THOMAS TSANG

CLOUD OF UNKNOWING: A CITY WITH SEVEN STREETS

DESIGN FOLIO
FACULTY OF ARCHITECTURE
UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG
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This Taipei Fine Arts Museum, 1983
It was the first museum in Taiwan built for contemporary art exhibitions.
Architect: Kao Er-Pan
Project Details

co-Curator
Thomas Tsang
co-Curator
Roan Ching-Yueh

Exhibition Title
Cloud of Unknowing: A City with Seven Streets

Output
Curation and Design

Function
Art and Architecture Exhibition

Location
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Venue
Taipei Fine Arts Museum

Date of installation
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Cloud of Unknowing: A City with Seven Streets (2014) is a key exhibition organized by the museum in conjunction with the city government’s celebration for the 130th Anniversary of Taipei’s Founding in 2014. Because this marks the first time for the museum to present a themed exhibition on the subject of urban spatiality and issues pertaining, therefore, two important scholars from Taiwan and Hong Kong specializing in spatial discourses are invited as co-curators, and they are: Professor Thomas TSANG from the University of Hong Kong and Professor Ching Yueh ROAN from Taiwan’s Yuan Ze University. The exhibition includes 25 important artists from Taiwan, Hong Kong, China, and Japan, whose artistic focuses
are on spatial contents, location-specific memories, and habitation relationships, with many new site-specific artworks to be presented.

The central theme of the exhibition deals with the multiple angles observed in today’s society, and by forgoing urban psychical structures and architectures, the focus is placed on examining the cultural elements and historical contexts contained in a city’s composition, and to closely investigate the interconnected links and implications that have evolved and been derived from urban spaces and cultural memories. Moreover, the exhibition further attempts to think outside of the box from the museum’s conventional approaches and habits with its venue, and from which, the third-floor tube-shaped space is transformed to simulate a cityscape
containing seven streets. From the artists’ spatial interpretations and transformations, the core subjectivity of the city in the modern life is reexamined, and through the distinctive features expressed through the various media of sounds, installations, constructions, images, manuscripts, and objects, the audience is guided to observe the interdependent contraposition between the architectural space and the body’s memory in the chaotic and vague modern city, where elusion and reality are intermixed.
4.1 North Meets South Collective
4.2 Kuang-Tsung Tseng
4.3 Lee Peifeng
4.4 Hyungmin Pai

5.1 Studio Mumbai
5.2 Lee Wai-I
5.3 Chung-Han Yao
5.4 Ting Fung Ho

6.1 Ou Ling
6.2 Lee Jiun-Yang
6.3 Chang Yung Ho

7.1 Lu Li-Huang
7.2 Wang Zhe
7.3 Cooper Fang
7.4 Ken Ueno
7.5 Wang Wei-Ho
7.6 Pak Sheung Chuen

Street of Learning
Street of Objects
Street of Utopia
Street of Cloud
Originality

Because this marks the first time for the museum to present a themed exhibition on the subject of urban spatiality and issues about space. But what if the ordinary and daily life of a city, and a local’s knowledge of and within it, were seen as a sort of expertise or tacit know-how; the wisdom of types can learn from East Asian cities, like Taipei, Hong Kong, and Tokyo. As intervenes in the problematic gap between the perception of the architect as an expert on space, and the public as novices and introduces a tricky territory for action.
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Research Questions

- One question we had was, what are the beliefs underpinning East Asian modernism?
- What is the distinction between an architecture project and exhibition, blur their expectation between fiction and reality, and inhabit inside the artwork?
- How can one uncover that illustrates the architectural and social history of an urban site and contributes to contemporary understandings of city conservation and regeneration?
- How can revisiting past projects help capture the continuously evolving history of architectural and urban thinking, and how can aspects of these projects be adapted for new critical and creative design production?
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Rigor

The project was an opportunity to rethink the architectural experience as a building type, its narrative and material relationship to surrounding contexts, and the interaction between art, urban, street, and architecture to address historical fabric and foster contemporary arts/architecture assets, and to help form the public memory.

Key design methods included:

• Examining critically the original museum with its engagement interpretation on architecture exhibition, undertaken 30 years ago, to develop models for exhibiting the contemporary life.
• To develop a project based on research to understand the relationship between a building’s exterior surface and its interior
structure and spatial and environmental qualities.

• Making a new installation project that survey how exhibition can a series of exploratory tools to understanding today’s human activity.

• Experiment with artists working in the realm of representational techniques, including construction, how processes of modernization and urbanization how translate into individual architectural object.
fig. 1: Dehow Projects: ‘Poster for Grand Opening’,
CHEN CHI-KWAN, 2014
fig. 6: Material: Metal Chain - Pantone Match
fig. 7: Construction of Exhibition
fig. 8: Existing Tile from Luce Chapel
fig. 9: Construction of Exhibition
fig. 10: Chen Chi-Kwan: Silver Print Collage of the Luce Chapel Interior Under-construction

1. STREET OF CHI-KWAN

Born in Beijing in 1921, Mr. Chi Kwan CHEN studied architecture at the Central University in Chongqing. He set sail for the US to continue his studies in 1948. In 1951, he joined the architectural firm of Walter Gropius. Invited by I.M. Pei in 1954, he participated in the design of the campus of Tunghai University and returned to settle in Taiwan in 1960.

Mr. CHEN had outstanding achievements in both architecture and painting. The Luce Memorial Chapel at Tunghai University is one of the representative works of his architectural design. In 2004, he received the National Award for Arts for his series of paintings. There are three reasons for giving him the award:

With the aesthetic of an architect, CHEN combined abstract concepts with the medium of ink to create a new art of painting that evokes a mystical, architectural, ethereal and pure world of the imagination beyond time and space. His work demonstrates a high degree of creativity and freedom. Fusing memories and imaginative elements, as well as emphasizing the exploration of the “new”, his work shows constant, multi-dimensional expansion through radiating, juxtaposed forms. Hence, his creativity in art is highly original. The paintings are decorative, with architectural lines and hallucinatory spaces that stimulate us to look at the environment around us in a new light. His style is inspiring and produces a cumulative effect.
2. STREET OF LANDSCAPE

The Industrial Revolution that began on the European Continent spelled the official end of the agricultural civilization. Those in the countryside had no choice but to move to the cities. Due to population growth and the high-density architecture, there was hardly any land left for natural green space.

However, after more than a century of modern urban development, the relationship between man and nature still remains to be resolved. This gives us the opportunity to re-examine it in our own culture. In particular, the quest for harmony / union between man, nature and the universe in East Asian civilization, as reflected in the literati’s emphasis on landscape painting and gardens, suggests that maintaining our respect for landscape and the universe may be a solution for the modern city.

No matter how “advanced” our civilization becomes, there are still sounds of the forest and the ocean in our DNA and our blood, and we still follow the natural cycles of the waning and waxing of the moon. This has nothing to do with whether we have advanced technology. Originating from nature, we have to go back to nature.

It is only right that the city and the people should respect and love nature.
3. STREET OF SCALE

The Street of Scales is initially hidden from view. It is present only as a controlled attempt to abandon visible forms of urban structures. Objects from superficial experiences and ordinary life are offered up with great reverence in an intimate and organic way, so that we barely give any notice to them. What intrigues in the street of measures are objects that have been displaced from their original intent, and transformed from their original size.

Changes in proportion provide a necessary stimulation that serves to unify memory, affirm convictions, and awaken the subconscious. Structures that enclose objects on urban roadways gradually become distinct; and buildings become reflective of the city. Memories are recalled generation after generation; the Street of Scales reassures us that memories are not guided by the specificities of time or place. These scales: of tantei (detective), of chikasa (proximity), and of engawa (buffer-zone), not only assure and validate us of our communal yearning and knowledge, but also consciously provoke shifts in scale that are perceived in complex and continued confirmation as they quietly fill and inhabit the streets. These creations and installations thus become autobiographical narratives.
4. STREET OF LEARNING

We are taught to understand the unknown world through logic of words and numbers, away from unfamiliar diversity, of sight and sound. These bear witness to our constant resistance to learning in confronting the overwhelming and often hostile forces of change. The strength of a community is in its connection to a shared communal memory. It provides a space and time for procuring knowledge that ultimately enables growth and self-defence. This occurs organically whenever we are irrevocably transformed by natural or man-made challenges, or when a treasured memory captures our interest. The knowledge we acquire often remains unseen, but its intangible presence increases in strength as it becomes embodied. Though the physical city exists in the buildings it encompasses, the forgotten spaces between buildings are valuable lessons in primal instinct that buffer against the ravages of time. Observation is an act of recognizing self-identity. These are constantly created from recurring sights and sounds. Observations include inherited memories and experiences. They are a necessary practice that influence ways in which we construct meaning and gain inspiration from our experiences.
5. STREET OF OBJECTS

The Street of Objects represents a lexicon of objects through which a city identifies itself. These objects evoke narrative fragments: missing maps, subverted anecdotes, and chronicles of images. As these narrative objects become familiar, they gradually unify any unresolved fragments. In varying ways, these buildings create a site that embodies our memories, and from which we begin to question the parts that form the urban whole, or which streets belong to the city. There are numerous ways in which a city resists fragmentation with shared connections despite zoning changes. Individually, objects hold no significance. But they become symbols only through memory or psychological associations. Without these anchors, objects lose inherent epistemological value and become invisible, meaningless, and immobile.
6. STREET OF UTOPIA

In western architecture, there have been continuous reflections on and projections of utopian ideals. However, there is hardly any imagination or quest of a utopia in Eastern architecture.

Of course, both Peach Blossom Spring written by Tao Yuan-ming and the painting Along the River During the Ching-ming Festival by Chang Tse-duan manifest the richness of the mixture of culture and reality in people’s daily lives, and reflect the longing that a city / village should be people-oriented. However, while subtly celebrating an existing city or an isolated village, neither dared to pinpoint what the human society should strive for.

“Street of Utopia” intends to find out why we have no such imagination of the ideal architecture / city, and where this kind of utopia should originate from. It also raises the question whether we are too timid to believe in the future, or whether we are so oppressed by power and the reality that we dare not face the contemporary society, and can only resign ourselves or withdraw ourselves from the world.

The city certainly needs myths, as well as utopias.
fig. 1: Dehow Projects: MONO VALLEY UTOPIA, 2014
The collaboration is between curator, artist, and exhibitor, this project is collection of body of work explores how relationships are articulated by the series of existing art works and programme rooms, building a singular wooden structure explore through furniture support members scaled into a structure for inhabitation.

Three principle ideas on MONO VALLEY MOUND:

**Mono**
A series of rooms within an existing gallery room, seamless intervention of both structure and display, emerge as singular and autonomous form.

**Valley**
An literal and figural collective point where visitor experience total image of the exhibition, as the cross-section melting between entry and exit mounds.

**Utopia**
As the buffer zone, between reality and fiction through the sense rural atmosphere in the setting of urban context of museum, both natural and artificial encounters through of visual and sensory contradictions.
There is always an element of enlightenment/ irrationality in creativity. The creator must admit his own inadequacy before he can conjure up this unknown spirit. However, there are few that are gifted with divine revelation. It has no direct correlation with the knowledge or status that one has. In fact, the example of sciomancers in Taiwan shows that the opposite is the case, and that the knowledge and moral system of the world may be the obstacle of direct communication.

The universe has existed as space anonymously for eternity. Self-conscious human beings have named all things on earth and defined the meaning of their existence in relation to mankind. However, there must be unexplored spaces in the spaces that we know and beyond the spaces we know. In that case, can we really grasp

the real existence of space?
What is the relationship between man and space? Is it definite or indefinite?
Maybe the answer is in the shifting clouds in the sky!
This project was the architect’s first design for a metropolitan building type.
This project was the architect's first design for a metropolitan building type.
Significance

The first thematic researched exhibition of the history of the museum and the exhibition marks the 130th Anniversary of Taipei’s Founding in 2014. The show was nominated for the Taishin Arts Award for Visual Arts and was selected among the top five public exhibitions for 2014 in Taiwan according to a poll as reported by China Times, was seen by over 176,500 people during the three months.

Featured full-scale installations, photographs, drawings, collages and other exhibits that explored the modernism theme as well as the different ways of experiencing architecture and the ambiguous status of architecture as an object of display. The works organized along seven “streets” that reflected
such perspectives as learning, objects, utopia, and landscape. On the walls, some suspended from the ceiling, some were on the floor, and some could be inhabitable, to present artefacts in spatial and environmental qualities. As a result, it prompted audiences to reimagine how they understand an architecture exhibition in the context of the art museum, as continuously evolving history of architectural and urban thinking.
Dissemination and Evidence of Peer Review

The Cloud of Unknowing: A City with Seven Streets was seen by over 176,500 people between 5 May - 17 August 2014. The exhibition was nominated for the Taishin Arts Award for Visual Arts and was selected among the top five public exhibitions for 2014 in Taiwan, according to a poll as reported by China Times. At the latter end, a commissioned project was selected as a finalist in the 2014 ADA Awards for Emerging Architects, exhibited at the UBC Museum of Anthropology in Vancouver, and one exhibitor leads to published two monograph comic novels.

The University of Hong Kong and the Faculty of Architecture awarded 2016
Faculty Knowledge of Exchange (KE) Award, a summary of evaluation by the Selection Committee recognized for its contribution to public “This is a rare example of an architect curating a cast of high-calibre international artists to produce an exhibition that clearly captured a nation’s attention.”

TFAM’s architectural exhibitions have garnered public attention and opened a fresh view through the cross-disciplinary convergence of art and architecture. List of Architecture Exhibition at the TFAM has explored the form of the architectural retrospective, at the beginning of 2002. A significant contribution was the disciplinary underpinning of the museum to examine architecture exhibition as a research endeavor that allows the commissioned curators to interpret the
specify as collaborative adventures, situate artists to interact with these locations, both the site and exhibition into a living entity.

**History of Architecture Exhibition at the TFAM:**

“Cloud of Unknowing: A City with Seven Streets” (2014)
“Glenn Murcutt: Architecture for Place” (2011)
“Richard Rogers + Architects: From the House to the City” (2010)
“Toyo Ito: Generative Order” (2008)
“Archilab: Collection du FRAC Centre” (2008)

The exhibition has been reviewed in the case-studies of curatorial studies program at universities. Presented in over 20 lectures including Harvard University, Wellesley College, Tongji University and among others.

Exhibitors include:
Street of Chi-Kwan, Chi Kwan CHEN;

Street of Landscape: Wei Ho WANG, Kuo Chang LIU, C.Y. LEE, Fu Yu CHEN;
Street of Scales: Terunobu FUJIMORI, Go HASEGAWA, Jun IGARASHI;

Street of Learning: Nick BONNER, Dominic JOHNSON-HILL, Department of Architecture - Tohoku Institute of Technology, Pei Feng LEE, Tsan Cheng WU;

Street of Objects: Sheung Chuen PAK, Wei I LEE, Ting Fung HO, Chung Han YAO; Street of Utopia: Ning OU, Jiun Yang LEE, Yung Ho CHANG;

Street of Cloud: Interbreeding Field, Che WANG, Cooper FANG, Ken UENO, Jay CHIU

Catalogue contributors include: ROAN Ching-Yueh, Thomas TSANG, Aric CHEN, Terunobu FUJIMORI, Yung Ho CHANG, Sand HELSEL, and OU Ning
Appendix

Books, journals, and references to the project written by others:

Cloud of Unknowing: A City with Seven Streets, Modern Art, No.173 Quarterly, Taipei Fine Art Museum, Taipei, Taiwan, June 2014, pp. 110-117
Cloud of Unknowing: A City with Seven Streets, IW Magazine, No.98, Taipei, Taiwan, July 2014, pp. 61-66
Cloud of Unknowing: A City with Seven Streets, ARTCO, Quarterly September, Taiwan, July 2014, pp. 109-112

Bibliography

“Cloud of Unknowing: an Exhibition about Modern Asian Architecture”
The University of Hong Kong, Knowledge Exchange, KE Newsletter - Issue 11 November 2016 - Link

“Cloud of Unknowing: A City with Seven Streets”
Taipei Fine Arts Museum - Exhibition Link - Video Trailer - Exhibition Catalogue
The Department of Architecture educates students in an active culture of service, scholarship and invention. Uniquely situated at the crossroads of China and global influence, the Department takes the approach that design is best explored from a sophisticated understanding of both. With a multidisciplinary curriculum emphasizing technology, history and culture, students gain broad knowledge and skills in the management of the environmental, social, and aesthetic challenges of contemporary architectural practice. With opportunities for design workshops, international exchanges, and study travel, graduates of the Department of Architecture are well prepared for contribution to both international and local communities of architects and designers.