Exquisite Scrolls: Collaborative Drawing in the Space Time of Post-digital Representation

CHENG-CHUN PATRICK HWANG
The Chinese University of Hong Kong

YUK-YI SUKEY HUI
The Chinese University of Hong Kong

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What is the function of architectural drawings, those drawn by architecture students that are conducive to learning? This paper discusses a pedagogical experiment generated from a series of collaborative drawings. The end goal seeks for a new agency, through a didactic platform and process exploring the *visuality* of the productive observation instead of the *optical* graphics of realism. Through the intermediary of the drawing in the present, the retrospective and prospective character of the design process can be explored. By reintroducing drawing as a medium of thought, its power to project a clear and intentional inquiry can be revealed. Inspired by the Chinese scroll painting and the spirit of public drawing from the west, *Exquisite Scroll* is a collaborative hand-drawing exercise with a working method akin to the Surrealist game exquisite corpse. It is corporeal in nature and requires intellectual exchange between a multiplicity of authors. It is a negotiated act showing beyond what is observed. The thematic topics of urban historiography and architectural conservation are further explored through a 'multi-temporal' perspective, to look into the past and future in both space and time.

Drawing in the Age of Post-digital Representation

In the past three decades, digital technologies have rapidly becoming ubiquitous in architectural schools. How should drawing situate within the context of post-digital era at school? Is the distinction between the digital and the hand drawing still a relevant debate? Is the digital drawing even a drawing at all or does it deserve a more precise and updated definition?

This paper argues that the role of drawing plays simultaneously in both architectural thinking and representation. Drawing is not only a representational tool but also an instrument of thought[1], which allows us to articulate ideas through the drawing process as well as using drawing to think. The loose definition of what a drawing is, has obliterated the drawing itself. John May claimed that 'everything is already an image', and architecture is immersed in an enormous cultural experiment called imaging[2]. He examined the literal and technical definitions of drawing, photograph, and image to clarify the status of computational images in contemporary architectural thought and practice. To put it simply, much of the images we see of architectural production are not drawings but dataset instead.

With the fundamental shift over the last thirty years to the use of computer-aided drawing programs, there emerges a trend towards hyper-realism representation. During this period, architects made drawings not to reimagine a better world, but instead to make a set of increasingly marketable rendered images. Issues of representation were discarded for slick renditions of speculative development through photorealistic images. The production of the images are to elevate, enhance the potentiality of the property owner, investors or the State. Whether it is land speculation or investment on a property acquisition, the objective is not to advance a visionary agenda in the avant-garde sense of the tradition, but rather to monetize the images.

In *Architecture Enters the Age of Post-Digital Drawing*, Sam Jacobs lamented that the culture of digital rendering has almost killed a critical architectural act: the facility to speculate through drawing[3]. He asserted that the high-fidelity rendering packages have transformed the architectural drawings as the body-double of photography. Presenting the audience with a realistic image of the building-to-be and indirectly creating a deep fake representation of the world at large. Similarly, Alberto Pérez-Gómez questioned the role of computer graphics as merely a tool of systematic representation, degenerating into a banal mannerism in a sea of homogeneity[4]. The fait accompli is what has stimulated the re-emergence to the act of drawing in the era of the post-digital.

Mario Carpo urged architects to consider the profound effects of technology as the 'second digital turn' has begun[5]. He pointed out that the fallacy of considering the collage is a crucial image-making technology. Digital technologies for design and fabrication have been changing people's ways of making, and now poised to change most of the ways of thinking.

For us, post-digital representation offers the opportunity to include a multiplicity of medium. It does not preclude preliminary images that are sourced or created by the computer. At the same time, it is not limited to the use of computer only. In fact, the pedagogic exercise is hand drawn onto a piece of

Figure 1. "Along the River During the Qingming Festival". Image credit by Palace Museum, Taiwan.

10 meters long Strathmore paper with sufficient texture for shading and hatching.

COLLABORATIVE DRAWINGS

Back in the twelfth century, Chinese artists used the format of a handscroll to depict an urban landscape. One of the best-known examples is *Along the River During the Qingming Festival*, also known by its Chinese name *Qingming Shanghe Tu* (清明上河圖). The earliest extant version of the Qingming scroll was painted by Zhang Zeduan during the Song dynasty, now in the collection of the Palace Museum in Beijing. It measures 25.5 centimetres (10.03 inches) in height and stretches 5.25 metres (17.22 feet) in length and was painted in monochrome ink on silk. Copies and variations of the scroll abounded in later dynasties. The Qing-dynasty version in the collection of the National Palace Museum in Taipei is one of them. This copy is a collaboration of five painters; Chen Mei, Sun Hu, Jin Kun, Dai Hong and Cheng Zhidao; of the imperial painting academy under the Qianlong Emperor. It can be distinguished from the original by its colorful depiction of urban life specifically during the Ming and Qing dynasties. Both versions employed the use of an overhead quasi-isometric, in which the artists made something seems to come closer and then to recede (Figure 1). Although the handscrolls are displayed stretched out full-length under a glass case in modern museums, they are originally intended to be held by the viewer, who would unroll only an arm's length section at a time[6].

Collaborative drawing has been widely explored within and beyond architectural institutions internationally forming a contemporary discourse on drawing, while surprisingly little research is written on the topic. Artist Carl Lavia works with photographer Lorna Le Bredonchel to create a portrait of the whole United Kingdom through large-scale ink drawings of all 69 cities. The aerial drawings inspired a rediscovery of place, in which the present face of the ever-changing urban landscape is portrayed and the question of what could be in its future is stimulated. In 2016, Yoshiharu Tsukamoto and Momoyo Kaijima of the Atelier Bow-wow challenged a group of students at the Delft University of Technology and Harvard University's GSD to observe deeply of their surroundings and to record their discoveries as a series of 'Public Drawing'. The 'public' refers to both the subject matter of the public space being observed, as well as the openness of the creative process which allows multiple people to participate. The large pencil drawing depicts the ecology that happens around architecture, where shadowless objects, human figures and spaces coexist with construction details. The activity is characterized as drawing of architecture, drawing for architecture, drawing among architecture, and drawing around architecture[7].

The pedagogic exercise, *Exquisite Scroll*, builds on the ancient Chinese practice of portraying urban landscape in the format of a scroll, and integrates the collaborative nature of contemporary design process from the west. Beyond showing what is observed, the exercise is a negotiated act. The dialogical aspect of the exercise is acknowledged as a crucial element of the collaborative methodology. The exercise asks students to generate drawing collaboratively, to facilitate conversations and foster interdisciplinary co-operation. The act of drawing becomes a platform of engagement, relational and contingent upon the actions of those contributing authors (Figure 2).

RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

Originated in the 1920s, Exquisite Corpse is a technique of collaborative compositions in which each participant takes turns writing or drawing on a sheet of paper, folding it to conceal his or her contribution, and then passing it to the next player for further contribution. As the leaders of the surrealist movement André Breton noted, the method is 'designed to provide the most paradoxical confrontation possible between the elements of speech[8]'. He described in the *Second Manifesto of Surrealism* of 1930 that 'the collaborative efforts intended to result in the creation of a unique sentence or drawing[9]'. The pen was brought out to a strange possibility of thought, which is that of its pooling. A very striking relationship is established in this manner, that remarkable analogies appear,

Figure 2. Collaborative "Participatory Drawing of a City". Image by the author.

that an incomprehensible factor of irrefutability often intervenes, and that, in a nutshell is one of the most extraordinary meeting grounds.

The working method of *Exquisite Scroll* is a 10-metre long drawing equally divided by the number of students. Each student is responsible for drawing within a randomly assigned numeric confine, each area is identified by a, b, c, in which the width of area a = b+c. Using streets or architecture as the source of inspiration, student could draw from any view, including elevation, axonometric, section, perspective etc. creating a improvisational narrative along the way. Students are asked to draw what they see, but also histories they researched and future that they imagined. They are expected to understand the selective nature of drawing, what one leaves out is as essential as what one draws.

As a system of creating collaboration designated to accommodate numerous visions, exquisite corpse has been applied to drawing, film-making or architecture, in which the final work is the outcome of a genuinely shared effort building upon the existing imagery of each participant. The process allows for action with no single participant fully in control of the result. In *Creative Collaboration*, Vera John-Steiner proposed that 'collaborative partners can build on their solidarity as well as their differences; complementarity in knowledge, working habits and temperament adds to the motivation needed for effective partnerships[10].' Collaborative drawing stimulates and

challenges students whose efforts are expanded by watching a classmate, trying to keep up with him or her, and absorbing the other's belief in one's capabilities.

Exquisite Scroll is an initial exercise that leads students to the design of a studio proposal. The methodology is applicable to different studio topics at various levels because of its nimble nature. By introducing the act of drawing as a method of inquiry, students were given the time and space to gain insight, reflect on and learn about what is being seen and experienced. The scroll of paper act as a place to hold and experiment with the ideas, at the same time to allow a plurality of authors to engage in the design process.

DRAWING AS A WAY OF READING THE CITY

One example of the *Exquisite Scroll* is a piece inspired from-literature, as it has a special capacity for rendering visibility. *Participatory Drawing of a City* is the collective construction and aspiration of an imaginary city. As an introductory exercise to the graduate studio *Hong Kong Archive – Super Ordinary 2047*, students are encouraged to research, observe, and reimagine the streets of Kowloon through a set of choreographed interactivities. The factual findings are coincidentally contextualized with multiple fictional sources. One of which comes from the book *Atlas, An Archeology of an Imaginary City*, a quasi-fiction written by the Hong Kong novelist Dung Kai-Cheung. City is a place where incompatible activities and elements can coexist, and where multiplication of perspectives can occur at the same time. Depicting the streets of Kowloon, the drawing shows a city's characteristics from what it was; what it is; to what it could be. It folds, blends, propagates, and extrapolates history, theory and fiction into a series of 10-metre long scroll.

The transfiguration of Fa Yuen Street, Tung Choi Street and Boundary Street reveals dialogue between the past and present. Boundary Street is drawn in two directions in time, showing the disappeared historical territory that divided Hong Kong from China in 1860. Farmers from the New Territories sold flowers and vegetables next to the Kowloon-Canton Railway tracks, which opened in 1910. The centuries-old farming villages was transformed into a middle-class 'Garden City Estate' in 1921 by a British entrepreneur, Montague Ede. The scene then moved to Tung Choi Street, or 'Goldfish street' where pet fish shops congregate. Starting from the 1960s, fish breeders in the New Territories sold ornamental fish in buckets, bags and boxes of fish on the pavement. Walking towards south is Fa Yuen Street. Meaning 'Garden street' in Cantonese, it was a place of growing flowers in the Qing Dynasty (Figure 3). In the 1970s, it evolved to a retail street with hawker stalls selling bargain-priced fashion and 'sneaker street' packed with sportwear stores. Drawing becomes a documentation of experience the students have with the streets that they observe. The drawing process becomes a vehicle for insight, the relationship with the street and its history goes beyond just looking.
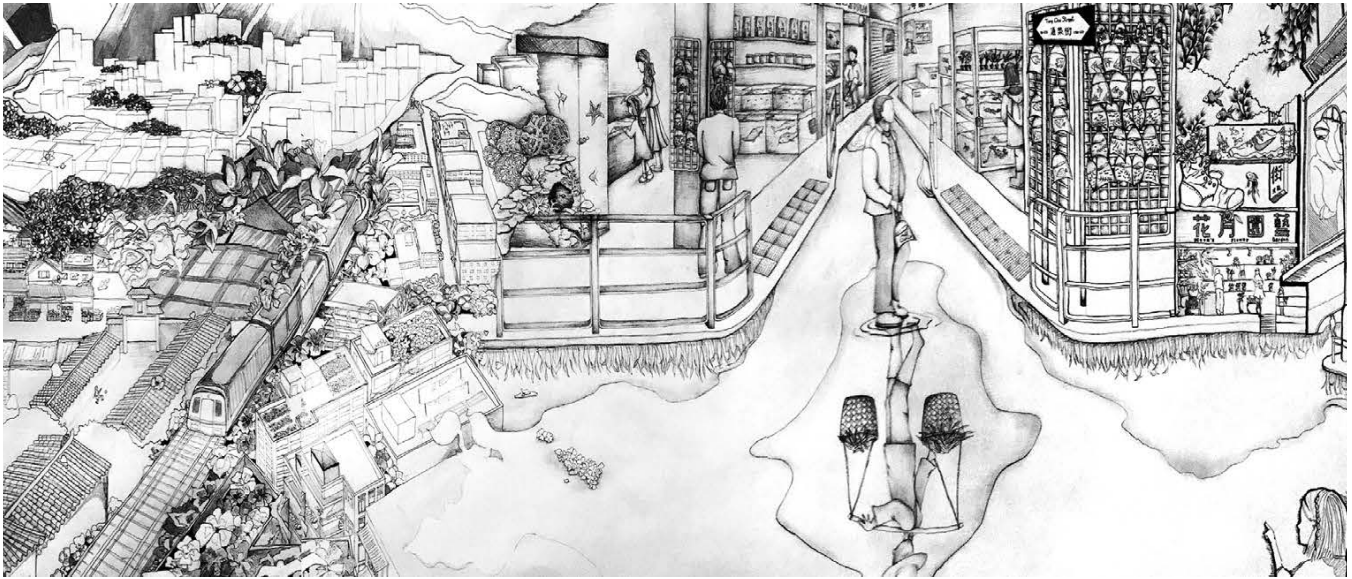
Figure 3. Kowloon Streets as an Imaginative City. Image by the author.

Hong Kong is an 'invisible city' built on contingency, historical accidents, shaped by times and circumstances beyond control. *Participatory Drawing of a City* reimagines the ordinary and the superlative wonders of Hong Kong, and how they could be re-enlivened in the future when duty calls upon them.

DRAWING AS A WAY OF SEEING BUILT HERITAGE
John Berger identifies drawing as an act of discovery, it is "an autobiographical record of one's discovery of an event – seen, remembered, or imagined.[11]" The other collaborative drawing *Sectioning Exquisite Corpse* generates ways of seeing adaptive-reuse strategies in architecture. Through researching the methodologies of architectural reuse and ideas behind the case studies, students become familiar with one main case study plus its adjacent case studies. The exercise enables them to perceive and analyse heritage, potently through drawing sections of the 'old and 'new' architectural elements.

 Section can be defined as a cut through the body of a building, perpendicular to the horizon line. In *Vertex and Vortex- A tectonics of Section*, Jennifer Bloomer described the convergence of inscription and incision as the moment when a section is born[12]. The collision of these two actions is what is conventionally called the poche, which is referred to 'floaters'. To inscribe is to capture a situation by giving it a visual presence. It is a trace, a memory, a description in between the viewer and the spatial narrative beyond. To incise is to discover the unknown of the beyond. It is a physical act, a temporal state of reading and understanding. The origin of section as a representational mechanism, has typically been associated with its capability to reveal the hidden workings of an existing building—often as a retrospective or analytical technique[13].

Sectioning Exquisite Corpse is a collective exploration of ten adaptive-reuse projects across their sectional potentials. The selected case studies are successful reuse projects of modern heritage from different parts of the world. Prior to drawing, students researched original sketches of the design, the building's history, context, methodologies of adaptive-reuse and produce interpretive sectional drawings, which demonstrate the archaeological layers of the building. They are asked to construct a 'visual' narration of the building's history. Drawing, photographs, newspapers, and the building itself thus become valuable resources to create a collaged understanding and interpretation of the building.

Students are asked to draw the case studies with the suitable scales and viewpoints that best reflect the nature of design. Multiple authors are responsible for the assembly of parts of different case studies, which accentuates the 'collage' nature of architectural conservation process. The exercise is meant to be part analysis and part imaginative extrapolation searching for the moment of truth in a section capable of triggering new frontiers. Following the exercise, students are asked to design and articulate an adaptive-reuse intervention to an under-valued heritage building. They are expected to conceive section as an interpretive narrative, before translating it into the project.

In contrast to the original game in which participants' own contribution is concealed from the next player, students shall be familiar with their adjacent case studies and make suitable transmutations. As a result, Herzog & de Meuron's Caixa Forum mutated into META4's Hong Kong Blue House Cluster, while Ibos & Vitart Architects's Musee des Beaux-Arts transformed into Bernard Tschumi's Le Fresnoy Contemporary Art. The extension of Musee des Beaux-Arts is a slender structure
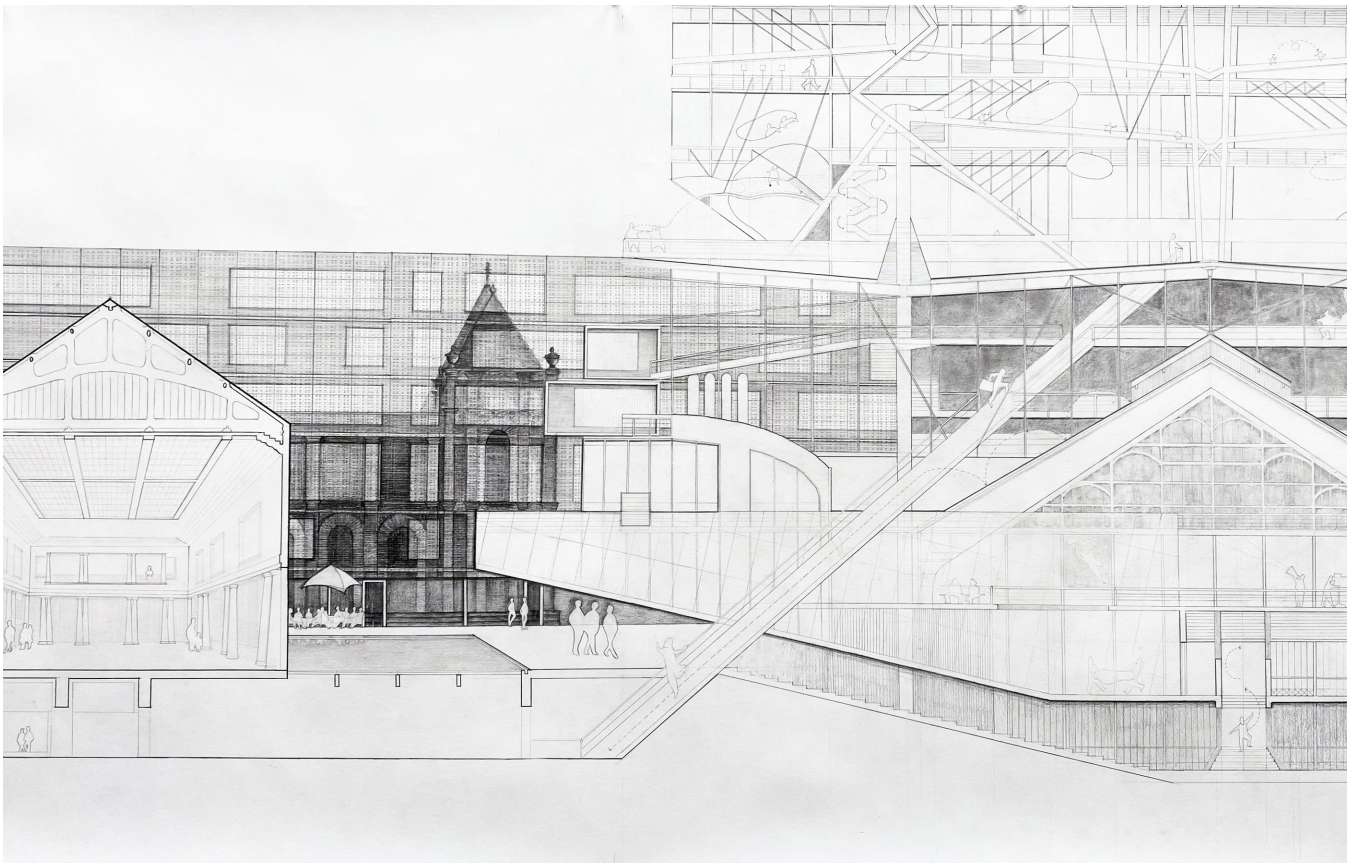
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Figure 4. Ibos & Vitart Architects Musee Des Beaux-Arts Transformed into Bernard Tschumi's Le Fresnoy Contemporary Art. Image by the author.

that reveals the initial scale of the original project. It renders a sense of normality, in which the existing museum is projected onto the exterior glass façade as a backdrop. The glass façade then evolved to the steel roof canopy of Le Fresnoy Art Centre, superimposed on a leisure complex of 1920. Developed as a cinematic montage, parts that inherently did not 'fit' together reconcile and create a space of in-between. The 'edge' becomes a 'threshold' articulating the moment of passage between precedents and original production, forming a refreshing composite scroll (Figure 4).

CONCLUSION

In the early 1800s Jean-Nicholas-Louis Durand attempted to determine the fundamental principles of architecture by outlining his vision in *Precis of the Lectures on Architecture*. For Durand it was first necessary to establish the basic elements that characterize it as a discipline[14]. Just as Euclidean geometry begins with the definition of the point and the line, architecture also needed to have its own ascertainable elements. The fundamental elements of a building and, by extension, of architecture was for Durand those that can be found in any building, regardless of its style. This belief in deducing architecture into fundamental elements was also informed in his teaching. Today such methodology has often been replaced with operational techniques.

Beyond merely a representational tool, drawing is an instrument of thought, both to think about the drawing process and use drawing to think. The collaborative scrolls are negotiated acts, in which students observe, analyse and reimagine a new narrative that enables one to project a consistent story responding to other contributing authors. As an introductory exercise to the latter studio design proposals, the working methods of *Exquisite Scroll* has a flexible nature that can be applied to various architectural topics. Premised on the question of place identity upon the arrival of the year 2047, *Participatory Drawing of a City* illustrated different ways of urban transitions that reshape Hong Kong. Drawing from what it was and what it is to what will it be, the invisible dialogues in different epochs has been made visible. It is a drawing that is about the city, about the collective and about the observation and imagination. *Sectioning Exquisite Corpse* offers a way of seeing built heritage through drawing analytical cuts of adaptive reuse projects. Section is a means of drawing techniques derived from both archaeological and anatomical practices, it was originated as a retrospective tool and an analytical device. *Exquisite Scroll* intends to inform a critical editing of the notions of architecture and conservation in present practice and propose an alternative paradigm for inventions in existing fabrics.

Figure 5. Drawing as a medium of thought and engagement. Image by the author.

Exquisite Scroll challenged the ingrained notions of authorship, originality and ownership that dominate our understanding of architecture. In the age of post-digital representation, the hand-drawn exercise serves as a site of imaginative exploration. This article is not arguing for, or undermining the need of the digital. Rather it argues for a critical and methodological approach that transcends the limits of the digital tools. The drawing exercise is one such framework that enables the translations from the analytical to the projective imagination, allowing the drawing to regain its position as an instrument and activity of thought (Figure 5).

ENDNOTES

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11. Hugh Haughton, "Seeing and Nothingness: John Berger's Moment," *Raritan* 38, no. 2 (Fall 2018): 7-8.

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