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# Containment as Neocolonial Visual Rhetoric: Fashion, Yellowface, and Karl Lagerfeld's "Idea of China"

Anjali Vats and LeiLani Nishime

*Grounding our evidence in Karl Lagerfeld's Paris-Shanghai: A Fantasy, a filmic homage to Coco Chanel, we theorize a "visual rhetoric of containment," which limits the subjectivity of the racial Other and consolidates whiteness. The visual rhetoric of containment manifests in four ways: the creation and enactment of "the yellowface gaze," which affirms whiteness through the eyes of the "native" Other, the affirmation of a post-feminist model of exchange, which objectifies the Chinese, the representation of Chanel as a master of place and order, and the conception of time as a constraint that Chanel, but not the Chinese people, can transcend.*

*Keywords:* Yellowface; Containment; Fashion; Visual Culture; Critical Rhetorics of Race

Only months after Lara Stone's appearance in *Vogue Paris* in blackface, which was later named in a French celebrity magazine as one of the biggest fashion scandals of all time,<sup>1</sup> Chanel designer Karl Lagerfeld released *Paris-Shanghai: A Fantasy*, a short, high-fashion film about a trip through China that only Coco Chanel could dream up, featuring models in yellowface. Lagerfeld wrote and directed the work for a web broadcast promoting his Asian-inspired 2009 pre-fall Chanel fashion show in China. In order to showcase Lagerfeld's newest fashions, *Paris-Shanghai* imagines a particular China, one filled with beautiful decor, mysterious and dangerous people, and

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intriguing places. The Chinese characters in the film are almost exclusively played by individuals dressed in yellowface, their exaggerated pitch black eyeliner, dark straight hair, elaborate costuming, and subservience to white Westerners signaling their “Chineseness.” They are set in contrast to Chanel, portrayed as a time-traveling, boundary-defying, fashion savant. In an interview that concluded his documentary about the making of *Paris-Shanghai*, Lagerfeld says, “I love 18th-century French chinoiserie. It’s an idea of China painted by people who never saw China. And that’s amusing, because there’s real imagination. It is spirited and light. I also enjoy having non-Chinese play Chinese.” He later adds that his intent is “more creative than the reality.”<sup>2</sup> His use of the French word *vérité*,<sup>3</sup> meaning “truth” but translated in subtitle as “reality,” concedes the falsity of his China, but he then, finds an invented China, one ventriloquized by the West that inspires but does not intrude into Western fantasies of a faraway land, more interesting than Chinese “reality.”

*Paris-Shanghai* is just one example of high fashion’s renewed interest in Asia generally and China in particular. The film’s release came shortly after Chanel’s launch of an aggressive marketing campaign in Asia in support of its megastores in Hong Kong and Tokyo. Other top high-fashion brands, such as Louis Vuitton, have adopted similar sales strategies, treating Asian nations as major and growing markets for their products.<sup>4</sup> With Asian consumers in some markets now buying approximately 50 percent of the world’s luxury products, a number that is projected to grow in coming years, the tastes and preferences of these new buyers are a growing concern for Western companies.<sup>5</sup> Recent issues of both *Vogue* and *Harper’s Bazaar* have commented on the increasing Asianization of high fashion, featuring articles on the influence of China and India, respectively, on Western fashion designers, and both noted the importance of those growing markets in inspiring and selling high-fashion apparel. In an apparently contradictory strategy, *Paris-Shanghai* attempts to court Asian consumers by asserting the superiority of French taste and culture. The short film calls upon past core-periphery relationships to reinforce a contemporary colonial gaze and ensure the centrality of European culture at the expense of Chinese subjectivity. This appeal to colonial nostalgia is noteworthy because it is a response to new forms of globalization and “post-racial” ideology:<sup>6</sup> unlike fashion’s past marketing strategies that sell exoticized looks or promote white norms of beauty, *Paris-Shanghai* betrays anxieties about the encroachment of difference on Western norms by reasserting the superiority of French cultural values. Lagerfeld’s advertising campaign creates a cosmopolitan image for global customers and builds upon the label’s exclusivity and cultural capital. As Mihn-ha Pham writes, “Painting Chinese consumers as unsophisticated gives a pass to designers, allowing retailers to continue predominantly featuring white women as the ideal customer while cashing in on the new Chinese market.”<sup>7</sup> Lagerfeld promotes Chanel as a global brand, capitalizing on the exotic allure of its entry into the Asian market while simultaneously working to assure its Western customers that it still dictates the terms of cultural contact.

By reading *Paris-Shanghai* through the lens of a critical rhetorics of race, we interrogate the often invisible power relations implicated by high fashion’s “Asian turn.” The short film uses a visual “rhetoric of containment”<sup>8</sup> to naturalize white

supremacy and reconfigure racial and colonial hierarchies for the contemporary era.<sup>9</sup> The term “rhetoric of containment” has been used in rhetorical studies to examine discourses that, according to Kristan Poirot, “tame a potential threat to hegemonic culture and/or the norms of the status quo.”<sup>10</sup> Although Poirot focuses on the containment of gender and sexuality, analogous strategies also structure the containment of racial difference through discourse. In focusing on Lagerfeld’s short film, we argue for containment’s utility in theorizing contemporary representations of *race* and, in particular, those racial formations that take *visual* forms.

*Paris-Shanghai* produces closely controlled representations of race through fashion, visually staging scenes of white Westerners safely reenacting colonial narratives. In employing visual rhetorical strategies for containing Asian bodies and lauding the achievements of Western culture, the film assuages Western anxieties about globalization, the increasing influence of Asian cultures, and cross-cultural contaminations. Our reading focuses on the links between rhetorics of containment and race, coloniality, and visibility, a relatively unexplored area of study. We are particularly concerned with the tendency of visual rhetorics of containment to simultaneously elevate and normalize the values of dominant cultural regimes, here white Western culture, in the process of confining difference. In this instance, fashion icon Chanel gains power through containment, using her ability to diminish the subjectivity of the Chinese and enhance the authority of white womanhood. Our analysis thus underscores the need to study rhetorics of containment both in the context of race and coloniality and in the context of visibility.

Through our examination of the intersections of coloniality, globalization, and aesthetics in Lagerfeld’s *Paris-Shanghai*, we identify four visual rhetorical mechanisms through which containment operates, namely the yellowface gaze, post-feminist politics of commodification, representations of place, and racialized time. These narrative elements most clearly and productively characterize the confluence of the neocolonial and neoliberal aesthetics of Lagerfeld’s fantasy of China and the mechanisms through which Otherness is policed. Each visual rhetorical element we identify operates to simultaneously constrain the subjectivity of Asian Others while emancipating and empowering whiteness and Western culture. First, the consistent portrayal of Chineseness through white actors in yellowface confines and directs the diegetic and extra-diegetic gaze, evacuating the subjectivity of the Other and confirming white superiority through an imagined Asian gaze. Second, the film enacts unequal relations of exchange and consumption by remaking Chinese “costumes” into marketable “fashions.” This transformation affirms the power and superiority of white womanhood and operates as a sign of feminist empowerment. As Chanel finds her inspirations among the Chinese people, difference is rendered material and then commodified and exchanged. Third, circumscribed spatiality limits the subjectivity of the Chinese, rendering them passive objects instead of active rhetorical agents. Chanel, a panoptic agent, monitors the Chinese, ensuring that they are contained by small spaces and Western forces of order. Finally, representations of temporality empower Chanel, whose ability to time travel allows her to mature and eventually develop timeless styles. The Chinese, on the other hand, remain

time-bound, visually contained by their traditional ethnic garb and unable to move beyond the specificities of their historical moments. These four manifestations of visual rhetorical containment simultaneously acknowledge the allure of the Other and redraw boundaries between self and Other. Taken together, these rhetorics of containment illuminate how racial formations continue to exist and evolve even in this purportedly “globalized” and “post-racial” era, reifying white supremacy and denigrating difference.

### Situating Containment

As a rhetorical concept used in analyses of public address and social protest, containment refers to discursive strategies that protect the power investments of the status quo through the constraint of Otherness. Michelle Smith argues that rhetorics of containment actually neutralize purported threats associated with out-groups—her case study of the Amana Society highlights the tendency of rhetorics of containment to “have direct (and dire) material consequences for the imagined group.”<sup>11</sup> With the exception of Smith’s focus on non-dominant religious communities, studies of rhetorics of containment have primarily centered on issues of gender. Karrin Vasby Anderson, for example, points to the use of the word “bitch” in political rhetoric as a means of “disciplining women with power.”<sup>12</sup> Poirot builds on this understanding, focusing on the confining effects of radical/lesbian feminist social movements on self-identification.

Here, we are concerned with the role of rhetorics of containment in a different context, namely confining the subjectivities of racial and colonial Others. As Smith points out, rhetorics of containment have played a historical role in the policing of types of difference other than sex and gender. In the United States, the “fear of the Other is inscribed into US identity, and the strategy of containment historically has been the mode of operation for combatting that fear.”<sup>13</sup> The significance of containment in protecting American national identity is reflected in interdisciplinary studies of the term as well. In this section, we draw upon those interdisciplinary studies to theorize the role of rhetorics of containment. Containment as a visual rhetorical concept sheds light on the complexities of contemporary racial formations, especially the repackaging of race and colonial difference as inferior to white, Western culture and the related reification of whiteness. Read in the context of race and visibility, we define containment as an expansive term that describes both *spatial* and *relational* processes through which racial and colonial identities are defined and negotiated in national and international spaces.

Containment, a rich concept often invoked in textual analyses, holds transdisciplinary significance. Spatial containment, a concept theorized in critical geography and political science,<sup>14</sup> refers to national and internal border drawing, while relational containment, a term explored in cultural studies, postcolonial studies, and rhetoric,<sup>15</sup> describes the possibility/non-possibility of interaction within and between groups. Often, these two aspects of containment, which we will discuss in greater depth below, are intimately related and even reinforce one another; in other words, spatial

containment and relational containment often exist simultaneously and may even fuel one another. Indeed, spatial and relational aspects of containment are often linked conceptually and ideologically, in scholarly practice and the real world. This is not to say that containment always involves both a constraint of space and a confinement of subjectivity. Instead, containment sometimes implicates space and sometimes implicates the exercise of subjectivity of marginalized groups. We separate these two characteristics of containment here in order to convey the theoretical complexity of the concept. However, in our analysis we analyze the visual manifestation of spatial and relational containment as overlapping and intertwined categories.

As a concept referring to space, containment imposes boundaries that regulate and limit the existence and influence of difference within society. Spatial containment can occur through political processes, such as the drawing of borders and immigration disputes, which cultivate ideological justifications for the physical closure of space.<sup>16</sup> For example, postcolonial critic Graham Huggan defines containment, in part, as a “regimentation of space” that is intimately intertwined with colonial processes.<sup>17</sup> With spatial containment, the unhindered flow of persons and ideas and the hybridity that comes along with them is replaced with specific instances of controlled exchange and a rigid recognition of dividing boundaries. Notably, the desire to contain almost always permits a limited degree of inclusion or access, suggesting that there is a necessary relationship between the drive to purify and the desire to possess Otherness. Stated differently, containment is a mechanism for control, separation, and differentiation, and regulation of longings for Otherness while maintaining the identity of the Self.

Homi Bhabha, in *The Location of Culture*, understands containment to be a largely relational process, which silences Others by denying them the ability and authority to speak: “Montesquieu’s Turkish Despot, Barthes’s Japan, Kristeva’s China, Derrida’s Nambikwara Indians, Lyotard’s Cashinahua pagans are part of this strategy of containment where the Other text is forever the exegetical horizon of difference, never the active agent of articulation.”<sup>18</sup> Consistent with the concept as articulated by Anderson, Poirot, and Smith, loss of agency and power over self-definition, signification, negation, and oppositional discourse accompanies containment—the contained individual or culture is reduced to a “docile body” and transformed from empowered subject into static object of knowledge, commodity, or form of entertainment.<sup>19</sup> In essence, defining the boundaries of “acceptable” behavior limits possibilities for invention by marginalized groups, forcing them to play by the rules laid out by majority culture. Containment describes the production of social relations in a manner that straightjackets progressive understandings of difference. This is not to say that Others can never recover the ability to resist or speak back to their oppressors, merely that containment aspires to silence and confine them.<sup>20</sup>

We extend the theory of containment by setting it in conversation with the growing body of literature on rhetorics of race and coloniality. Our understanding of containment thus contributes to the study of critical rhetorics of race, which combines critical rhetoric’s concern for revealing relations of domination in contemporary texts and public discourses and understanding racism in its overt and inferential forms.<sup>21</sup> It

also responds to Raka Shome's call to "place the texts that we critique or the theories that we produce against a larger backdrop of neocolonialism and racism, and interrogate to what extent these discourses . . . reflect the contemporary global politics of (neo)imperialism."<sup>22</sup> More specifically, we use a critical rhetorics of race to "understand how and why race works,"<sup>23</sup> mapping a primarily textual theory onto a visual text. Just as Smith demonstrates the role of rhetorics of containment in framing the identities of imagined communities, we focus on the creation of racial and neocolonial relations of domination by and through the visual enactments of high fashion in short films. The moving images of the short films offer a unique opportunity for developing and enacting both spatial and relational rhetorics of containment through a visual medium.

### Emergence of the "Fashion Film"

Fashion, as scholars such as Roland Barthes, Jennifer Craik, and Dorinne Kondo have pointed out, is a power-laden endeavor that can be used to communicate myriad forms of hierarchical difference.<sup>24</sup> It performs the doubled and ideologically necessary task of visually displaying power structures while denying inequities in access to power through a discourse of beauty and art. These differences become especially acute when mapped onto racialized cultural differences. Craik argues that fashion operates through the creation and manipulation of "exoticism," which she defines as pertaining to "the enticing, fetishized quality of a fashion or style, or to foreign or rare motifs in fashion."<sup>25</sup> The very premise of fashion, which uses fads and trends to distinguish some wearers from others and, according to Nirmal Puar, justifies an appropriation of the novel, often from spaces of Otherness.<sup>26</sup> These fashions then become revalued in ways that accrue cultural capital to white Westerners, forgetting the stigma attached to them when worn by marginalized women of color. The postmodern aestheticization and recontextualization inherent in fashion become a means of disciplining bodies and negotiating social and political orders.<sup>27</sup> Fashion—and the fashion film in particular—demonstrates the need to consider rhetorics of containment in visually mediated cultural texts.

*Paris-Shanghai* was the first in a series of creative, pre-season productions in the high-fashion industry that fall somewhere between short narrative film and long advertisements. The genre, which has been dubbed the "fashion film," is now a fixture in the high-fashion industry and "an essential part of the marketing toolbox for megabrands and emerging labels alike."<sup>28</sup> Fashion designers such as Christian Dior, Lanvin, Alexander McQueen, and Prada have followed Chanel's lead, creating their own pre-season short films. These filmic advertisements have become so prominent that blogs such as Business of Fashion have started ranking the best fashion films of the year, all the while critiquing them for their poor directorial skills, lack of imagination, and limited impact on profits.<sup>29</sup> Despite being poorly made, fashion films have established themselves as expected parts of the marketing strategy of the high-fashion industry, often garnering audiences of millions on YouTube and other Internet sites. Fashion films have become so prevalent in part because of the stories

they tell. The medium of the film provides the opportunity to weave a live-action narrative that frames the seasonal collections subsequently displayed in runway shows and high-fashion photography. Moreover, they have become vehicles for negotiating difference. *Paris-Shanghai* is the first in a series of films, including Cartier's *L'Odyssee de Cartier* and Saloni's *Jodhpur Jackie*, which target and portray "emerging" fashion markets such as China and India. While we focus on *Paris-Shanghai*, the first and longest of these films, there is certainly a greater trend to use live action film to confront globalization and difference through the medium of film.<sup>30</sup>

*Paris-Shanghai*, the black and white tribute to Chanel, consists of vignettes depicting the design icon's imaginary visit to China. The story begins in Paris where, after a visit from Wallis Simpson, Chanel lies down for a nap in her home and takes a trip to China that she "only made in her dreams." Although in reality she never visited China, in each subsequent scene Chanel travels to a different moment in Chinese history, moving backwards through time. Each segment in the film, which only lasts a few minutes, is introduced with a title card. The scenes take place in a narrow one-room set, further heightening the film's sense of fantasy.

The first scene, entitled "China in the 60ties," takes place in a small, hovel-like room in Maoist China. Chanel, played by the same middle-aged actress of the opening Paris atelier sequence, walks into a sparsely decorated barrack inhabited by two young "Chinese" actors in yellowface and Mao-style suits.<sup>31</sup> Chanel ultimately appropriates their clothing, while bringing her high French fashion to Communist China. The next scene, "Shanghai Nightclub Dressing Room, 1940s" skips backwards in time without any narrative explanation. Initially, Chanel is a young woman, younger than in the Paris atelier scene or "China in the 60ties," who is meeting Dietrich and her maid for the first time. A distracted Dietrich summarily dismisses Chanel, who returns at the end of the scene as the older actress from the opening sequence and 1960s China. The third scene "Shanghai Express, 1930s" takes place on the famous train with Chanel, now young again, sharing a cabin with Anna May Wong, who is played by an Asian model, and Marlene Dietrich, playing Shanghai Lily. Chanel watches as Dietrich and her companion are dragged away in a reenactment of the film *Shanghai Express* while the French fashion icon remains safe. In the fourth scene, "Shanghai Gambling Room 1920s," the young Chanel meets Wallace Simpson in a seedy lounge as they comment on the Shanghai underworld and speculate about "the most expensive" woman in Shanghai, who is played by another actress in yellowface.<sup>32</sup> In the final scene, "Imperial Court," Chanel is middle-aged again, even as she takes a large leap back in time to meet the Empress Dowager and her son.

### The Yellowface Gaze

In *Paris-Shanghai*, the yellowface performances are not only an act of provocation. The exchange of gazes between the white female tourist and "Chinese" natives also enact a visual rhetoric of relational containment beyond the straightforward act of Othering. This Othering, after all, could be more easily depicted with bodies already understood to be naturally or biologically racially distinct. While we might read the yellowface



performance as a move to appropriate an imagined China, it also betrays a more complex desire for interaction with the Chinese and a simultaneous need to limit their autonomy and their subjectivity. The racial masquerade enacts the twin moves of containment: it seeks out an encounter with the Other through an exchange of gazes, but then seizes control of that exchange by literally inhabiting the Other and directing the yellowface gaze. The rhetorical work of the scene can only be accomplished through the audience's knowledge of the racial masquerade. By reading the management of the yellowface gaze between the two actresses who play Chanel and the actresses who play the Chinese characters through the rhetorics of containment, we can see the complex ways in which the yellowface performance of an active "native" gaze must be both *invoked* and then *contained* in order to secure a coherent and masterful colonial identity (Figure 1).

Yellowface performance, while less central to discussions of race than blackface has been, is nevertheless a longstanding practice in American racial representations.<sup>33</sup> Like the popularization of blackface performance in vaudeville, early yellowface performance was widespread in the musical theater of the second half of the nineteenth and the early part of the twentieth century.<sup>34</sup> Then, as now, yellowface worked to contain the threat of the "yellow peril." As Asian American studies scholars such as Robert Lee, Krystyn Moon, Kent Ono, and Vincent Pham have argued, early yellowface performance coincided with the first large wave of Chinese immigration.<sup>35</sup> The subsequent panic about Asian labor flooding the market fueled the popularity of yellowface performances, emphasizing the alien and unassimilable cultural practices of foreigners from the East. Ultimately, the stereotype propagated through yellowface helped justify discriminatory anti-Chinese immigration policies.



**Figure 1** Model dressed in yellowface costume and make-up in *Paris-Shanghai*. Image copyright held by Chanel. Cropped by authors.

Critics of yellowface argue that these performances turn Asianness into a spectacle,<sup>36</sup> encouraging an imperialist gaze to emphasize the incommensurate difference of the Other.<sup>37</sup> Following the seminal work on blackface by Eric Lott and Michael Rogin,<sup>38</sup> performance studies have also focused on the social function of blackface for the white performers and have studied why it provides so much pleasure for its audiences.<sup>39</sup> In the field of visual culture, Lisa Nakamura similarly argues that the use of Asian avatars by white gamers enacts an “identity tourism,” enabling a temporary escape from a white identity without any of the social and cultural costs of such an identity switch.<sup>40</sup>

Yellowface performance confounds and expands conventional rhetorics of the gaze. Visual rhetorical critics, following the work of feminist film theorists, commonly understand the camera’s gaze as a means to center and naturalize a dominant viewpoint.<sup>41</sup> This gaze, which generally echoes that of the white male hero, positions the Other as the object of gaze, deprived of agency or subjectivity.<sup>42</sup> Shui invokes Rey Chow to reread the imperialist gaze in yellowface video games.<sup>43</sup> Chow reverses the familiar argument that the possessor of the gaze is the imperialist with the native positioned as the passive object of that gaze. Instead, Chow theorizes the colonized native as the originator of the gaze so the colonizer, caught in the native gaze, becomes self-aware.<sup>44</sup> Yet, in yellowface performance, the white performer in masquerade is both the object of the gaze and a point of identification for the white audience. This dual position as both the possessor and the object of the gaze exploits the ambivalence of the colonized gaze.

*Paris-Shanghai* harnesses the yellowface gaze not only to create self-awareness (Chow) or as an expression of white anxiety (Shiu) but to consolidate a white ideal by controlling the native gaze. In “China in the 60ties,” we see a “Chinese” man and woman in yellowface seated at a bare table in a small, sparsely furnished room. Chanel enters the room, sits down to tea, and begins her conversation by saying, “All you young people in China are so beautiful and elegant. I love to look at you.” The scene opens with a recapitulation of the disciplinary viewing relationship of the panopticon with Chanel’s imperialist gaze focused on the “natives.” The clarity of that power relation, however, is undermined by the fact that Chanel is actually looking not at “the young people in China” but at white models in yellowface. Almost immediately after her statement, the “Chinese” woman returns Chanel’s gaze, surveying her clothing and admiring her purse and suit jacket. The ownership of the assessing gaze has shifted from Chanel to the Chinese woman. Rather than a change in perspective, the yellowface gaze reflects back to Chanel a view of the West as the center of culture, affirming the universal appeal of her designs. At this moment, the reason for a yellowface performance becomes clear: by playing the Chinese in yellowface, the white Westerner can imaginatively assume their subjectivity. The important transformation is not for the Chinese to see themselves in the West but for the West to see their cultural influence on China *through Chinese eyes*.

The yellowface gaze reiterates the interplay of abjection and denial that structures the creation of a racialized subjectivity. Lacan argued that the mirror stage of development was a moment when an infant’s fragmented sense of self cohered by

recognizing its image in the mirror. The spectacle of wholeness viewed in the mirror allows the infant to deny its experience of a fragmented and incoherent self in favor of its wholly formed reflection.<sup>45</sup> Thus, the perception of a coherent and powerful self is routed through the gaze; one sees and identifies with a visual representation of one's body reflected back by the mirror. This notion of a subjectivity split between an experience of the body and its idealization in the image is racialized in Frantz Fanon's writing. Fanon argues that the white spectator projects her/his recognition of the split and fragmented self onto the African Other.<sup>46</sup> At the same time, the idealized self-image is fragile so the white subject must constantly seek his or her reflected image to be reassured. The film screen functions as one of those social "mirrors" for the white spectator.

The yellowface gaze is the gaze of the Other imagined through the white masquerade. It becomes another mirror, reflecting back a whole and coherent self. The audience recognizes the yellowface performers as "actually" white, yet that perception is at odds with the representation of the performing bodies as Asian. Thus, the yellowface performer occupies two subject positions at once: she is both the ideal (white) and fragmented (Asian) self. In viewing this dual self on screen, the audience can form a dual identification. The audience identifies with Chanel as the ego ideal and also temporarily inhabits the vantage point of the Other, a positionality made possible by identification with the white-self masquerading as an Asian Other. The abjected and divided self, embodied by the "Chinese" performer, sees the white star as whole and ideal. The audience momentarily assumes the subject position of the split Other; it can then turn the gaze of that Other back upon the powerful white woman at the center of the story. The use of yellowface performers provides access to the fantasy of a whole and coherent white-self.

The recuperative value of this imagined gaze is made manifest a moment later. After putting on Chanel's jacket the "Chinese" woman turns to the mirror to admire her image, and Chanel puts on the "Chinese" woman's jacket. She then walks over to the mirror and pushes the "Chinese" woman out of the way and admires her reflection saying, "I may use this as inspiration for my next collection." Chanel is then twice confirmed through the actual mirrored reflection and through the mirror offered by the gaze of the Other. She takes possession of the mirror and, by extension, the wholeness offered by that image. The yellowface "Chinese" actor, having fulfilled her psychic function, is no longer necessary and is pushed to the margins.

The "native" gaze or the gaze of the colonial Other both confirms the ego ideal of the white female and threatens that ideal, since that gaze can potentially challenge the imagined wholeness of the image. As a result, it functions as an important site of control and containment. In the short segments that follow "China in the 60ties," the substitution of Asian bodies for the actors in yellowface highlights the stakes of the uncontrolled "native" gaze which, in turn, necessitates other means of containing that Asian gaze. Even as the substitution of yellowface performers allows for absolute control over the "native" gaze, it also reminds the viewer that such control is a fantasy. The wholeness and dominance offered through the yellowface gaze are never

complete and must thus be repeated throughout the film in alternative, but still unsatisfying, ways.<sup>47</sup>

Following “China in the 60ties” are three scenes set in Shanghai that take place from the 1920s to 1930s. In them, we see a younger version of Chanel whose fame and resultant personal autonomy grows through the film. The roles played by Asians and the exchange of gazes by Asians and by white actors in yellowface track the shifts in Chanel’s status as she becomes more established as an iconic figure in fashion. The first of these “Shanghai Dressing Room, early 1940s,” provides a counterpoint to the “China in the 60ties” sequence. Instead of being confirmed by the yellowface gaze, this scene features an Asian actress who plays the role of a servant and never looks at nor interacts with Chanel. Chanel arrives at the dressing room of Dietrich, as she prepares to perform before an audience in Shanghai.<sup>48</sup> She is interrupted by a servant, played by an Asian actor, who is reprimanded for entering the dressing room. The servant introduces Chanel who is described by Dietrich as “that dressmaker” whom she “vaguely remembers.” After being caught flirting with Dietrich’s male companion, Chanel is thrown out of the dressing room.

In this scene, Chanel has less power than in any other part of the film. She is young and unknown, and mistreated by Dietrich, who calls after her, “I prefer to never see you again in my life.” Emphasizing her lowly status, the sequence of events in the scene sets up a parallel between Chanel and the servant. They both interrupt Dietrich, they are both verbally abused by her, and they are both dismissed from her dressing room. Most noteworthy, the Chinese servant is neither in yellowface nor does she ever turn her gaze on Chanel. Rather than confirm the superiority of Chanel as the imagined object of the yellowface gaze, the Chinese servant is tangential to the action of the scene, does not look at, and, by extension, does not affirm Chanel.

Chanel’s fame and influence reach their apex in the final scene, “Imperial Court.” Chanel, played by the older actress of the “China in the 60ties” scene, visits the Empress and her son. We also see the return of two yellowface performers with central speaking roles. The actress in yellowface playing the Empress says, “The Empress of China is happy to grant the queen of fashion an audience.” The Empress confirms Chanel’s power and prestige verbally and through her direct gaze and unlikely acceptance of Chanel’s Western influence.<sup>49</sup> The Empress’s young son, the “Chinese” emperor, takes Chanel’s hands, looks into her face, and then kisses her cheek. The pattern of yellowface acting maps directly onto the emergence and visibility of Chanel as a recognizable icon and successful business woman. She must be seen and confirmed not only through the eyes of the European women she encounters but also through a carefully contained “Chinese” gaze. Further, it is a “Chinese” gaze that is visibly split with a white actor pretending and always failing to be Asian. Against and through the eyes of this divided subject, the white female subject can be imagined as powerfully whole.

### Post-Feminist Politics of Exchange

While the scene “China in the 60ties” operates on a psychoanalytic level through the yellowface gaze, it also works to visually represent containment through the circulation

of consumer products. Similar to the exchange of gazes in yellowface performance, the exchange of goods in “China in the 60ties,” confirms Chanel’s central role as the ultimate arbiter of taste and meaning. The scene reiterates containment’s dual function as a means of mediating the influx of difference while indulging desire by “eating the Other.”<sup>50</sup> Chanel welcomes contact with the Chinese but then contains their cultural influence by treating the clothing she takes from them as the raw material of haute couture. The scene highlights Chanel’s power to determine the terms of the exchange between the West and China, framing power as a benevolent impulse to liberate and empower the Chinese by helping them to recognize the value of their own culture. Chanel becomes an emblem not only of the freedom of white women to live unencumbered in this post-feminist society but also as a messenger of the power of globalization and consumerism.

In her dreams, Chanel appears as an anachronistically post-feminist icon primarily interacting with other powerful white women in China—Simpson and Dietrich. Her excursions in China adhere to a popular post-feminist narrative, as it has been represented by mainstream media pundits such as Christina Hoff Sommers and Katie Roiphe and by the public academic Camille Paglia.<sup>51</sup> This version of post-feminism turns away from second wave feminism’s focus on female oppression and legislated equity which, according to these authors, have outlived their usefulness as mechanisms for emancipation. At the same time, it is not a reactionary backlash against feminism that seeks a return to pre-feminist days. Instead, as Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra argue, it assumes that the goals of feminism have been achieved, and women should embrace and exert their power through consumerism and by exploiting/embracing their femininity. Furthermore, the post-feminist alternative rhetoric of “choice,” which frames the embrace of femininity as primarily a matter of personal preference, individualizes and depoliticizes the social role of gender in maintaining inequalities. Within this framing, the success of feminism means that women can now choose their own paths rather than see their life choices as limited by social structures.<sup>52</sup> Sarah Banet-Weiser, among others, argues that in our post-feminist moment, the achievements of feminism are not measured by collective action or legislative change. Instead, the buying power of each individual acts as a means of self-expression.<sup>53</sup> The version of post-feminism we read in *Paris-Shanghai* is articulated through an assumed consumerist femininity, one that defaults to a white, middle-class norm.<sup>54</sup>

By returning to “China in the 60ties,” it is evident how the mechanisms of containment imagine an empowered white womanhood not only through an exchange of gazes but also through the trade and bodily display of material goods. Even though it attempts to portray the exchange between cultures as equal or, even, more favorable for the Chinese people, this logic only makes sense within the limited world view of the European tourist. In this scene, Chanel and a young “Chinese” woman trade jackets, haute couture white wool for a utilitarian quilted work jacket. Chanel is the initiator of interaction: she notes the exquisiteness of the jackets the youth are wearing and offers a trade for her own beautiful but impractical apparel. Although the film depicts this as a simple trade, there is an imbalance in value, both practical and monetary. Chanel’s

expensive jacket appears to be a benign gift to the curious “Chinese” woman and a symbol of her largesse. The young couple obliges Chanel without question. They accept and give away their presumably state-mandated uniforms and, in the eyes of the Western consumer, get the better end of the bargain. The exchange confirms the absolute allure of Western fashion regardless of cultural or practical considerations such as the use-value of a Chanel coat in protecting the young “Chinese” from the elements (Figure 2).

However, this exchange of jackets represents a transaction that only favors the “Chinese” monetarily. Culturally, it elevates the status of Chanel above the “Chinese.”



**Figure 2** “Chinese” couple wearing Chanel jackets with their work hats just before Chanel announces to the camera, “You see. Everyone in the whole world can wear Chanel.” Image copyright held by Chanel.

The “Chinese” exist for Chanel’s inspiration, and indeed, since this entire scene actually takes place in her dream, they are literally created for that purpose. This enactment of an empowered white womanhood dependent upon the objectification and commodification of an exotic Asian Other has clear antecedents. The popular consumption of foreign objects and the use of “exotic” imagery to sell products, dubbed “commodity racism” by Anne McClintock,<sup>55</sup> followed the exploration and subsequent colonization of the Middle and Far East. The craze for collecting Asian objects in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, while part of this same phenomenon of commodity racism, was primarily the domain of the upper-class or the striving middle-class consumer. According to Mari Yoshihara, the commodification of Asian arts and artifacts helped Americans cope with rising tensions with Asia and incorporated Asia in the feminized domestic space of the household.<sup>56</sup> Consumer goods enabled white women, in contrast to their foreign counterparts, to experience the adventure of foreign lands without ever traveling there or, as was the case of most collectors, ever encountering living Asian culture.

The shift from the domestic space of the Victorian home to the sidewalks of fashionable world capitals in *Paris-Shanghai* indicates the dramatic change in the acceptable social role of white womanhood. What remains constant over time is the aestheticization and commodification of Asian women. Their primary function as raw material for the cultural capital accruing to worldly and emancipated white women severely limits the chance for Asian women to emerge as subject of their own narrative. In her study of white female journalists’ representations of Japanese “geisha,” Julietta Hua argues that the journalists assert their post-feminist identity in opposition to the exoticized geisha. The geisha, who cannot recognize her own oppression, acts as a foil to the liberated Western women and provides the opportunity for the journalists to display their own prowess as cultural translators.<sup>57</sup>

Like those journalists, Chanel translates Chinese culture to the Western world of fashion. In the process, she forecloses on the possibility of a Chinese subjectivity expressed through fashion. Instead, we only perceive China and Chinese culture revised and filtered through Chanel’s individuated sensibility. The exchange of jackets, like the unequal cross-cultural interactions that unfold elsewhere in the film, enables the transfer of knowledge within heavily restricted boundaries to the detriment of the Chinese. It also allows a specifically gendered performance of cultural appropriation and alienation. Fashion facilitates Chanel’s twin impulses of containment and desire. She desires the culture of the Other as a sign of her worldly knowledge and access, but then subordinates it to the superiority of the “empowered” Western female.

### Colonizing Place and Space

One of the defining characteristics of Lagerfeld’s China is that it exists only in confined places.<sup>58</sup> *Paris-Shanghai*’s representations of spatiality perform three important visual rhetorical roles in the film: they portray China as Shanghai, transforming the city into a metonym for the Chinese nation; they physically enclose the Chinese within walled

structures, isolating the disorder Lagerfeld portrays as endemic to China; and they facilitate Chanel's interventions, giving her relative hierarchical authority over the "natives."<sup>59</sup> Lagerfeld's portrayal of Shanghai suggests China is a disordered and chaotic place while his chosen mode of spatial arrangement, namely easily manageable, bounded areas, contains the Chinese, portraying them as subordinate to Chanel and Western culture. The representation of place and space in *Paris-Shanghai* underscores the importance of rhetoric's "spatial turn" for critical rhetorics of race.<sup>60</sup> Images of place and space are not neutral choices but persuasive ones that create the conditions of possibility within which racialized bodies move and are socially and politically read. One method for studying the rhetorical implications of place and, and the one we employ here, "situates communication and culture within a physical, corporeal landscape."<sup>61</sup> Put simply "places . . . do rhetorical work."<sup>62</sup> Understood within the ongoing discussion of spatiality's rhetorical implications, *Paris-Shanghai* is useful in uncovering links between visual representations of place and space and (neo)colonial domination. Presentation of place and physical arrangement not only keeps the Other isolated, regimenting contact with Western culture, but facilitates Chanel's panoptic control over Chinese disorder.

Lagerfeld's imagined China centers on Shanghai, a city implicated in colonial power struggles and racial stereotyping. The mere invocation of Shanghai during the period of French colonial control as the primary locale of the film invokes an unruly China. From the late 1800s to the 1940s, a large section of Shanghai was a French Concession, "a foreign-controlled area free from Chinese jurisdiction."<sup>63</sup> Historically, the French occupied zone was famed as "the dirtiest spot in the Orient" with "the largest opium dens, the fanciest casinos, the biggest brothels, and the most brazen prostitutes."<sup>64</sup> The French often turned a blind eye to the debauchery of their protectorate, letting the natives run amuck, so to speak.<sup>65</sup> The historical reality of the French Concession thus becomes a foundation for Lagerfeld's imagined China and gives rise to the colonial nostalgia of *Paris-Shanghai*. The film reflects back a disordered China in which the nation's people are unable to police themselves or establish legal and moral order.<sup>66</sup>

The small sets on which *Paris-Shanghai* unfolds exaggerate the film's myopia detracting focus from those places and spaces in Shanghai, as well as China more broadly, that are *not* dramatic and chaotic. The film's scenes take place in a Maoist peasant barrack, a dressing room, Shanghai Express train cars, a gambling room, and finally a remarkably small throne room. The sets for all the scenes are narrow from front to back and tightly enclosed at the sides, making them easy to monitor. Taken together, these places suggest that China is an entire nation of social and political unrest, unruly nightclubs, mysterious and dangerous travelers, and grandeur lost. Apart from a momentary glimpse into a centuries-old throne room, the audience sees nothing but unsavory, dishonest, and weak inhabitants who cannot take control of their world or cultural heritage. Against the backdrop of Shanghai marked by these uncivilized confined physical spaces, Chanel cultivates her cultural superiority.

Control emerges in the film as a counterpoint to disorder and a means of asserting colonial dominance within confined spaces. Even as chaos unfolds around her,



Chanel maintains control, never falling prey to the danger and intrigue that seems to pervade China. In “Shanghai Gambling Room 1920s,” Chanel retains control of the space even as she is surrounded by seedy characters, including “the most famous madam in the world,” and watched by a man peering through a secret peephole. From the moment she enters the room, the camera centers on Chanel, tracing her confident entry into the crowded room. Chanel sits at the center of a table where she can, and does, surveil the scene. Her act of surveillance is, in itself, a powerful means of asserting dominance; through watching, Chanel gains information about the scene and marks her sophistication in contrast to Shanghaiese natives. Chanel looks around, the camera following her as she monitors the entrance of two regal-looking women into the gambling establishment. Yet even though the women look like royalty and stand commandingly, the cigarette-smoking Chanel directs the action in the room. After a short dialogue about the identity of the women, Chanel asks Simpson about the quality of opium in Shanghai. Simpson quickly cautions Chanel to change the topic, noting that “even the walls have eyes.” The simple statement that the walls have eyes does more than identify danger—it relocates any control the Chinese may have gained through surreptitiously looking back to the fashion icon, who sees all from her central location in the room. Even the best attempts to regain Chinese dominance and assert control over Chanel are stymied, affirming Western dominance. All the while, the Chinese are presumably unaware that Westerners have discovered their tricks and beat them at their own game (Figure 3).

A similar scenario unfolds in “China in the 60ties.” Chanel peers through a dirty window, spying on two Chinese youth before she enters the room. She not only drives



**Figure 3** Chanel dominates the scene visually and has a commanding view of the rest of the Shanghai gambling den. Image copyright held by Chanel.

the action but controls the space—once Chanel enters, the scene is centered on her as the youth disperse to find her tea and close the door behind her. There is seemingly no doubt that Chanel will sit at the head of the table. Chanel offers her jacket, which the Chinese woman puts on happily. Chanel tries on the discarded work uniform, traversing the tiny room as though she owns it and aggressively pushing the young lady, who is looking at her new garb in the barrack's singular mirror, out of the way. The show of force, though small, is stark in the context of the rest of the scene, which is driven by Chanel's displays of fashion prowess, not physical force. In an uncharacteristic moment that breaks through the fourth wall, Chanel turns and speaks to the audience. The curious gesture to the audience is, in itself, a marker of the mastery of space: as the Chinese youths are enchanted by the scent of Chanel No. 5 and gaze at their new coats in the mirror, Chanel breaks the boundaries of place and space, reaching outside her location to make grandiose claims to an unseen audience about the quality of her work.

### Racialized Temporalities

In *Paris-Shanghai*, representations of temporality constrain the subjectivity of the Chinese. Understanding how time functions as a manipulatable object and “an arbiter of human worth, a structuring form of social difference,”<sup>67</sup> is increasingly important as a complement to the spatial turn in communication studies. As Sarah Sharma argues, “the politics of time does not yet share a similarly documented systemic record or vocabulary anything akin to the politics of space” despite the fact that “in all of these forms of spatialized power you will find a temporal counterpart in the form of a material struggle.”<sup>68</sup> In Lagerfeld's film, time does not function as it does in the real world, nor does it operate according to consistent rules. Instead, time is a racialized phenomenon that behaves differently depending upon whether it is operating on Chanel or the Chinese. Specifically, representations of temporality work to emancipate Chanel, facilitating her movement across time and space while simultaneously limiting the cultural and political self-determination of the Chinese people. Visually, these racialized temporalities take a number of forms, which include clothing styles and representations of place. Most notably, visual change over time is a symbol of power. For example, while Chanel ages and hones her skills as a fashion designer, the Chinese never truly gain self-awareness, their country and people remaining undeveloped. The iconic Chanel is able to transcend the very boundaries of time, moving from era to era in defiance of the space-time continuum while the Chinese are hopelessly confined to single times and places. Temporality thus acts as a means of containment insofar as it allows Chanel to emancipate herself at the expense of the Chinese, enacting her colonial fantasies on them. It also prevents the Chinese from developing their own identities, presenting them instead as unreflective characters without the capacity for change or insight.

The ideological work of *Paris-Shanghai* is evidenced more by its gaps and chronological inconsistencies than by its overt representations of particular time periods. Chanel travels through time from the 1960s to the Imperial Court and

switches back and forth between middle age and young adulthood from one scene to the next. Her ability to age in ways counter to the chronology of the story marks her as more powerful than the Chinese figures who are trapped in their historical moments and bound by the cultural conventions of their times. In “Shanghai Nightclub Dressing Room, 1940s,” for instance, Chanel appears as both a young woman and a middle-aged one even though the scene takes place in a single time period. Chanel is so powerful that she can return as her future self to berate Dietrich. Indeed, Dietrich sends the young Chanel away only to have an older Chanel return moments later to point out Dietrich’s mistake. The malleability of time in the film follows a certain imperialist logic wherein Chanel, a representative of European superiority and taste, temporally transcends history.

Chanel moves seamlessly through time with her fashionable tastes intact, repeating a longer history of colonial reinterpretation of the history of the colonized. Popular academic and non-academic treatments of the Near East, according to Edward Said, often employed a similar technique. He argues that “a solitary individual endows himself with timeless faculties and imposes on a society and people a personal lifespan.”<sup>69</sup> This sets up an uneven relationship between the individual “timeless” explorer and the “native,” a product of his or her time, formed by a personal lifespan lived in particular historical conditions. As a result, the “native” is reimagined from an individual to a general type so that each “native” comes to represent all the people of that region. All of them are equally shaped and destined by their historical and cultural circumstances. Thus, even as the “Chinese” figures change costumes over time, they are like Asian Barbies and Kens who retain the same makeup, expressions, and even postures, as if they were taken out of a box and clothed in the latest outfits. From the quilted peasant jackets of the 1960s to the cheongsams of the early part of the twentieth century and the elaborate brocades of the Imperial Courts, their clothing typifies the traditional clothing of their historical era rather than expressing their originality or individuality. The Chinese develop no self-awareness and fail to make any “progress” in improving the state of their nation. Chanel, on the other hand, is individualized and has the capacity to step outside of history and see larger patterns, patterns invisible to those caught up in their own time and place.

Because of her sense of history, Chanel matures and improves over time, creating clothing that becomes “timeless.” In a telling moment, she speaks about her iconic purse, informing the young woman in “China in the 60ties” that the design was inspired by traditional Chinese clothing. Chanel says, “The Chinese invented quilting.” The “Chinese” youth, surprised by the news, replies “Really?!” As the omniscient time-traveling hero of the story, Chanel can trace the history of Chinese textiles and link traditional Chinese arts with the jackets the “Chinese” people wear in the scene set in the 1960s. The Chinese, however, because they lack the ability to time travel or transcend the cultural conventions of their historical moments cannot develop such a perspective. Lagerfeld authors a temporal narrative that organizes and interprets a cultural history of Chinese clothing and simultaneously asserts the expertise of Western knowledge-producers. Within the film, Chanel can make sequential sense of the “Chinese” clothing because she is not bound by the contemporary tastes or the

narrowness of Chinese culture. She transcends time and the cultural moment to create fashion that is purportedly universal and timeless. Chanel wears her trademark tweed jacket and skirt in scenes set in the 1960s, the 1940s, and Imperial China. In every time period, Chanel remains fashionable in her suit, an outfit that transcends the vicissitudes of culture and context. Her self-proclaimed cultural superiority is a manner of containing the Chinese by implicitly negating their authority to speak about fashion (Figure 4).

The use of visual representations of fashion as a means to contain Chineseness in *Paris-Shanghai* is unsurprising given Lagerfeld's temporally inflected approach to the film. He created *Paris-Shanghai* as a means of embodying, in his words, the "idea of China," a goal that suggests the construction of a temporally bounded nation in which no development of identity is possible. Arif Dirlik, speaking about Western presentations of Chinese history, critiques the phrase because it ignores the duration and complexity of Chinese history. "Idea of China" homogenizes the nation, recognizing only those representations that fit Western stereotypes.<sup>70</sup> Dirlik, quoting Frederic Jameson, points out that an adherence to "the idea of China" is a "strategy of containment" that straightjackets Chinese subjectivity.<sup>71</sup> The same strategy is at play in *Paris-Shanghai*: narratively and visually, the Chinese people remain trapped in time with their fates dictated by history. In contrast, Chanel moves freely through time redefining taste through a transcendent Western sensibility.



**Figure 4** Chanel wears her fashionable tweed suit as she travels throughout several time periods while the "Chinese" people are confined to their traditional clothing and era. Image captured from *Paris-Shanghai* by authors.

## Conclusion

In order to expose the imperial longings of Lagerfeld's film, we read *Paris-Shanghai* through the lens of a critical rhetoric of race, proposing containment as a visual rhetorical concept to analyze its representations. Lagerfeld's film highlights how racial formations have evolved in a post-racial world, particularly in response to anxieties about globalization and the erosion of the perceived superiority of Western culture. Post-racial politics provide the justification for visual representations of race and gender purportedly transcending identity categories through the use of the yellowface gaze and post-feminist models of exchange. Images of confined spaces and racialized time reimagine contemporary global markets through a return to an invented past, transforming Asian subjectivity into an object that can be easily limited and managed. Together, these visual manifestations constrain global flows, permitting the intermingling of difference only on terms defined by Westerners.

Taken together, the containing aesthetics of Lagerfeld's *Paris-Shanghai* invoke an "imperialist nostalgia."<sup>72</sup> Except for a short foray into the period after the Cultural Revolution, the film reinforces the two characteristic aspects of the concept. On the one hand, *Paris-Shanghai* romanticizes and neutralizes the colonial age, portraying it as an innocent time in which noble colonizers brought enlightening doctrines to Chinese natives. On the other hand, it mourns the passing of China's unspoiled pre-contact "lost" past, ending the film with the portrayal of a long gone period in which Chinese royalty reigned. The majority of the film, representing the first type of imperialist nostalgia, focuses on the 1930s, a period of French colonial expansion and occupation of Shanghai. This was the time when France had its most lucrative trade relationship with China, forcing China to open its markets at the point of a bayonet.<sup>73</sup> In *Paris-Shanghai*, Lagerfeld replaces the unequal political and economic relationship between France and China under colonialism with a purely aesthetic one. He rewrites the raiding of China's natural resources as an appreciation of their clothing style and reimagines forced trade imbalances as the Chinese "choice" of European goods over Chinese ones.

Lagerfeld defends *Paris-Shanghai*'s imagery by calling his film an "homage to Europeans trying to look Chinese." Lagerfeld's "homage" consists of a scattershot stroll through Chinese history and reenactments of early US and British films such as *Broken Blossoms* (1919), *Shanghai Express* (1932) and *The Good Earth* (1937) which featured yellowface in lieu of Asian actors. Lagerfeld's "tribute" to the past reveals his desire to contain. The object of his homage is not the Chinese people or the nation of China but a time when Europe could creatively reimagine China and Chinese identity with little to no regard for the sensibilities of the Chinese people, a rapidly receding era as the Chinese markets expand. China's history becomes visible and meaningful primarily in relation to Europe in general and Chanel specifically.

The changing landscape of racial representations demands evolutions in theoretical and methodological approaches for studying whiteness and difference. The high-fashion film, in particular, has emerged as a space for visually negotiating difference. *Paris-Shanghai*, as the first and longest of this genre of fashion films, is an exemplary

object for interrogating contemporary global racial politics and developing analytic frameworks for the emerging medium. Critical rhetorics of race advances rhetoric's inquiry into issues of difference by presenting "a critical apparatus that can expose and interrogate racialized discourse as it changes and adapts to new cultural conditions."<sup>74</sup> In advancing containment as a rhetorical concept, we contribute to the projects of a critical rhetorics of race by offering a tool for understanding racialization in an increasingly visual and globalized world. Containment is a productive lens for theorizing these constraints on the subjectivity of the Other precisely because it permits the type of multifaceted and transdisciplinary account of how difference is policed and whiteness normalized that analysis of racial formation requires. Visual rhetorical containment occurs through the spatial and relational negotiation of difference. Spatiality implicates the management of material boundaries through the management of borders, places, and even the placement of bodies vis-à-vis other bodies. Relational containment implicates the interaction between bodies and relative flows of power in a post-racial and globalized world. Each kind of containment fuels and reinforces the other. The flexibility of a visual rhetorical model of containment as a tool for theorizing multiple aspects of rhetoric and racial formation makes it a powerful tool for the continued study of critical rhetorics of race, especially as colonial peripheries take on new forms.

## Notes

- [1] Sophie Bernard, "Les 10 Plus Grands Scandales Mode," *News-de-Stars*, July 8, 2011, [http://www.news-de-stars.com/kate-moss/les-10-plus-grands-scandales-mode\\_art51002.html](http://www.news-de-stars.com/kate-moss/les-10-plus-grands-scandales-mode_art51002.html).
- [2] Karl Lagerfeld Interview, "Chanel—Paris/Shanghai Pre-Fall 2010 Documentary 3," *Paris Shanghai*, YouTube video, 6:45, posted by Erich Ben, December 14, 2009, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bMKsPi4FKu0>.
- [3] Except as noted in the text, we have used the French translations of Lagerfeld's interview about *Paris-Shanghai* included in the subtitles.
- [4] Stephanie Wong, "Designer Brands Battle for Slice of Booming Asia Market," *AsianOne*, March 17, 2008, <http://www.asiaone.com/Just%2BWoman/News/Beauty%2B%2526%2BFashion/Story/A1Story20080317-54830.html>.
- [5] Radha Chadha and Paul Husband, *The Cult of the Luxury Brand: Inside Asia's Love Affair with Luxury* (Boston: Nicholas Brealey International, 2006), 55. The September issue of *Vogue* reports that China alone accounts for "more than a quarter of all luxury goods." Jonathan Van Meter, "Go East!," *Vogue*, September, 2012, 649.
- [6] While the term "post-racial" is arguably an American one, talk of "multiculturalism" dominates in contemporary Europe, creating a stand-in concept to represent racial transcendence. Alana Lentin argues "[w]hile the politics of race in Europe are of a different quality, post-racialism exists in the denial of racism across the mainstream political spectrum." Alana Lentin, "Racism in a Post-Racial Europe," *Eurozine*, November 24, 2011, <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2011-11-24-lentin-en.html>.
- [7] Minh-ha T. Pham, "Couture's Chinese Culture Shock," *The American Prospect*, January 27, 2012, <http://prospect.org/article/coutures-chinese-culture-shock>. For Pham's response to Lagerfeld's work, see Minh-ha T. Pham, "The Truth of Lagerfeld's Idea of China," *Threadbared* (blog), December 7, 2009, <http://threadbared.blogspot.com/2009/12/truth-of-lagerfelds-idea-of-china.html>.

- [8] Michelle Smith, "Containment Rhetoric and the Public Sphere: Imagining Amana, Inscribing America," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 40 (2010): 129.
- [9] Michael G. Lacy and Kent A. Ono, "Introduction," in *Critical Rhetorics of Race*, ed. Michael G. Lacy and Kent A. Ono (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 3.
- [10] Kristan Poirot, "Domesticating the Liberated Woman: Containment Rhetorics of Second Wave Radical/lesbian Feminism," *Women's Studies in Communication* 32 (2009): 265.
- [11] Smith, "Containment Rhetoric and the Public Sphere," 132.
- [12] Karrin Vasby Anderson, "Rhymes with Rich: 'Bitch' as a Tool of Containment in Contemporary American Politics," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 2 (1999): 600.
- [13] Anderson, "Rhymes with Rich," 601.
- [14] Michael J. Shapiro, *Violent Cartographies: Mapping Cultures of War* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).
- [15] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979); Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994); Poirot, "Domesticating the Liberated Woman."
- [16] Lisa A. Flores, "Constructing Rhetorical Borders: Peons, Illegal Aliens, and Competing Narratives of Immigration," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 20 (2003): 362–87; Shapiro, *Violent Cartographies*.
- [17] Graham Huggan, *Interdisciplinary Measures: Literature and the Future of Postcolonial Studies* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008), 29.
- [18] Bhabha is speaking of containment in an academic context. He argues that in theorizing and critiquing the academic processes through which difference is reduced to a mere tool for deconstructing Enlightenment humanism, scholars refuse the to understand Otherness as a meaningful and autonomous site for resistance and oppositional politics. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 46.
- [19] Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 46.
- [20] The alternative to both spatial and relational containment is a breaking down of political and social boundaries. The "lines of flight" described by Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, methodology of the oppressed espoused by Chela Sandoval, and Borderlands theorized by Gloria Anzaldúa each address the spatial and relational aspects of containment to which Huggan refers. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987); Chela Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000); Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands, La Frontera: A New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1999). The metaphors of mapping and boundary crossing that each of the scholars employs signify the breaking down of spatial borders while simultaneously recognizing the multiple connections between cultures, identities, and ideas. Huggan, *Interdisciplinary Measures*, 28. The mental picture they create of destroying spatial boundaries becomes a powerful mechanism for conceptualizing the construction of rhizomes, differential consciousness, and mestizas, and embracing hybridity.
- [21] Lacy and Ono, "Introduction," 2.
- [22] Raka Shome, "Postcolonial Interventions in the Rhetorical Canon: An 'Other' View," *Communication Theory* 6 (1996): 41.
- [23] Lacy and Ono, "Introduction," 8.
- [24] Roland Barthes, *The Fashion System* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983); Jennifer Craik, *The Face of Fashion: Cultural Studies in Fashion* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Dorinne K. Kondo, *About Face: Performing Race in Fashion and Theater* (New York: Routledge, 1997).
- [25] Craik, *The Face of Fashion*, 17.
- [26] Nirmal Puwar, "Multicultural Fashion . . . Stirrings of Another Sense of Aesthetics and Memory," *Feminist Review* 71 (2002): 66–67.

- [27] Julia Emberley, "The Fashion Apparatus and the Deconstruction of Postmodern Subjectivity," in *Body Invaders: Panic Sex in America*, eds. Arthur Kroker and Marilouise Kroker (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987), 47–48.
- [28] "Top 10 Fashion Films of the Season," *The Business of Fashion*, October 19, 2012, <http://www.businessoffashion.com/2012/10/fashion-2-0-top-10-fashion-films-of-the-season-7.html>.
- [29] "Top 10 Fashion Films."
- [30] "Top 20 Fashion Films." Interestingly, *Jodhpur Jackie*, which tells the story of Jackie Kennedy's 1962 visit to Jodhpur, was created by an Indian artist, adding a new layer to the complex negotiation of difference. *L'Odysee de Cartier*, however, narrates domination of global markets through a jeweled panther, a metonym for the West.
- [31] We have put the word "Chinese" in quotes here to indicate the actor's use of yellowface.
- [32] The women who signify as white European and Americans in the film are all famous individuals. Coco Chanel was a fashion designer and household name, Marlene Dietrich was a German-born movie star known for her beauty and sophistication, and Wallace Simpson was the divorcee who married the King Edward VIII, an act that required him to abdicate the throne. The Asians in yellowface however are generic types—peasants, prostitutes, and royalty. They are literally interchangeable types who are significant for their social role rather than as an individual personality.
- [33] Kondo, *About Face*; Josephine Lee, *The Japan of Pure Invention: Gilbert and Sullivan's "The Mikado"* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).
- [34] Tina Chen, *Double Agency: Acts of Impersonation in Asian American Literature and Culture* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005); Krystyn R. Moon, *Yellowface: Creating the Chinese in American Popular Music and Performance, 1850s–1920s*, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005).
- [35] Robert G. Lee, *Orientalists: Asian Americans in Popular Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999); Kent A. Ono and Vincent Pham, *Asian Americans and the Media*, (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2009); Moon, *Yellowface*.
- [36] Lee, *The Japan of Pure Invention*; Moon, *Yellowface*; Jeffrey A. Ow, "The Revenge of the Yellowfaced Cyborg Terminator: The Rape of Digital Geishas and the Colonization of Cyber-Coolies in 3D Realms' Shadow Warrior," in *Asian America.Net: Ethnicity, Nationalism, and Cyberspace*, eds. Rachel C. Lee and Sau-ling Cynthia Wong (New York: Routledge, 2003), 249–66.
- [37] Chen, *Double Agency*.
- [38] See Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Michael Rogin, *Blackface, White Noise: Jewish Immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).
- [39] Susan Gubar, *Racechanges: White Skin, Black Face in American Culture* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); Doreen K. Kondo, "(Re)visions of Race: Contemporary Race Theory and the Cultural Politics of Racial Crossover in Documentary Theatre," *Theatre Journal* 52 (2000): 81–107; Kondo, *About Face*.
- [40] Lisa Nakamura, *Cybertypes: Race, Ethnicity, and Identity on the Internet* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 89.
- [41] Gillian Rose, *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to the Interpretation of Visual Materials*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2008), 149–52; Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright, *Practices of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).
- [42] Jamie Moshin and Ronald L. Jackson II, "Inscribing Racial Bodies and Relieving Responsibility: Examining Racial Politics of *Crash*," in *Critical Rhetorics of Race*, eds. Michael G. Lacy and Kent A. Ono (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 214–32; Sturken and Cartwright, *Practices of Looking*.



- [43] Anthony Sze-Fai Shiu, "What Yellowface Hides: Video Games, Whiteness, and the American Racial Order," *The Journal of Popular Culture* 39 (2006), 122.
- [44] Rey Chow, *Writing Diaspora: Tactics of Intervention in Contemporary Cultural Studies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 51.
- [45] Jane Gallop, *Reading Lacan* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985).
- [46] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 109–12.
- [47] We thank Dorinne Kondo for pointing out the importance of repetition in the performance of yellowface in her response to our paper, "Exoticism in Fashion: Colonialism and Race in Contemporary Fashion Design," presented at the Crossroads of Cultural Studies Conference, July 2–6, 2013, Paris.
- [48] The encounter between Chanel and Dietrich in the 1940s is a particularly acute act of historical revisionism. In the 1940s Dietrich, a German national, was openly anti-Nazi, even appearing in an US army uniform in protest. Chanel, on the other hand, began a romance with a German officer during France's occupation and would have stood trial as a collaborator had Sir Winston Churchill not intervened.
- [49] The Empress Dowager Cixi, who ruled China just prior to the Boxer Revolution, was notoriously anti-Western in ideology. Not only does her open-armed invitation to Chanel belie the reality of her governance, but it adds to the film's fantasy of the power of white womanhood and the power of colonial fashion. Only in Lagerfeld's world does China willingly accept, and indeed welcome, the West's encroachment.
- [50] bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 21.
- [51] Christina Hoff Sommers, *Who Stole Feminism?: How Women Have Betrayed Women* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994); Camille Paglia, *Vamps and Tramps: New Essays* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994); Katie Roiphe, *The Morning After: Sex, Fear, and Feminism* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1994).
- [52] Michele L. Hammers, "Cautionary Tales of Liberation and Female Professionalism: The Case Against Ally McBeal," *Western Journal of Communication* 69 (2005): 167–82; Virginia McCarver, "The Rhetoric of Choice and 21st-Century Feminism: Online Conversations About Work, Family, and Sarah Palin," *Women's Studies in Communication* 34 (2011): 20–41; Belinda A. Stillion Southard, "Beyond the Backlash: Sex and the City and Three Feminist Struggles," *Communication Quarterly* 56 (2008): 149–67; Mary Douglas Vavrus, "Domesticating Patriarchy: Hegemonic Masculinity and Television's 'Mr. Mom,'" *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 19 (2002): 352–75.
- [53] Sarah Banet-Weiser, "What's Your Flava? Race and Postfeminism in Media Culture," in *Interrogating Postfeminism Gender and the Politics of Popular Culture*, eds. Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 201–25. See also, Davi Johnson, "Selling Sarafem: Priestly and Bardic Discourses in the Construction of Premenstrual Syndrome," *Women's Studies in Communication* 27 (2004): 330–51; Katarina Kuruc, "Fashion as Communication: A Semiotic Analysis of Fashion on 'Sex and the City,'" *Semiotica* 171 (2008): 193–214; Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra, "Introduction," in *Interrogating Postfeminism: Gender and the Politics of Popular Culture*, eds. Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).
- [54] Tasker and Negra, "Introduction," 2.
- [55] Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (Routledge, 1994), 34.
- [56] Mari Yoshihara, *Embracing the East: White Women and American Orientalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).
- [57] Julietta Hua, "'Gucci Geishas' and Post-feminism," *Women's Studies in Communication* 32 (2009): 63–88.
- [58] In using the term "place," we are referring to the "bordered, specified, and locatable." We use "space," on the other hand, to refer to the "open, undifferentiated, [and] undesignated."

- Carole Blair, Greg Dickinson, and Brian L. Ott, "Introduction," in *Places of Public Memory: The Rhetoric of Museums and Memorials*, eds. Greg Dickinson, Carole Blair, and Brian L. Ott (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2010), 23.
- [59] Raka Shome makes a similar argument with respect to *City of Joy*, demonstrating that surveilling disorder and chaos operates as a means to civilizing racial Others and justifying the imposition of white norms and the assertion of cultural superiority under the guise of encouraging helpless Indians to help themselves. Raka Shome, "Race and Popular Cinema: The Rhetorical Strategies of Whiteness in 'City of Joy,'" *Communication Quarterly* 44 (1996): 502–18.
- [60] The 2010 Special Issue of *Critical Studies in Media Communication* on Space, Matter, Mediation and the Prospects of Democracy showcases this turn to rhetorical study of space and materiality.
- [61] Jeremy Packer and Stephen B. Crofts Wiley, "Introduction: The Materiality of Communication," in *Communication Matters: Materialist Approaches to Media, Mobility and Networks*, eds. Jeremy Packer and Stephen B. Crofts Wiley (New York: Routledge, 2011), 3.
- [62] Carole Blair, "Contemporary U.S. Memorial Sites as Exemplars of Rhetoric's Materiality," in *Rhetorical Bodies*, eds. Jack Selzer and Sharon Crowley (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999), 17.
- [63] William C. Johnstone, *The Shanghai Problem* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1937), 98.
- [64] Frederic E. Wakeman, *Policing Shanghai, 1927–1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 14.
- [65] Wakeman, *Policing Shanghai*, 14.
- [66] While the first scene of *Paris-Shanghai* is described as being in "China" and the Imperial Court was seated in Beijing, the title of the film and the location of the accompanying fashion show directs the audience to think of Shanghai even if doing so is historically inaccurate. We thus treat Shanghai as the focal point of Lagerfeld's imaginary and the accompanying implications.
- [67] Sarah Sharma, "It Changes Space and Time! Introducing Power-Chronography," in *Communication Matters: Materialist Approaches to Media, Mobility and Networks*, ed. Jeremy Packer and Stephen B. Crofts Wiley (London: Routledge, 2011), 71.
- [68] Sharma, "It Changes Space and Time!," 68.
- [69] Said, *Orientalism*, 161.
- [70] Arif Dirlik, "Timespace, Social Space, and the Question of Chinese Culture," *Boundary 2*, 35 (2008): 2, 7.
- [71] Dirlik, "Timespace, Social Space, and the Question of Chinese Culture": 13, 3.
- [72] Renato Rosaldo, *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993): 68–74.
- [73] Johnstone, *The Shanghai Problem*.
- [74] Lacy and Ono, "Introduction," 6.