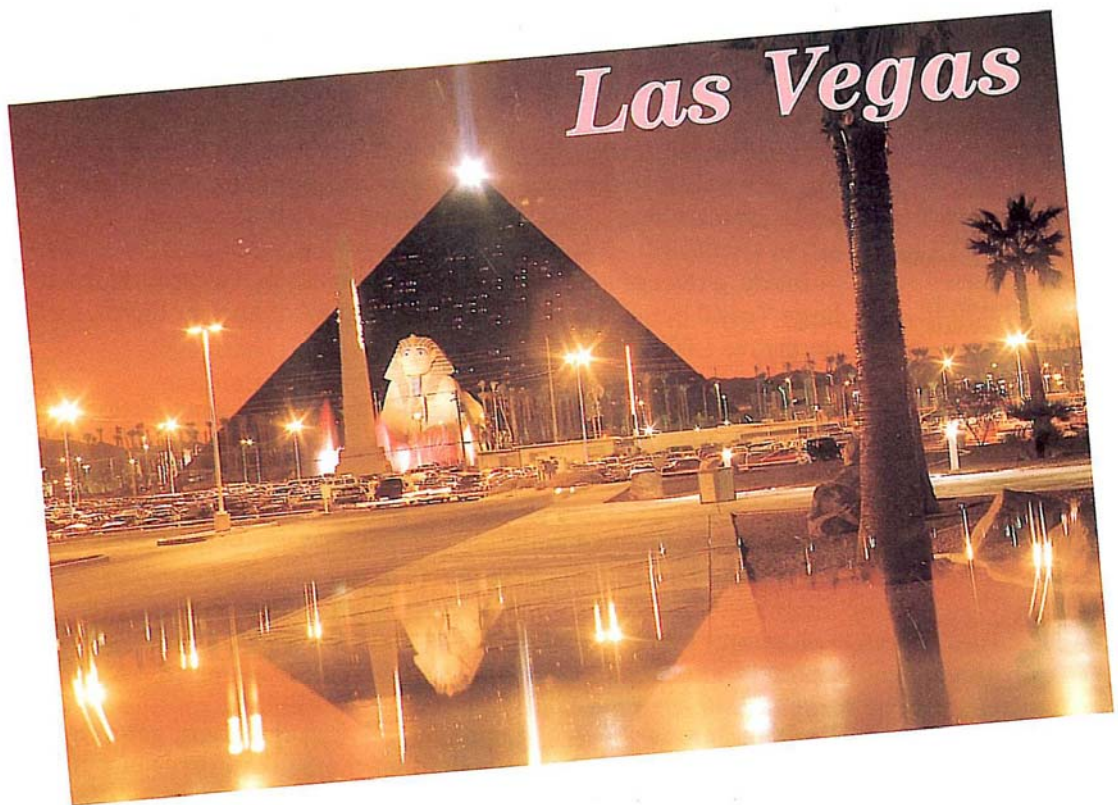
Built by Circus Circus Enterprises, Inc., one of Las Vegas' largest concerns, the Luxor is a recent addition to Vegas' 'Valley of Monuments'. Every statistic related to the complex confirms the po-mo monumentalism of the project:

— a white laser beam, "the brightest in the world", fires ten miles into the evening sky from the pinnacle of the thirty-storey pyramid of the Luxor. It is visible to planes cruising over Los Angeles 250 miles away on the Californian coast.

— it boasts the largest atrium in the world of twenty-nine million square feet. The space could happily accommodate nine Boeing 747s piled on top of each other.

¹ Umberto Eco says that the "craving for opulence... seems to us a trademark of American opulence" but that it is more common on the Pacific Coast of the US. "Baroque rhetoric, eclectic frenzy, and compulsive imitation prevail where wealth has no history." See Umberto Eco, *Travels in Hyper Reality*, trans. William Weaver, Harcourt Brace and Co, 1986, pp 26-27. As you will see below, at the other side of the Pacific, along the Chinese seaboard, baroque rhetoric, eclectic frenzy and compulsive imitation can also surface in a land where new-found wealth is burdened by too much history.





2 For a lament for Vegas past, see Mark Ebner, 'Smoke & Mirrors in Vegas', *Spy*, September/October 1994, pp 50-55. As gaming sites proliferate in the United States, Ebner, who derides the Luxor as a "kiddie-casino" of disastrous proportions, predicts that "like an overhyped Hollywood blockbuster, this new monstrosity of a town will probably go bust quicker than Eurodisney".

3 See the back cover of *Las Vegas: A New Dimension... A New Destiny*, M & M Graphics, Las Vegas, 1993.

4 See *Time*, June 17, 1991, Vol 137 No 24, p 53.

5 'Moving on Vegas', *Forbes*, October 10, 1994, Vol 154 No 8, p 116.

6 For some comments on the Hard Rock chain in China, see G R Barmé, 'Windows in the Orient: stained-glass and rock iconography in Asia', *Object*, Sydney, 1995, forthcoming.

7 Quoted in Ebner, op cit, p 55.

8 'Entertainment: It's Big Business', *Financial Review*, 20 July, 1994.

9 David Collins, 'China may not be so far off', *The Day*, New London, Connecticut, 18 December, 1993. Also Tan Manni, 'Where East Meets West, There is Now China', *China Today*, August, 1994, pp 26-30.

10 For an analytical view of 'Splendid China', see Ann Anagnost, 'The Nationscape: Movement in the Field of Vision', *Positions*, Vol 1 No 3, Winter 1993, pp 585-591.

— a ten-storey high sphinx crouches at the entrance of the matt black edifice. It is illuminated by white lasers and in turn emerald laser beams shoot from its eyes into a bank of fountains that play in a miniature lake lying at its massive paws.

— you drive in under the sphinx's belly for valet parking and, divested of your car, you walk into the pyramid along corridors of simulated stone decorated with imitation carvings of hieroglyphics and Egypto-graphics.

— inside, a river one-third of a mile long snakes its way around the atrium carrying large "royal barges" which tour the "sights" of ancient Egypt, including murals depicting 4,000 years of history.

— a seventy-foot high movie screen plays a 3D science-fiction film that recasts the mythology of the pyramids. People leave the screenings with heads reeling on a simulated high: it's like having toked dope for half an hour.

— the casino is dotted with full-scale replicas of Egyptian statuary, artefacts and adornments.

— a unique system of elevators ferry guests to their rooms up the inclines of the pyramid's corners.

Back on ground level, gamblers can indulge their get-rich-quick fantasies comforted by the New Age belief that the benign forces of pyramid power are beaming down on them.

The connection between ancient Egypt and America's capital of gambling is a fiction. Everything at the casino recalls and reinforces the images of Egypt gathered like sediment in our memories like so many layers in an archaeological dig. It is also a sediment laid down by years of exposure to Hollywood cinema, the autobiographical ingestion of the ancient Egypt enacted by Charlton Heston, Yul Brynner, Elizabeth Taylor and others, the décor of *The Ten Commandments*. The Luxor recreates the Hollywood vision of an imaginary past.¹

The pyramids and their paraphernalia convey all the right messages to both tourist and gambler alike; they bespeak tradition, opulence, empire and the mysteries of the East. As in the case of advertisements that exploit images of the Wild West, the Australian outback, pastoral Europe or exotic Asia, the creators of the Luxor have staked a claim on people's fascination with the Egyptian past and have made it their own. Once you have done the Luxor, ancient Egypt will never be the same. The reinvented replaces the original, the simulacrum vampirizes its source.

Las Vegas is rapidly developing the family entertainment dimension of its casinos. While the parents pay the kids can run off and play.²

Apart from the Luxor, the closing months of 1993 saw two other massive new gambling/entertainment complexes open on 'The Strip', as Las Vegas Boulevard is commonly known. They are the Treasure Island and MGM Grand resorts. As its name suggests, Treasure Island is a money-making theme-casino inspired by

11 In this context, see Barmé, 'Taiwan: China's Other', in *Art Taiwan: The Contemporary Art of Taiwan*, Nicholas Jose and Vong Wan, Sydney/Taipei Museum of Contemporary Art and Taipei Fine Arts Museum, 1995, pp 66-69.

12 See Wang Yi, *Yuanlin yu Zhongguo wenhua* (Gardens and Chinese Culture), Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1990. It should be noted that the massive unexcavated tomb of the First Emperor of the Qin (*Qin Shihuangdi*) on the outskirts of modern Xi'an in Shaanxi Province and guarded by an army of terracotta warriors contains, according to historical records, a version of the universe in miniature.

13 In the early '90s, Shaoshan enjoyed a new tourist boom because of the commercial Mao cult. In August 1994, the Hong Kong *Eastern Express* published a spoof vision of what a 'Maoland' theme-park in Shaoshan would look like. Youthful park attendants could dress as Red Guards and carry *The Little Red Book*, messy visitors could be struggled with and there would be a Cultural Revolution roller-coaster taking you up and down just like a political purge. There could even be a 'Haunted Politburo' featuring the ghosts of leaders airbrushed out of history. See 'Fun in the magic kingdom of Mao', *Eastern Express*, 27-28 August, 1994. See also Barmé, *Shades of Mao: The Posthumous Career of the Great Leader*, M E Sharpe, Armonk, New York, 1995, forthcoming.

Robert Louis Stevenson's novel of the same name. Two full-scale pirate ships sit in a simulated sea by The Strip, pedestrians passing by on a wooden boardwalk with roped handrails. Periodically 'pirates' man the vessels and engage in a battle which invariably results in the dramatic sinking of one of the ships.

Further along The Strip in the direction of the Luxor is the MGM Grand. Built for \$1.1 billion, it is the largest hotel in the world (the Luxor and Treasure Island being the seventh and eleventh largest respectively) employing 8,000 people. With these new additions, Las Vegas now boasts eleven of the thirteen largest hotels in the world.

MGM Grand is a movie theme-casino; its fantasy realm is born of the simulated legendary past generated by the myth-machine of Hollywood. You walk into the mountainous onyx-green complex between the paws of the golden MGM lion and enter the World of Oz, with all of the characters and incidents from the 'classic' movie recreated life-size, a laser-enhanced storm crackling across the domed ceiling above. In the main lobby, dozens of television screens behind the reception area play a pastiche of cinema classics for the clientele while, across the hall, an emporium sells film tie-in products ranging from Betty Boop pencil sharpeners to inflatable cartoon characters.

Even before these new pleasure palaces opened their doors, Las Vegas had achieved mythic status. Fremont Street, also known as 'Glitter Gulch', where the amassed street-side casinos turn night into day with dazzling lighting displays, is an instantly recognizable sight. Among its many cameo appearances in film, it is used at the end of *Honey, I Blew up the Kid* when the outsized ankle-biter, having uprooted the mammoth electric guitar from the local Hard Rock Cafe, goes marauding playfully along the street.

Among many other sights/sites along The Strip — Circus Circus, Stardust, The Mirage, Imperial Palace, Barbary Coast, Tropicana, Excalibur to name but a few — there is Caesar's Palace. Advertising itself by encouraging people to "Relive the Legend"³ it is one of the oldest night-club casinos in the city and as a venerable entertainment venue it is something of a "legend" in its own right. It now features a new wing: The Forum Shops. This is a mall with a past. It is entered from The Strip via a moving walkway that conveys you through structures inspired not by fusty old Rome itself, but by the Hollywood versions of empire as previewed in films like *Quo Vadis* and *Cleopatra*. Greeted by a massive yabbering sculpture of Bacchus surrounded by ancient Roman worthies, you are in the Forum. This is a long series of shopping arcades set around a piazza the central feature of which is a generic cluster of glistening lard-like sculptures and a fountain. The shop fronts are dolled up in the style of Roma alfresco and the vaulted ceilings are painted and lit to create a 24-hour preternatural dusk.

In early 1995, Peter Morton, one of the founders of the Hard Rock Cafe chain, will open a 340-room rock theme hotel/casino. It will declare itself with an 82-foot high electric guitar on the roof.⁴ In the casino, slot machine arms will be molded in the shape of guitar necks and roulette tables will take the form of pianos. The \$25 chips will be purple with Jimi Hendrix etched in profile and inscribed with the title of his hit 'Purple Haze'.⁵ The rock past is history and ripe for rehashing as nostalgia fast food.⁶

At this juncture it is worth recalling a line from Hunter S. Thomson who wrote, in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, that the town is "what the whole hep world would be doing on Saturday night if the Nazis had won the war".⁷

Gambling and the new theme palaces are big business. In 1993, Las Vegas boasted 22 million visitors, and projections estimated that with the new resorts the figure could reach 25 million in 1994.

14 Or a version of the 'American Dream'. But as Erazim Kohák, a Czech philosopher resident in the US, puts it in relation to that other former socialist giant, the Soviet Union: "...the American dream has very little to do with liberty and justice for all and a great deal to do with soap operas and the Sears catalogue". See 'Ashes, Ashes... Central Europe after Forty Years', *Daedalus*, Spring 1992, p 209.

15 This is the name of the Walt Disney Company group working on a new theme-world called Disney's America. See William Styron, 'Slavery is no subject for Disney', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 August 1994, and the critique of the 'Disneyfication' of the US in *Spy*. See Paul Iorio, 'Has Disney taken over America?', *Spy*, September/October, 1994, pp 56-63.

16 See John Minford's 'Preface' to Cao Xueqin and Gao E, *The Story of the Stone*, Vol 4, 'The Debt of Tears', Penguin, London, 1982.

17 Monkey did eventually travel to the West, but that was in the vehicle of a popular Japanese television series made in the 1970s.

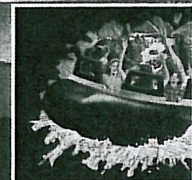
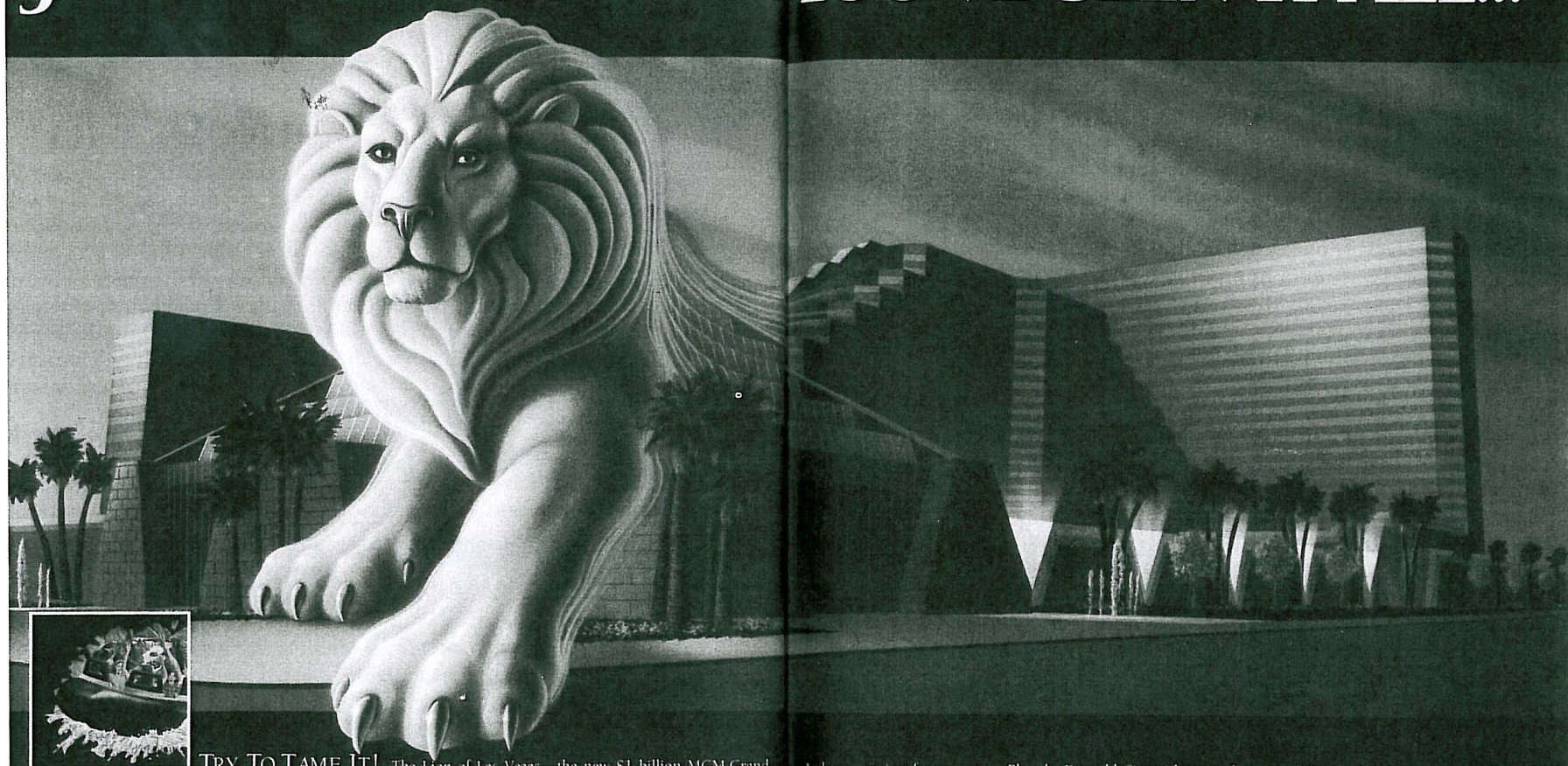
18 See Anne Goodrich, *The Peking Temple of the Eastern Peak*, Monumenta Series, Nagoya, 1964.

19 Peter Quennell, *A Superficial Journey Through Tokyo and Peking*, Oxford University Press, Hong Kong, 1986 reprint, p xiv.

Archaeo- and techno-tainment are also leading elements in the push into realms of invention. "The entertainment industry is now the driving force for new technology, as defense used to be," says Edward T. McCracken, CEO of Silicon Graphics Inc., a company that supplies technology and software to the entertainment industry.⁸

And the past is not the only foreign country being consumed by the industry.

JUST WHEN YOU THINK YOU'VE SEEN IT ALL...



TRY TO TAME IT! The Lion of Las Vegas - the new \$1 billion MGM Grand - is easily the world's ultimate entertainment, sports, and casino mega-complex. Surpassing anything that Las Vegas, or you, have ever seen. Imagine all this: 5,005 spacious rooms and suites. Four distinctly different casinos larger than two football fields. A 15,200-seat MGM Grand Garden event center that can handle anything from a major concert to major league sports...or your next business function. MGM Grand Adventures: A full-blown, full-tilt 33-acre theme park. The largest and most spectacular showroom in Las Vegas which will be home to the city's most incredible show.

A showroom just for superstars. Plus the Emerald City with magical secrets of the Wizard of Oz. And shops, and stores, and restaurants, and lounges, and pools, and health clubs and just about anything else you'd expect to see in a self-contained city. So no matter where you've been before, no matter how many times you've been to Las Vegas, there's never been anything as grand as the MGM Grand. It's the experience of a lifetime. And considering what we've got planned for you, it could take a lifetime to experience. RESERVATIONS: 800-929-1111.

WORLD'S LARGEST HOTEL, CASINO & THEME PARK
MGM GRAND
L A S V E G A S

In late December, 1993, Splendid China, a theme-park mini-version of all that is great in China's legendary 5,000 years of longevity, was opened in Orlando, Florida, one of America's tourist meccas. The 76-acre display of some sixty landmarks, including the Forbidden City, the Temple of Confucius and the Terracotta Warriors, is only two miles from Walt Disney World and is in competition with "the sea lions and seals of Orlando's Sea World, the lizards of Gatorland and the water slides of Wet 'n Wild".⁹ Appropriately enough, the half-mile long western perimeter of Splendid China is protected by a replica of

20 Similar parks are mushrooming all over China. 'Wonders of the World' (*Shigie qiguan*) park outside Wuxi near Shanghai and on the shore of Taihu Lake is the creation of China Central TV and the Macau Yilian Company. It already features a European city — including a traditional 'Eurocityscape', a mini Parthenon, Norwegian church, a cement Stonehenge, a French garden and a bridge bedecked with Greek nudes — as well as Tang and Song dynasty cities built for the filming of historical dramas for television. The project is soon to be expanded to include American, Australian, Asian and African cities. It is often used by film-makers and ad agencies to provide a 'foreign' backdrop for their productions. 'Cosmo Park', something of a SinoDisney, is also under construction in Shanghai. See Shi Ling, "'Dongfang Disini" zai Hu quanmian kaigong' (Full-scale work on the 'Oriental Disneyland' Begins), *Wenhui* (Shanghai), 28 August, 1994. And in February 1995, Khor Eng Hock and Sons, a Malaysian investment group, announced plans for a massive Pandaland Theme Park in Shanghai's Pudong area, China's new financial El Dorado. See Heather Eiszale, 'China's new northern heart', *The Australian*, 25 February, 1995.

the Great Wall constructed from over one million tiny bricks.

The Mashantucket Pequots, a Connecticut Indian tribe famous for the wealth they have generated through casino development, are planning a similar Sinorama in conjunction with the Malaysian financiers of their Foxwoods casino and China Construction International, a Mainland Chinese company. In this new park, actual fragments of the Great Wall may be cemented into the mini replica and there will be a time-travel ride, possibly through the wall itself, that will give visitors a compressed Chinese take-away course in 5,000 years of non-stop civilization.

Splendid China is not simply another foreign construct of the exotic Eastern Other. It is a product of Self-Orientalism, a Chinese 'Retro-Orientalism', a self-assertive and congratulatory view of all that symbolizes China's material past.

The original of Splendid China (*Jinxiu Zhonghua*) is in Shenzhen, the southern economic boom town bordering on Hong Kong. It is a city with capital but not history, a perfect 'utopos' (non-place) in which to construct a false and unified vision of Chinese diversity.¹⁰ Taiwan, the island province that is long on economic boom but short on tradition, has its own version of Splendid China called, appropriately enough when we consider the island's alienation from the Mainland, 'Window on China'.¹¹

Theme-parks, or theme-places, are by no means new to China, and 'tourism' to historical sites by literati-bureaucrats and the collection of artefacts both have a venerable history. According to the mythic Grand Tradition, China was a celestial realm, a terrestrial refraction of a heavenly plan, a world bound mystically by Five Sacred Mountains (the *Wuyue*) through which the essence of the universe coursed freely. For over a millennium, the literati and nobility created exquisite gardens (*yuanlin*) that attempted to capture the design of Heaven in miniature.¹² Under the gaze of the modern shopper/traveller, however, the journey through Nature has become an adventure of acquisition and consumption.

From the 1950s, the recent past also began to provide material for comrade-tourists. The sites of the history of the Communist revolution, like the Stations of the Cross, were marked as 'revolutionary holy places' (*geming shengdi*). Inspired by Soviet precedents, which were influenced in turn by the Orthodox Church, the Jinggang Mountains, where the Red Army came into its own, Yan'an, the Communist capital in the 1940s and 'cradle of the revolution', and Shaoshan, Mao Zedong's birthplace in Hunan Province,¹³ along with every other locus of approved revolutionary activity, became shrines and were flooded by Red Guard tourists during the Cultural Revolution.

Throughout the 1980s, however, as the nation recovered from the horrors wrought by Mao's revolutionary romanticism, there was a moratorium on Communist utopianism; idealism was deferred. People had seen the Party's vision of the future and they resiled from it. Straight-laced interpretations of traditional culture and Party ideology mitigate against fantasy and futuristic techno-visions. In the '90s, the future can only be envisioned in terms of bourgeois consumption¹⁴ or nationalist aggrandizement.

For the moment, in Mainland China 'imagineering'¹⁵ the future is, like other luxury goods and ideas, a foreign import. Fantasies about the past, however, abound. For example, the Prospect theme-mansion (*Daguan*) which opened in Beijing in 1987, is a tacky late-socialist no-tech vision of the life of a grand family as depicted in China's most famous novel, Cao Xueqin's 18th century *Story of the Stone* (*Hongloumeng*). The palace, regarded by some as being the model for

Cao's creation, however, remains in a dishevelled state having been occupied many years ago by the Chinese Academy of Music.¹⁶

Then there are the Monkey (*Sun Wukong*) theme-spots. Monkey is the rakish and anarchic hero of another famous classical novel, *Journey to the West* (*Xiyouji*). He is also one of the few figures who straddles both elite and folk cultures and can be readily utilized as an archaeo-tainment motif. Parks devoted to a commercial Monkey cult can be found throughout China.¹⁷

There is one more traditional 'theme-park' in Beijing, however, although it is kept away from the tourist's gaze. In its pre-1949 heyday, the Temple of the Eastern Peak (*Dongyuemiao*), outside Chaoyang Gate, used gruesome tableaux to depict the tortures that await the sinner's soul in various Daoist hells.¹⁸ Similar in concept to the carnivalesque Tiger Balm Gardens of Hong Kong and Singapore, the temple became a training school run by the Public Security Bureau.

Necrophilic theme-temples are eminently suited to China's cult of the dead and ancestor worship. It is, after all, a realm tellingly described in the early 1930s by the social historian Peter Quennell as being like "an over-crowded tenement... co-existing with, or being raised on the foundations of, a huge necropolis".¹⁹

Tombs are, indeed, the most enduring theme-spots in China. There are the Ming and Qing imperial tombs to the north and east of Beijing; Mao's corpse on display in Tiananmen Square (itself a massive theme-site, a hallowed revolutionary graveyard dominated by the tombstone-shaped Monument to the People's Heroes and crowded by the ghosts of 20th Century Chinese history); Sun Yat-sen's Tomb in Nanjing; and a plethora of grave mounds and tumuli commemorating national heroes, mythical figures and revolutionary leaders dot the land. A century and more of cultural collapse, political turmoil and economic uncertainty have, for many, made the future unimaginable; since the dead occupy so much of the mental and physical landscape of the living, it is not surprising that when people want to fulfil a need for fantasy they often cast an eye on the past. And it is in the dead weight of past achievement that diversion is found. There is little imaginative interpretation of the past; there is a love of the deceased. Indeed, in the Chinese case perhaps 'necro-tainment' is more descriptive of the underpinnings of tourist fantasy than 'archaeo-tainment' as discussed in the above.

It is little wonder then that, among other things, the authorities have created a park on a real necropolis. There is now an 'earthquake theme-park', on the site of the devastating 1976 Tangshen earthquake in north-east China which claimed hundreds of thousands of victims. For a modest sum, you can relive the horror in an entertainment centre situated amidst the real-time rubble of that benighted city.

Even the most popular theme-restaurants of recent years — Temples of the Five Entrails as Lung-kee Sun calls them — have been retro in mood. They feature, in particular, the fashions and foodstuffs of the Cultural Revolution, the fodder on which rusticated youths, now often mobile-phone-toting yuppies, were fed. While they network to build a consumer's paradise, Mao's children sup on the overpriced nostalgia victuals of their impoverished past.

Mainland China may have difficulty imagining a future that is any different from other newly industrializing countries, but there are attempts to embrace more than just the past.

21 The trade in theme-parks is by no means only one-way. A consortium in Harbin, the north-eastern city that hosts an annual ice carving festival, now exports what it calls 'The Frozen City' show. It is a "spectacular lifesize city of ice" that is displayed in a massive football field-size refrigerator. The city includes a Great Wall slipperydip, Buddhas, a nine dragon wall and, in the case of the exhibition displayed at Sydney's Darling Harbour in early 1995, mammoth ice-sculpted kangaroos. Originally advertized as "The Coolest Show on Earth", during the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras season of February-March 1995, promoters put ads in local gay weeklies like the *Sydney Star Observer* touting the Frozen City as "The Campest Show on Earth". See *Sydney Star Observer*, 23 February, 1995.

22 'Theme-Park' software which simulates the experience of running your own theme-park became available in 1994. You can create and manage your own park, fight off corporate raiders and then, if techno-sadism is not your thing, rearrange the park to make it into a theme hell: put the fast food outlets next to rides and watch visitors chuck up their bikkies, neglect security and turn the place into a gangland, and so on. See Zach Meston, 'Variations on a Theme Park', *Wired*, November, 1994, p 139.

23 Koichi Iwabuchi, 'Complicit Exoticism: Japan and its Other', *Continuum*, Vol 8 No 2, 1994, p 68. A similar strategy, but this time in relation to the "colourful" although often restive "national minorities" of China can be found in theme parks like the 'China Folk Culture Village' (*Zhongguo minsu wenhuacun*) in Shenzhen, near Hong Kong, which was blessed by a visit from Deng Xiaoping in early 1992.

24 Joseph Conrad's novel *Under Western Eyes* was published in 1911. This quotation comes from Joseph Skvorecky's essay 'A Revolution is Usually the Worst Solution'. See Skvorecky, *Talkin' Moscow Blues: Essays About Literature, Politics, Movies and Jazz*, The Ecco Press, New York, 1990, p 244.

'The World Playground' (*Shijie yule chang*) theme-park is situated on the outskirts of Beijing. It boasts an international — or let's be chi-chi and call it globalized — dimension. To an extent, it recalls the glories of the Yuanmingyuan, an imperial pleasure built outside the capital by the early Manchu-Qing emperors. Sacked by Western imperial forces last century, the Yuanmingyuan was a marvel of 'Europoiserie': fey buildings, fountains and collections of western bibelots created by Jesuit designers for the diversion of the Chinese court.

At 'The World Playground' all the man-made marvels of the world are featured in convenient miniature. Within its purview the elements of both empire and modern achievement, Chinese and foreign, find their place. There's China's Tiananmen, of course, as well as the pyramids (down-scaled from the originals in Egypt, not the Luxor in the Nevada desert), the onion domes of Red Square, the Taj Mahal, l'Arc de Triomphe and there is even a detailed rendering of Sydney Harbour Bridge and the Opera House which are situated just across the way from a nodule of shrunken Easter Island heads. Visitors can readily be seen striking poses for happy snaps next to pollution-stained white sculptures, mostly the voluptuous forms of Roman ladies, which are liberally scattered around the park.²⁰

Given that foreign lands are still inaccessible to the vast majority of Chinese, this round-the-world-in-80-minutes view of the Alien Other is a convenient substitute.²¹ It and similar parks will remain novel until dollar-rich Chinese, like the Japanese, Taiwanese and Koreans before them, turn the real world into their playground, although many may also be satisfied by computer-generated theme-park simulations.²²

The park is also, perhaps, an example of what Koichi Iwabuchi, a scholar of Japanese globalization, has called "internationalism through nationalism and nationalism through internationalism... both ...strengthening one another; internationalism masks and tries to absorb all domestic diversity and nationalism makes internationalism less threatening and more pleasurable".²³

Yet it is not just a lack of imagination that has led to the impoverished fantasy worlds of China today. Of course, economic backwardness is a crucial factor as is the sad political history of that nation. Yet there is also a crippling *Weltschmerz* that, despite the dramatic changes of recent years, pervades the cultural and emotional landscape of the Mainland.

"Hope grotesquely betrayed, ideals caricatured", as Joseph Conrad describes the upshot of revolution in his novel *Under Western Eyes*,²⁴ describes perfectly the heartbreak that people have experienced in China time and again since the beginning of this century. The symbols of the past — tacky, tawdry and tedious though they may be — provide some sense of stability and coherence in an age of dislocation and uncertainty. It is, for the moment, a past that is beyond the realm of political contention; it is dead and safe. Mainstream culture on both sides of the Taiwan Straits wants its great tradition snap-frozen. It can then package and sell it for export as part of the China heritage industry. Until something really new — or really old — happens, it's probably the way things are going to stay, too.

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