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ARRIVAL CITIES



—> MIGRATING
ARTISTS AND
NEW METROPOLITAN
TOPOGRAPHIES IN
THE 20TH CENTURY

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Arrival Cities

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Migrating Artists and
New Metropolitan Topographies
in the 20th Century

Edited by
Burcu Dogramaci, Mareike Hetschold,
Laura Karp Lugo, Rachel Lee
and Helene Roth

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Tales of a City

Urban Encounters in the Travel Book *Shanghai* by Ellen Thorbecke and Friedrich Schiff

Mareike Hetschold

***Shanghai* – “Images shifting inside a kaleidoscope”**

The travel and photo book *Shanghai* by Ellen Thorbecke and Friedrich Schiff portrays the urban topography of a modern metropolis. The book was preceded by a number of similar collaborative projects: in 1934, Thorbecke and Schiff published *Peking Studies* with Kelly & Walsh Shanghai, and *Hong Kong* in 1938 with the same publishing house. *Shanghai*, however, was published in 1941 by the *North China Daily News*, one of the largest English-language British newspapers. It was to be Thorbecke and Schiff’s last joint book project on Chinese metropolises. Like the two previous books, *Shanghai* is divided into chapters which spread over 83 pages, each devoted to a selection of different locations and themes as well as to the inhabitants of Shanghai. It is aimed at an English-speaking readership and designed as a kind of alternative travel guide. Although similar topics can also be found in conventional English-speaking travel guides of the time, the way in which form and content are dealt with here is more suggestive of artistic or narrative methods.¹ The photos and text are by Thorbecke, the drawings by Schiff – together, they are embedded in a complex layout and carefully coordinated with each other. Black-and-white close-ups, panoramas, intimate portraits and lively street scenes are interspersed with colourful and humorous drawings, infographics, maps and various typesets. The graphic design is varied and appears playful.

Additionally, extreme perspectives and details as well as overlaps and a loose, versatile arrangement of text blocks contribute to a vivid reading experience (figs. 1-2). The book depicts the Shanghai of the 1930s; since then the city has undergone massive transformations that raise the question of how its urban history can be explored from a contemporary perspective. As Cary Y. Liu states in her essay, “Encountering the Dilemma of Change in the Architectural and Urban History of Shanghai”,

[...] it is never possible to know completely the innumerable relationships and interactions that make up a city's architectural fabric or its continuous history, nor can anyone discern the countless ways a city is experienced and the perspectives from which it is seen. [...] How one selects the elements of that picture is informed by one's point of view, as well as influenced by one's own cultural or social context, by the sources available, and by prior narratives. Every new study adds to the multiplicity of possible narratives and pictures, resembling the shifting image inside a kaleidoscope. (Liu 2014, 119)

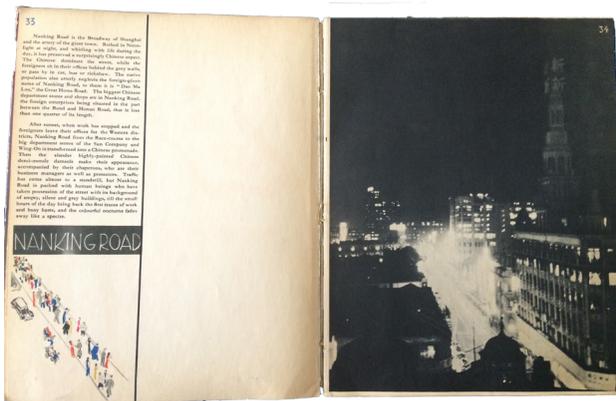


Fig. 1: Ellen Thorbecke and Friedrich Schiff, "Nanking Road." (*Shanghai* 1941, 33f.).

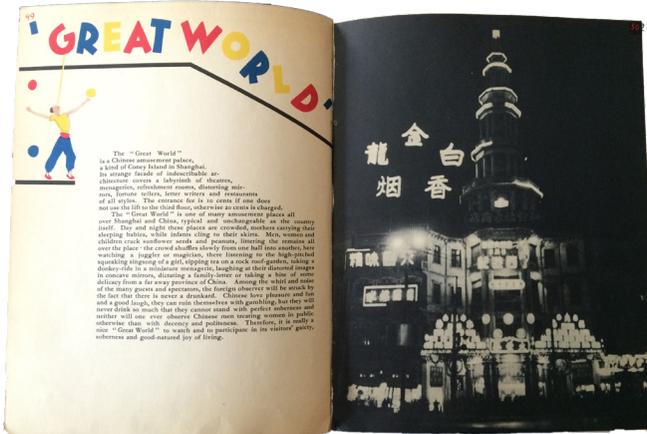


Fig. 2: Ellen Thorbecke and Friedrich Schiff, "Great World." (*Shanghai* 1941, 49f.).

If you set in motion the small glass mosaics within a kaleidoscope an almost endless sequence of different images emerges. Considering the almost infinite possibilities for modifying their configuration, an incalculable pool of image sequences is generated.² The pages of *Shanghai* and their design, as well as the text, can also be understood and parsed as such sequences of images. Thorbecke and Schiff's series of images, I argue, maps an urban space that is characterised by practices of inclusion and exclusion which play out on different levels (e.g. by the selection of motifs or the choice of language). This provokes questions about different modes of perspectivation. By choosing artists whose biographies are related to exile, flight or migration while discussing the urban cultural production in Shanghai a productive and sharpening perspective on the abovementioned questions is offered. Furthermore, it will be successively shown that Shanghai's complex and specific geopolitical structure, which is heavily shaped by conflict, borders and flight, is deeply entangled with the urban set up as well as with what emerged from it artistically at that time.

This article examines two chapters from the book, each of which extends over a double page.³ The chapters "The Hotels" and "Fictitious Characters" are both dedicated to the exploration of specific urban topographies: the Bund, the grand hotel and its architecture, the streets, sidewalks and promenades. My analysis will focus on creative engagement with sensory and physical experiences of the urban space. Here, Shanghai comes to embody a form of "metropolitan art [that] perceives urbanity not solely as a space that creates motifs, but [as] a complex web linking creativity and environment, art theory and metropolis [...]" (Dogramaci 2010, 9).⁴ By selecting three comparative examples from related artistic disciplines, such as photography, poetry and literature, I intend to embed Thorbecke and Schiff's *Shanghai* within the context of a specifically urban cultural project.

But how can the experience of the city be conveyed in book form? What artistic means and procedures are used to articulate the encounters between people and city? To what extent does the relationship the authors have to the metropolis register in the book? The first of the two Shanghai chapters to be discussed here is concerned with the grand hotel and its architectural structure, the 'skyscraper'. In the second half of the 20th century, skyscrapers became a popular feature of modern metropolises. However, they can also be linked to Japanese and Euro-American imperialism in China.⁵

In the following, I will first address the geopolitical context of Shanghai as a place of production and activity in relation to both Thorbecke and Schiff. Further, I will discuss the different visual conventions and strategies which are at play in the book, to then connect them to the larger context of how urban spaces are represented in different media.

Shanghai “at this very moment of highest tension”

Shanghai is rooted in the complex geopolitical and cultural structures of a semi-colonial metropolis.⁶ After the First Opium War, the signing of the Treaty of Nanking in 1843 and the “most favoured nation” clause contained therein, Shanghai’s territory as one of China’s five port cities was split into British and American concessions (later known as the International Settlement) as well as French and informal Japanese concessions – each with its own jurisdiction. As a result, Shanghai transformed into a capitalist world trading centre.⁷ In 1934, Shanghai was the sixth largest city in the world and had ca. 3,350,570 inhabitants, of whom about 2 per cent were foreigners, representing around 48 different nations (Shih 2001, 236). The largest group of foreigners were the Japanese, followed by the British, Russians, Indians, Portuguese, Germans and French. On several occasions throughout the first half of the 20th century Shanghai would become an important place of refuge. Of the Chinese population, about 80 per cent were immigrants and fugitives from Chinese territory. The third largest foreign group, the Russians, fled to Shanghai in the wake of the Russian Revolution. In 1938, about 20,000 people from continental Europe reached the city on the Huangpu River, fleeing Nazi persecution. The city’s largely immigrant population, from a variety of different places, brought with it a variety of cultural practices, formed itself into neighbourhoods and shaped their respective urban environments (Liu 2014, 236; Bergère 2009, 103). But this image “of a flexible Shanghai with significant Chinese representation should not mask our perception of inequalities in a city marked along various lines of nationality, race, gender, and class [...]” (Shih 2001, 237). The continued existence of large parts of the population was dependent on nationality, ethnicity, gender or class, and influenced by numerous uncertainties and economic emergencies. Since the so-called first Shanghai Incident in 1932 in the lead-up to the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945), parts of the city had already seen use as theatres of war.⁸

Ellen Thorbecke and Friedrich Schiff travelled to Shanghai at the beginning of the 1930s for personal and professional reasons. Due to their Jewish origins, however, both were unable to return to their home countries after the Nazi takeover of power in Germany in 1933 and the annexation of Austria in 1938, and became exiles in Shanghai. In the burgeoning photo and travel journalism scene of the city, however, Thorbecke and Schiff saw an opportunity to pursue their careers as photographers and illustrators.⁹ Via personal contacts and because they belonged to the wealthy middle classes, they succeeded in establishing effective professional and private networks in Shanghai. Their biographies and careers show the actual individuality behind the often collectively attributed notion of the exiled artist.

As mentioned above, Shanghai's population was largely made up of communities who had moved there after fleeing war and persecution of various kinds and had therefore to deal with divergent experiences of flight, arrival and survival in Shanghai. Nevertheless, I argue, it can be observed that the specific Shanghainese geopolitical situation is a common theme in much of the urban artistic production of that time.

Not much is known of Thorbecke's life. Her photographic archive as well as some – unfortunately incomplete – notes concerning her biography are housed in the Nederlands Fotomuseum in Rotterdam. Despite the gaps in them, some of these biographical notes will serve as references in the following.¹⁰ According to them, Thorbecke was born in Berlin in 1902 and studied national economics at the University of Berlin. From 1928 on, she worked as a freelance journalist and wrote for the *Berliner Tageblatt* and *Neue Freie Presse*, among others. In 1931, she was involved in the economic restructuring of the flourishing studio of the photographer Yva. At this point in time, Yva's photo studio was expanding.¹¹ This expansion was carried out by the Gesellschaft für Organisation, a non-profit-making association and network for organisation and management.¹² Through her work in Yva's studio, Thorbecke most probably came into closer contact with experimental, artistic and commercial photography: in 1931, she presumably started taking her own photographs with a Rollei camera. In the same year, she travelled to China for the first time, where her second husband, Willem J. R. Thorbecke, had taken up a post as Dutch ambassador. She made further trips to Beijing and Hong Kong and stayed in Shanghai for some time. It is here that she most likely met Schiff. In Shanghai, according to the biographical notes, she also worked for the daily newspaper *Deutsch-Chinesische Presse* and supplied photographs and texts from her time in China to journals and papers in Berlin. Since Thorbecke was very well-travelled, it is not yet possible to determine exactly when she stayed where. In 1935 and 1936, for example, she journeyed to Paris and the Netherlands before returning to Shanghai. In 1941, the year *Shanghai* was published, she left the city and travelled to South Africa, Palestine and Lebanon. In 1946, she and her husband relocated to the USA and in 1960 moved to and fro between the Netherlands and the USA. She died in The Hague in 1973.

Friedrich Schiff was born in Vienna in 1908. There, he initially attended the Graphische Lehr- und Versuchsanstalt for two years and then studied at the Akademie der bildenden Künste from 1924. Schiff worked as a graphic artist for various newspapers (Kaminski 2001, 7). In 1930, he travelled to Shanghai to visit his cousin Francis Gmehling, who ran an art and antiques shop there and was able to introduce him to the city's international community. Schiff established himself as an artist and press illustrator and opened a painting school (*ibid.*, 10–17, 29). In

1947 he emigrated to Buenos Aires, where his sister lived. In 1954, Schiff relocated to Vienna with his family, where he worked as a graphic designer for the Vienna advertising department of Unilever and where he died in 1968 (ibid., 87).

For Thorbecke and Schiff, the English language and the switch to a new environment obviously did not impose any professional restrictions. They worked in professions that allowed them to draw, photograph and write anywhere. They recorded their observations and experiences in Shanghai in different ways and through different media: Schiff drew and painted, and Thorbecke photographed and wrote. There are events, however, that both recorded in similar ways, such as their experiences on the day of the Japanese bombing of the city in 1932. Schiff wrote in his journal:

[...], 6:00 AM

I wake up and slowly realize that the detonations I hear are gunshots. [...]

1:15 Noon. From my balcony the airplane attack can be observed clearly. [...] The show ends at 2 o'clock sharp. [...] 5:00 PM. I go to the roof of the Cathay Hotel. The city lies in the twilight like a giant – stretching infinitely. It burns in six different places.

[...] 5:30 PM. Tea in the hotel lounge. Salon orchestra, lipstick-decorated ladies, cocktails and extra editions. [...]

January 31st, 9:30 in the morning [...]. Since noon yesterday there have been lots of refugees: women, children on their backs, suitcases and crates, bedding and all sorts of bits and pieces on rickshaw carts. Tchapei is being evacuated. Yesterday evening there had been no sign of all the hustle and bustle in the cabarets and Bars de Settlements.

Just a regular Saturday evening. [...]

February 23rd ... Visit to a refugee camp in the morning. Scenes of the most horrible misery, against which one is almost blunted by the all too often granted sight. Almost! It is impossible to describe it [...].¹³ (cf. Kaminski 2001, 13–15)

Thorbecke's historical introduction to *Shanghai* contains a similar description of the events of 1932:

[...] The situation seemed tense and unpleasant for Shanghai's foreign population and the hundred thousand Chinese refugees who had sought refuge under the foreign flags, but five years

later the Concessions faced a much more exciting situation when the Japanese landed strong naval units to eject Chinese military forces from the Chapei district. The fighting did not touch the foreign settlement, but from the balconies of its fashionable skyscraper people could watch the blood red sky illuminated by the raging fire and listen to the uncanny concert of the roar of shells and gunfire [...].¹⁴ (Schiff/Thorbecke 1943, 14)

Both Schiff's contrastive, almost surrealistic portrayal and Thorbecke's description of the events reveal the different lived realities of Shanghai's heterogeneous population. For some, the bombings were a spectacle just far enough away, for others they were a cruel and threatening reality. Referring to the bombing, Thorbecke closes the introduction to her book with the following words: "To depict this city of contrast and unlimited possibilities at this very moment of high tension has been too tempting to be resisted." (Thorbecke 1943, 16) The aim of the book, however, was not to document the situation critically, but to conjure up a dazzling Shanghai whose 'fate' was uncertain and at risk, but which could nevertheless be enjoyed and consumed. This is apparent from the way the book was marketed. Offered for a generous \$16, it was advertised in the *North China Daily News* as follows:¹⁵

[...] delightfully-illustrated book that embraces Shanghai proper in almost every form. It commences with a concise history of Shanghai and proceeds through 83 pages of illustrations, amusingly clever sketches in a riot of colour, by Schiff and photographs [*sic!*] sepia and text dealing with trade, imports, exports, population, hotels, newspapers, exchange, shops, traffic, temples, Chinese food, places of interest, beggars, funerals, public health, etc. ending with the Cycle of the Twelve Terrestrial Branches and Chinese Zodiac. (*North China Daily News* 1943)

Shanghai was lauded as a book that "will afford not only the interest to the tourist, but will prove a veritable mine of information." (*North China Daily News* 1943). A different advertisement in the same newspaper commends it as a "Delightfully Informal Description of Shanghai Life" (ibid.) and yet another one even claims:

Nothing like Shanghai has ever been produced in Shanghai before. The Modern Chinese girl, tea at French Club, Yates Road, Moscow Boulevard, Blood Alley, Shroffs [*sic!*] and Exchange Shops, Sikhs and Traffic Signals. They all pass by in

a kaleidoscope of colour and movement which will never grow old. Shanghai is a book which you will buy to give – and then change your mind and keep it. (*North China Daily News*, 1943)

This seemingly curious list of individual chapters and urban phenomena, such as “The Modern Chinese Girl”, “Blood Alley” (a red light district) and “Sikhs and Traffic Signals,” points to an “urban fabric” that is interspersed with imaginaries of the adventurous.¹⁶ This of course raises questions about the nature of such “urban fabrics”. Liu expands the concept of ‘urban fabric’ and understands it as “a broader phenomenon” (ibid.). This then encompasses “a set of material and immaterial connections, uniting aesthetic concepts, social relationships, traditions and beliefs, and standards of taste, exoticism, and decorum” (Liu 2014, 119). Following this understanding of the term, Thorbecke and Schiff’s book can be read not only as a kind of cartography but as part of Shanghai’s urban fabric itself. As a consequence, we need to ask to which “material and immaterial connections, uniting aesthetic concepts, social relationships, traditions and beliefs, and standards of taste, exoticism, and decorum” (ibid.) the design of *Shanghai*’s pages refer.

Skyscrapers and Urban Encounters

On the double page 25 and 26, *Shanghai*’s chapter entitled “The Hotels” is dedicated to the theme of grand hotels (fig. 3). On the right-hand page 25 are text and drawings by Schiff, while the left-hand page 26 features a reproduction of one of Thorbecke’s photographs. The text itself is divided into two centred paragraphs which extend over two thirds of the page. The headline “The Hotels” was designed by Schiff in all capital letters and sits left justified above the text. Each of the headline’s horizontal lines is drawn in a bold red colour, whereas all vertical and curved lines are set in a medium blue. The text block is framed by two small multi-figure drawings which are placed at the top right and at the bottom left of the page.

Both illustrations depict lively street scenes. Their vibrant red, medium blue, rich green, yellow and light grey tones lend them a cheerful appearance. Painted in watercolour, the figures and objects are accentuated by sparingly applied black contours. Four black lines of different lengths place the street scenes within the visual space of the page. A perpendicular and slightly thicker black line extends vertically across the entire double page from the outermost edge of the left page; another cuts the lower left-hand corner to create a pentagonal frame which is filled by Thorbecke’s high-format photograph. The image axis is slightly offset and extends diagonally from the bottom left to the top right of the page. The

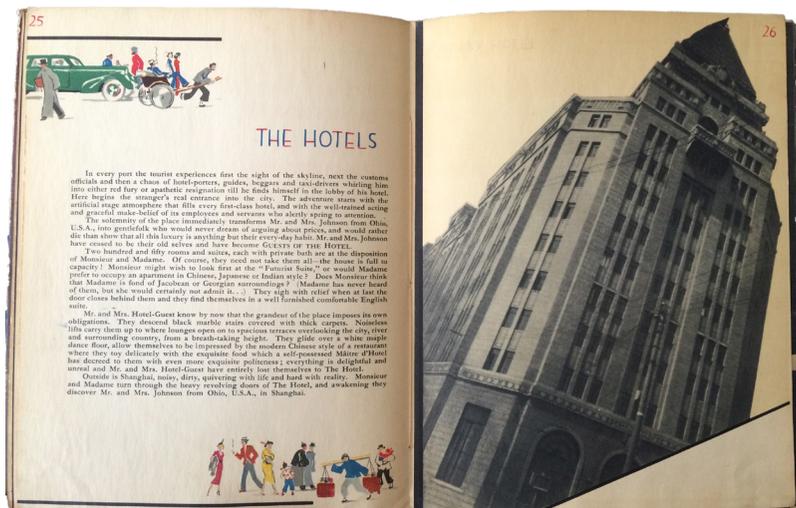


Fig. 3: Ellen Thorbecke and Friedrich Schiff, "The Hotels." (*Shanghai* 1941, 24f.).

photograph shows a skyscraper that is perilously placed in parallel to the image axis and consequently appears to be about to topple down. Cut off at the bottom and photographed from below, the building seems to lift the page's visual space off its hinges. The Nederlands Fotomuseum holds a print of the photograph in original size: here, we can see that the original photo format is square and that the image in the book was both cropped and rotated. In addition, the print in the archive reveals the hotel's urban surroundings, such as a neighbouring building currently under construction. Further details such as a flagpole and power cables running through the photograph can no longer be found in the book, suggesting that the building was cut out along its contours and then mounted on its side.

The building complex shown on these pages is easily identifiable as Sassoon House, which housed the Cathay Hotel. The building's owner, Victor Sassoon,¹⁷ not only commissioned the architects Palmer & Turner but also the designer G.L. Wilson (Pan 2008, 220). To this day, the emblematic reinforced concrete construction, one of Shanghai's first skyscrapers, remains located directly flanking the Bund – a wide boulevard running along the western bank of the Huang Po river which, as the "entrance to the harbour", embodied "the seat of British colonial power" (Lee 1999, 8). Sassoon House was completed in 1929 and accommodated various facilities (including a theatre/cinema, shops, restaurants and a penthouse that was inhabited by the owner) as well as the Cathay Hotel. Where it faced the Bund, the hotel stretched from the fourth to the ninth floors. Furnished with a

tiered pyramidal roof, the Cathay was a landmark that was visible from afar and shaped the skyline of the Bund (fig. 4). The significantly enlarged photograph which was shot from a low angle has the building loom even larger, almost vertiginously so. Presumably photographed from the opposite side of the street, the choice of location contributes to a dynamisation and dramatisation of the architecture. In addition, this use of perspective is an effective strategy for capturing as many of the building's soaring storeys as possible. Perhaps this also required the photographer herself to act dynamically. By kneeling, for example, the point of view could be optimised to achieve an even steeper perspective. The type of camera may also have played an important role: Thorbecke photographed with a medium format camera, a Rolleiflex, which was placed centrally in front of the upper body and whose viewfinder was located on the upper side of the camera.



Fig. 4: Ellen Thorbecke and Friedrich Schiff, "The Bund." (*Shanghai* 1941, 17f.).

This way of photographing tall buildings was a common practice in modern urban photography and was used widely throughout Shanghai – as were radical perspectives and croppings. Photographs of high-rise buildings can be found in photographic press products, for example in Shanghai pictorials such as the popular *Liangyou huabao* (良友畫報). The city had a lively and rich publishing sector, located around Fochow Road, which was also home to 80 per cent of Shanghai's bookshops (ibid., 120). Innumerable magazines, periodicals were the

driving forces behind the urban culture of the metropolis. There were about 30 publishing houses in Shanghai, which alone published over 100 literary journals (Shih 2001, 240; Lee 1999, 129). Among these countless magazines, journals was *Liangyou huabao* published by *Liangyou tushu yinshua gongsi* (良友圖書印刷公司), which was founded by Wu Liande in 1925. It was one of the most successful pictorials of the time. Wu had previously worked for Commercial Press and had thus established excellent contacts. With *Liangyou*, Wu set up one of the first magazines in Shanghai to specialise in photography:

Liangyou (The Young Companion) is truly unique in the history of Chinese modernity for several reasons. First, it was the longest-running Chinese-English bilingual monthly pictorial that offered a visual testimony, however indirectly, to the sea change in China from the Republican decade (politically centered in Nanjing 1927–37) through the Eight Year War of Resistance against Japan (administrative headquarters in Chongqing 1938–45). Second it was the most cosmopolitan and comprehensive periodical in the first half of the twentieth century that managed, in a significantly non-partisan way to capture almost every aspect of the kaleidoscopic life of Shanghai, a rising global metropolis at the time. Third, with its eclectic taste for visual pleasures, the lavishly designed magazine constitutes the best emporium for a retrospective investigation of a vibrant – indeed “flowering” – urban culture [...]. (Pickowic et al. 2013, n.p.)

The bilingual *Liangyou* (Chinese/English) had a large reach. Newspapers and magazines were often sold in street kiosks, where they could catch the eyes of passers-by. While it is therefore possible that Thorbecke was aware of the pictorial, it is not of paramount importance here.

When browsing through some of the pictorial's editions,¹⁸ one is struck by photographic views of Shanghai's skyscrapers, whose towering silhouettes – all differently mounted and collaged – threaten to tilt out of the pages; this becomes evident, for example, in the *Intoxicated Shanghai* or *Metropolitan Excitements* photo collage in the February issue of 1934 (fig. 5).¹⁹ Various pictorial elements, including a young woman dressed in a sophisticated *Qipao*,²⁰ a cinema poster, a racecourse and an orchestra, float about in the visual space in a seemingly weightless state, lacking anchors. Two photographs, also taken from below, show the Park Hotel from different perspectives (Lee 1999, 151). The hotel was built by the immigrant Hungarian architect Ladislaus Hudec and opened to the public in



Fig. 5: Anonymous. "Intoxicated Shanghai." Photographic Collage (Lee 1999, 151).

September 1934. With its 22 floors, it was the highest building in Shanghai for a long time. In an advertisement in the American travel guide, *All About Shanghai*, it is promoted as the "Tallest Building of the Far East" (Anonymous 1934/2008, 38). Even before its official opening, *Liangyou* published a photograph of the Park Hotel (Lee 1999, 151). This shows the fascination and interest in such types of buildings at the time. The skyscraper went on to become one of modernity's central motifs: "The predominant image of Shanghai in Chinese photography, illustrated magazines, cinema, and fiction at this time was composed of art deco skyscrapers, the world of speculation and finance, modern women and modern men, and so on." (Schaefer 2007, 127) Building on this, Shu-mei Shih writes that "[l]ike its Japanese counterpart, Shanghai modernism was a product of the urban milieu" and quotes two verses from a 1928 poem by Shao Xunmei²¹ entitled "The Soul of Shanghai" ("Shanghai de linghun", 上海的靈魂), reproduced here (Shih 2001, 236):

Ah, I stand atop the seven-story building,
Above is the unreachable sky,
Below are cars, electric wires, horse races,

Front doors to stages, backs of prostitutes,
Ah, this is the spirit of the city:
Ah this is the soul of Shanghai.

Like the *Intoxicated Shanghai* photo collage, these two verses by Shao Xunmei address the urban landscape – its material and immaterial qualities. Both the poem and the collage evoke similar motifs (a seven-storey building, stages and a horse race) and associations (height, spectacle and tempo). The two narratives are characterised by the choice to use extreme perspectives. While the pictorial world of the collage no longer seems to adhere to gravity and suspends the logic of perspective, Shao Xunmei's lyrical I rises to lofty heights, caught somewhere between the distant hustle and bustle of the streets and the unreachable sky. These artistic and poetic articulations of perspective can be contrasted particularly well with the dizzying architecture of skyscrapers. The extreme differences in altitude make it possible to create dramatic vistas in order to narrate the encounter between people and cities. The starting point for such explorations is the author's own embodied and sensory experiences, always constituted by the surrounding urban space. Not least the choice of titles for these works, *Intoxicated Shanghai* and "The Soul of Shanghai", speaks to an intense confrontation with an intoxicating city. In a similar vein, Thorbecke chose the photograph of a skyscraper to illustrate an encounter with the city that is completely different from preceding ones.

Sensual Encounters and Urban Identities

The text positioned next to the photograph of the Cathay Hotel in the chapter entitled "The Hotels" tells the story of how the imaginary tourist couple Mr and Mrs Johnson from Ohio (USA) arrives in Shanghai. From the busy, noisy streets, they enter the interior of a large hotel and hence turn into "Mr and Mrs Hotel-Guest". Surrendering to the hotel's opulence, they find their way back to themselves only when they step out again through the mighty swing doors into the bustling street. Before this happens, however, the readers accompany the couple on a tour of the rooms:

Two hundred and fifty rooms and suites, each with private bath are at the disposition of Monsieur and Madame. [...] Monsieur might look first at the “Futurist Suite,” or would Madame prefer to occupy an apartment in Chinese, Japanese or Indian Style? Does Monsieur think that Madame is fond of Jacobean or Gregorian surroundings? (Madame has never heard of it, but would certainly not admit it...). (Thorbecke 1941, 25)

Accompanying “Mr and Mrs Hotel-Guest” or Madame und Monsieur alias Mr und Mrs Johnson, *Shanghai’s* readers are presented with “the artificial stage atmosphere”, “spacious terraces overlooking the city, river and surrounding country, from a breathtaking height” and “heavy revolving doors” (ibid.). The real protagonist is the hotel itself. The building encompasses its guests and absorbs their identities. All that remains are “Mr and Mrs Hotel-Guest”. But the street noises of Shanghai’s exterior settings unleash a force that allows Mr and Mrs Johnson to rediscover themselves and regain awareness of their ‘American identity’. The urban space therefore turns into an active agent – it affects bodies and senses and may even alter identities. Familiar with an outsider’s perspective, with the routine of luxury hotels and the conventions and ‘embarrassments’ of an international ‘upper class’ community, Thorbecke humorously describes the encounter of wealthy American tourists with the city, which is itself a central actress in this play. Thorbecke, who is neither tourist nor Shanghai native, who did not flee there yet lives there in exile, allows her readers to participate in her observations: the grand hotel turns into a stage for negotiating different perspectives in and on urban space, as well as for the encounter between humans and city.

Schiff’s drawings evoke the events taking place in front of the hotel: an impressive automobile pursues a rickshaw which is pulled by a man clad in traditional Chinese attire. Sitting on the rickshaw is a smoking sailor with a relaxed posture. Two young Chinese women dressed in sophisticated *Qipaos* glance in his direction. A Sikh in a red robe with a turban on his head is turned towards what is happening behind the car. In the foreground, an employee or businessman, briefcase firmly clamped under his arm, hurries out of the picture. Two ladies in high-heeled shoes, shapely dresses and fashionable headdresses are depicted standing at the bottom right of the page. They are joined by a smoking ‘gentleman’, a young child, two businessmen, a delivery man and a mother with a toddler in her arms. Reduced to certain dress conventions and ostensibly distinctive outward appearances and occupations, Schiff’s colourful figures emerge as the stereotypical inventory of a ‘multicultural’ Shanghai.²² Positioned as such alongside each other, they are literally presented like objects in an exhibition. The

text itself though creates a narrative connection between photograph and drawings which differ in their visual language. While Schiff reduces his protagonists to stereotypical features, Thorbecke's photography pursues other artistic strategies. As a starting point for the visualisation of urban space, the reference to physical and sensory aspects is of equal importance to both artists. These aspects are made particularly visible in another of *Shanghai's* chapters, entitled "Fictitious Characters". I will argue in the following that it is specifically dedicated to (female) corporeality and its representation in urban space, or rather as an embodiment of the metropolis.

Physical Encounters and Urban Transformation

The double page 59/60 (fig. 6) features another of Schiff's sketches: a group of couples of different nationalities stroll across the paper. From an elevated perspective, the reader overlooks their parade. A short text explains, "Every character in this book is entirely fictitious and no reference whatsoever is intended to any person" (Schiff/Thorbecke 1941, 59). Here, too, Schiff has created stereotypical figures which follow a "racialized regime of representation" (Hall [1997] 2003, 253). Young Chinese women wear *Qipaos* and are accompanied by non-white men. Western women, on the other hand, wear Western clothing and are depicted exclusively in 'Western' company. There is also a Japanese and an Indian couple. By choosing these specific constellations and by choosing what *not* to show, these drawings reveal sexual taboos that call up novel questions concerning the entanglement of gender, ethnicity and urban space. Schiff's illustrations mark the latter, for example, as decidedly heterosexual and as ethnically mixed only within certain asymmetrical couple constellations. On the left-hand page, we find a curious photograph: two plucked chickens lie on a 'pedestal' (or book?) in an undefined (exterior) location. While the 'pedestal' and the chickens are brought into sharp focus by the camera and are shot with a stark contrast of light and dark, the surrounding space remains shadowy and diffuse.²³ Behind the chickens we can clearly make out a section of a poster which seems to advertise a magazine. The silhouette of the two plucked chickens is reproduced in the way the poster depicts a stack of magazines which fan out – thus generating a relation or parallel on the level of form. The cover of the magazine on the top of the pile depicts a couple and hence repeats the motif of Schiff's drawings. The perspective of the photo indicates that the photographer must have taken the shot from above left; the horizontal axis of the image is skewed, and the objects seem to slip out of the photograph. Schiff's couples move towards the left side of the double page, diagonally crossing the photo on top of and next

to it. I argue that photograph and drawing are unmistakably related to each other with regard to their motivic and formal elements: the illustrations trace and echo the compositional structure of the photograph. Despite these obvious connections, however, the photograph remains a mystery. It is possible to understand the photograph as a humorous, critical commentary on the drawings. Thorbecke's shot of the naked and raw chicken bodies and their ambiguity contrasts with Schiff's clichéd sketches.



Fig. 6: Ellen Thorbecke and Friedrich Schiff. "Notes." (*Shanghai* 1941, 17f.).

The double page thus produces a comical, even absurd effect – but at the same time opens up a frame of reference that alludes to the physical, sensual aspects of 'carnality'. It can therefore be assumed that the visual composition offers an ironic commentary on the sexualised portrayal of the city's female citizens.

To describe the sensory, physical experience of the metropolis and its materiality as a sexual and carnal encounter is by no means unusual. A prominent example of this is Mao Dun's novel *Ziye (Midnight)* (Mao 1933/1983). Its story begins with the death of old Wu, who – due to impending communist riots on the family's rural farmland – flees to Shanghai where his eldest son lives. His son works as an industrialist in the silk business. The sudden confrontation with the unknown, modern metropolis causes such a shock to the devout, ascetic old Wu that he dies a few hours after his arrival. During the drive from the Bund to his son's

estate, his torments in the face of such completely unfamiliar surroundings are described as follows:

Good Heavens! the towering skyscrapers, their countless lighted windows gleaming like the eyes of devils, seemed to be rushing down on him like an avalanche at one moment and vanishing at the next. [...] A snake-like stream of black monsters, each with a pair of blinding lights for eyes, their horns blaring, bore down upon him, nearer and nearer! He closed his eyes tight in terror, trembling all over. He felt as if his head was spinning and his eyes swam before a kaleidoscope of red, yellow, green, black, shiny, square, cylindrical, leaping, dancing shapes, while his ears ran in a pandemonium of honking, hooting and jarring, till his heart was in his mouth. (Mao 1933/1938, 8)

Having arrived at his son's estate and subsequently been taken into the care of his female relatives, he is dealt the final blow as he is being accosted by

[F]ull, pink-tipped breasts [...] bosoms, bosoms that bobbed and quivered and danced around him. [...] Suddenly, all these quivering, dancing breasts swept at Old Mr. Wu like a hail of arrows, piling up on his chest and smothering him [...] [the women were] laughing with wide-open, blood-red mouths as though they wanted to swallow him. (ibid., 13–14)

Closing this first part, or rather prelude, of the novel, one of the characters – a student called Fan – remarks:

[...] I'm not in the least surprised. When he lived in the country he existed like a mummy. The country was his grace, in which he couldn't decompose easily. In this modern city of Shanghai, he has done. He's gone, and good riddance. One mummy of old China the less. (ibid., 24)

“[T]owering skyscrapers, their countless lighted windows gleaming like the eyes of devils” (ibid., 8) pile up above old Wu like giants and speak of an uncanny and deadly encounter between human being and city. His interaction with the female body, again to be interpreted as a personification of the metropolis, leads to Wu's

ultimate passing. As with Thorbecke and Schiff's art, skyscrapers and the sexualised female body remain essential motifs of the urban narrative.

Conclusion

Shanghai by Ellen Thorbecke and Friedrich Schiff conveys the physical experience of the metropolis. Their work offers us a unique cartography of urban space because it is not only captured viscerally and physically but also reconfigured through practices of inclusion and exclusion and through its material, cultural productions (including traffic, magazines, posters, fashion). *Shanghai's* images simultaneously form the basis of this narrative and generate it. The visual and textual structure of the book itself forms part of the urban space.

As I have shown, *Shanghai* is composed of a kaleidoscopic mosaic of colourful drawings and artistic photographs, of stories and statistics, maps, interpretations and facts. Time and again, readers happen upon encounters with and physical experiences of the urban metropolis – which itself has turned into an active agent. In the context of publication and book formats that emerged (or experienced great popularity) in the first half of the 20th century, *Shanghai* alludes to the genres of the photo book and the travel guide. The indexing of cities through photography and publication in photo books is considered an important genre of the 1920s. Photo books appealed to travellers and collectors alike (Dogramaci 2010, 207). Their popularity and global dissemination testify to the increasing number of people who were able to travel and to the expansion, professionalisation, commercialisation and democratisation of the travel industry (ibid.; Koshar 1998, 323–26).

This is especially relevant for people who were forced by war and persecution to move and/or work internationally. In addition, *Shanghai* can be counted among newly-emerging alternative travel guides, such as the travel guides of the series *Was nicht im Baedeker steht*. This series (1927–1938, Piper Publishing Munich) understood itself as a critical alternative to the more conventional Baedeker written for a bourgeois audience.²⁴ *Was nicht im Baedeker steht* excelled by incorporating artistic illustrations and by reviewing alternative locations (pubs, cafés, city districts, travel routes). Thorbecke's photographs function differently from Schiff's drawings, but both are connected by the book's design and layout. Despite their contradictory nature, photographs and illustrations remain at eye level. *Shanghai* is not a homogeneous narrative, but instead contains kaleidoscopic perspectives of and on urban space.²⁵

What is more, both *Shanghai* the book and Thorbecke and Schiff's experiences of exile illustrate the complex and divergent meanings behind terms such as 'émigré'

and 'exiled (artist)', especially against the backdrop of Shanghai's geopolitical context.

The collaboration between Thorbecke and Schiff remains largely unexplored to date. Essential and in-depth research has not yet been carried out; other joint projects or books have not yet been considered. The photographic work of Ellen Thorbecke is virtually invisible in art historical research. Shanghai as one of the largest modern cities and a hub of diverse migration movements of the 20th (and 21st) century offers new and exciting fields of research spanning urban studies, art history and the history of exile, challenging new assessments of the topography of modern art historiography.

Notes

- ¹ See, for example, the reissued American travel guide, *All About Shanghai* from 1934.
- ² The metaphor of the kaleidoscope has been used in a variety of contexts to describe urban perception processes. In her book *Shanghai. China's Gateway to Modernity*, Marie-Claire Bergère, for example, writes on "The Kaleidoscope of Shanghai Society" (Bergère 2009, 84). Another reference appears in the title of the book *Liangyou: Kaleidoscopic Modernity and the Shanghai Global Metropolis, 1926–1945* (Pickowicz et al. 2013).
- ³ To choose just two double pages from a totality of 83 pages may seem somewhat arbitrary and unrepresentative. But since each page reflects the context of the whole book and since the book's chapters are structured in such a way that each can also stand for itself, a double page may serve as a case study. And although the page layouts may vary, they all demonstrate similar artistic strategies.
- ⁴ "Großstadtkunst, die Urbanität nicht allein als motivstiftenden Raum wahrnimmt, sondern [als] ein komplexes Geflecht zwischen Kreativität und Umraum, zwischen Kunsttheorie und Metropole [...]." Translated into English by Mareike Hetschold.
- ⁵ Shih describes the way Chinese intellectuals and artists perceived the geopolitical and cultural situation at the time as "bifurcated". The West is perceived on the one hand as an inspiring and modern urban culture, the "metropolitan West", and on the other as a coloniser, the "colonial West": "By bifurcating the two, the intellectual could proselytise for Westernisation without being perceived as a collaborator [...]. The capacity to displace colonial reality through the discourse of cultural enlightenment was endemic to semicolonial cultural politics." (Shih 2001, 36).
- ⁶ The term semi-colonial can be traced back to the 1920s and was used in Marxist criticism "as a way to describe the coexistence between the native feudal and the colonial" (Shih 2001, 31) Shih uses the term "to describe the specific impacts of multi-layered imperialist presence in China and their fragmentary colonial geography (largely confined to coastal cities) and control, as well as the resulting social and cultural formation." (ibid., 31).
- ⁷ This contractual clause states that no nation may be favoured over another nation (Liu 2014, 188).

- ⁸ The selection of examples referring to the movement and internment of Shanghai people because of conflict and war is not intended to be complete.
- ⁹ On the connection between colonialist and imperialist strategies and the emergence of travel and photojournalism and literature see: Hadfield 1999, Granqvist 2017.
- ¹⁰ Handwritten notes, Evelyn Thorbecke, 7 December 2007, Collectie Ellen Thorbecke (Nederlands Fotomuseum, Rotterdam). All following biographical references are based on this source.
- ¹¹ Yva (Else Ernestine Neuländer-Simon) was a photographer who ran an exceptionally successful photo studio in Berlin which employed up to ten people. Economic restructuring is a term commonly used in the business world to describe restructuring measures taken by companies to favour more efficient management. Yva worked for Ullstein Verlag, among others. On 13 June 1942 she was murdered in the Sobibor extermination camp. *Yva. Photographien 1925–1938*, edited by Marion Beckers and Elisabeth Moortgat, exh. cat. Das verborgene Museum, Berlin, 2001; *Fotografieren hieß teilnehmen: Fotografinnen der Weimarer Republik*, edited by Ute Eskildsen, exh. cat. Museum Folkwang, Essen, 1994.
- ¹² The Gesellschaft für Organisation is a non-profit-making association, which was founded in 1922 and still exists today. <https://gfo-web.de/gfo/gfo-verbundet/>. Accessed 12 April 2019.
- ¹³ Original German version: [...], 6 Uhr früh
 Ich erwach und werde mir langsam klar, daß die gehörten Detonationen Schüsse sind. [...]
 1 Uhr 15 mittags. Von meinem Balkon aus lässt sich der Flugzeugangriff wunderbar beobachten. [...] Um Punkt 2 Uhr ist die Vorstellung zu Ende. [...]
 5 Uhr. Ich gehe auf das Dach des Cathay-Hotels. Die Stadt liegt in der Dämmerung riesenhaft da – ohne Ende. Die Stadt brennt an sechs verschiedenen Stellen. [...]
 5 Uhr 30. Tee in der Hotellounge. Salonorchester, lippenstiftgeschmückte Damen, Cocktails und Extraausgaben. [...]
 31. Januar, ½ 10 Uhr früh [...]. Seit gestern mittag sieht man haufenweise Flüchtlinge: Frauen, die Kinder am Rücken, Koffer und Kisten, Bettzeug und aller möglicher Krimskrums auf Karren Rikschas. Tschapei wird evakuiert. In den Kabarets und Bars de Settlements spürte man gestern abend nichts von all dem Wirbel. Der reguläre Samstagabendbetrieb. [...]
 23. Februar ... Vormittags Besuch in einem Flüchtlingslager. Das Bild des entsetzlichsten Elends, gegen das man durch den allzu oft gewährten Anblick fast abstumpft. Fast! Schildern kann man es nicht [...]. Translated into English by Mareike Hetschold.
- ¹⁴ The first page of the book features a schematic world map. At the centre of the map is Shanghai. From there, the distances to other port cities such as Vladivostok, Sydney, Alexandria and Valparaiso are measured in nautical miles. This is followed by an introduction entitled “Trouble never ends in Shanghai”, which addresses the history of Shanghai from a ‘Western’ perspective on eight pages.
- ¹⁵ The advertisements quoted below are part of a collection of extracts and cannot be accurately dated.

- 16 Definition according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*: “adventurous, adj.”; “1b. Characterized by adventure; full of incident [...]; 2a. Full of risk or peril; hazardous, perilous, dangerous [...]; 4b. Of a product, activity, etc.: unconventional, innovative; characterized by experimentation or novelty.”
- 17 The Sassoons were a distinguished family from Baghdad who migrated to Bombay in the 1830s and there established their main trading location. After the British forced the opening of five Chinese trading ports, however, the Sassoon family established two offices of David Sassoon, Sons & Co in China – the first in Hong Kong in 1943, and the second in Shanghai in 1945 – and rapidly expanded its presence along the East Coast. In the second half of the 19th century, its trade with China focused on the importation of Indian opium. In addition, members of the Sassoon family and the ‘Baghdadi’ who had settled in Shanghai established themselves in many other economic enterprises, such as banking, real property, import and export (Betta 2003, 1001–1008).
- 18 Liangyou editions, Municipal Library, Shanghai.
- 19 Photographers not specified.
- 20 A body-hugging dress with distinctive features developed from traditional Qing gowns.
- 21 Shao Xunmei was an author, artist, publisher and editor of numerous magazines and a central figure in Shanghai’s salon culture of the 1930s as well as in the city’s publishing sector: Bevan 2016, 53–70).
- 22 For a more complex discussion on racism and processes of stereotyping, cf. Hall 2002, 108–166.
- 23 The Thorbecke Archive does not contain a print of this photograph. The even distribution of light from the right-hand side suggests that the photograph was pre-composed and not montaged afterwards.
- 24 For more on Baedeker and related topics, cf. Camilla Smith, “Challenging Baedeker Through the Art of Sexual Science: An Exploration of Gay and Lesbian Subcultures in Curt Moreck’s Guide to Depraved Berlin (1931).” *Oxford Art Journal*, vol. 36, no. 2, 2013, 231–256 and Rudy Koshar. “‘What Ought to Be Seen’: Tourists’ Guidebooks and National Identities in Modern Germany and Europe.” *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 33, no. 3, 1998, 323–340.
- 25 Medial representations of urban space in general, and specifically of the modern metropolis of Shanghai in the context of exile and migration, are a central leitmotif of my PhD research which I am currently conducting within the framework of the ERC project METROMOD, directed by Burcu Dogramaci at LMU Munich (2018–2021).

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