Nostalgia and Escapism
History and Memory can be Invented

• Or at least people try
The Commissar Vanishes

• Alteration of historic photos in Stalin’s USSR
• Lenin in 1919, Red Square, with and without Trotsky
• Stalin and Yezov 1930s

• After Yezov has been executed by Stalin in 1940
• Stalin fakes a photo of friendship with Lenin
• Turns it into art and statues
• The vanishing of the Old Bolsheviks
Suppression of History

• History can be altered, erased
  – Works for historic landscapes too
“Danzig is German”
Great Zimbabwe
Great Zimbabwe

- Royal centre of a medieval African civilization
- Considerable achievement compared to medieval Europe
- In C19th and C20th many European historians refused to accept that Africans had built it
  - theories of visiting Arabs
The Bamyan Buddhas
Ahmicj Mosque, Bosnia
Mostar Bridge
Mostar bridge destroyed
Mostar Bridge

• Now rebuilt as a symbol of post-war reconstruction
• But the ethnic divide remains
• Heritage architecture as a balm for the wounds of conflict?
  – A means of escape?
Escapism

• A book by geographer Tuan, Yi Fu
• There’s a theme of escapism in human culture
  – From the imagination of palaeolithic cave artists
  – To the obvious fakery of theme parks and malls
• Has a bearing on the use of history and heritage in contemporary urban culture
Master Planned Communities

• Private residential developments

• Marketed as safe, planned communities with regulated architectural order
  – A fetish for retro-styled architecture and ‘neo-urbanist’ streetscaping
  – Important regulatory functions performed by the private sector

• Nostalgic escapism you can live in
Seaside, Florida

- Prototype “Neo-urbanist” community designed by Andres Zuany & Elizabeth Playter-Zyberk in the early 1980s
- Utopian walking community
- Whimsical post-modern architecture, gazebos and turrets
- Admired and inspired
  - Prince Charles a fan
Seaside, Florida

- In 15 years prototype neo-urbanism degenerates into touristy rental summer-cottage resort
The Truman Show

- Jim Carrey does “hyperreality TV”
- *The Matrix* as a comedy?
- Shot on location at Seaside, Florida
Markham Heritage Estates

• 1988 Markham initiates a scheme to place “heritage” buildings in a new subdivision.
  – A refuge for displaced historic buildings
• Town-owned 38-lot ‘heritage’ subdivision
• Lots sold below market price to those who will pay to install an historic structure
Markham Heritage Estates

• Intended to encourage developers to ‘save’ historic buildings otherwise threatened with elimination

• Makes it easier for developers to remove unwanted historic structures and satisfy heritage requirements in subdivision schemes
Markham Heritage Estates

- Limited attempt to situate buildings in historically-appropriate ways
- Becomes a bizarre theme-subdivision
Heritage In Markham

- Additional schemes to get developers to recycle old buildings for other purposes
- ‘Preserves’ the building, but not the context.
Markham: Cornell

- Later 1980s:
  - David Peterson’s Liberal government promotes a scheme for mixed-income housing in Markham
  - Includes rental co-ops, high rises, townhouses

- Residents object
Markham: Cornell

• Early 1990s
  – US ‘neo-urbanist’ planners Andres Zuany and Elizabeth Playter-Zyberk invited to redesign the scheme
  – Initially wanted a ‘small-town USA’ look
  – Later press-releases talked of a ‘small-town Ontario’ look
Markham: Cornell

• The neo-urbanist makeover brought ‘Victorian’ architectural styling and ‘town’ streetscaping
• High-rises and rental co-ops vanished
  – There’s a price for neo-urbanist landscaping
Markham: Cornell

• Most of the homes in these recreated ‘Victorian heritage’ landscapes were bought by Chinese and Asian immigrants
  – Not really their heritage
Nostalgia and Escapism

• The culture distorts ‘history’ and ‘heritage’ for its own purposes.

• History is
  – contested
  – invented
  – Distorted
  – Inauthentic
Nostalgia and Escapism

- Part of a retreat from present reality into simulated environments?
- Theme parks, theme malls, theme suburbs
- Sim Cities: achieving social perfection by simulating reality?
- End times?