The Spatial Narration of Drawing Media and its Transition of Cultural Representation

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Abstract
Drawing and representational media are means for artists, designers and architects to convey ideas or narratives happened in places. In the architectural field, architects utilise drawing media to represent physical architectural spaces or to demonstrate their viewpoints on spatial configuration. Since the invention of perspective in Renaissance, architectural spaces presented through perspectival drawings could have been regarded as essential means for constituting narratives and religious stories in specific spaces. On the other hand, the traditional Chinese landscape painting is created by non-perspective way and which suggests imaginative or poetic manners of representation due to different cultural and philosophical background. This paper thus firstly intends to discuss the difference of cultural representation of spatial configuration in the pictorial composition between the two drawing media.

As varied drawing medium implies different viewpoint of composing the scenes and stories presented in pictorial images, this paper argues that the difference of spatial representation in drawing media may also suggest different approaches of spatial narration and the unfolding of events in the scenes. Following the development of contemporary moving images and digital media, dynamic and multiple ways of presenting spatial configurations or narratives have been generated. The paper would finally ask what the cultural transition of spatial narration could be forged by the development of modern drawing media. Could specific cultural identity of traditional drawing media be transformed into modern presentation when the artist and the viewer's viewpoint is fully dominated by digital tools?

Keywords: Drawing media, spatial narration, transition, cultural identity

Introduction

Due to the development of varied channels for perceiving spaces and recording memories, different representational media might stem from different cultural backgrounds or be established by varied realisations of spatiotemporal conception as well as by the dialectic between the subject and the object of space. For example, Renaissance perspective drawing was used to demonstrate religious events or symbolic meaning of Holy Spirit. The vanishing point of perspective was presented in numerous Renaissance and later traditional paintings so as to emphasise the importance of religious symbolism and the intelligibility of the subject matter of religious events.[1] On the contrary, Chinese landscape painting was utilised by artists to express their perception of natural environment or to represent his/her experience of a journey through the application of multiple perspectives in the composition. In other words, the symbolic meanings conveyed by perspective are based on the orthodoxy of Christian religion and were developed by scientific approach in Renaissance period. (Figure 1) Whilst, Chinese landscape painting is stemmed from the temporal-spatial philosophy and eternal cosmology developed in ancient China, in which various viewpoints and natural phenomena or aura are portrayed.
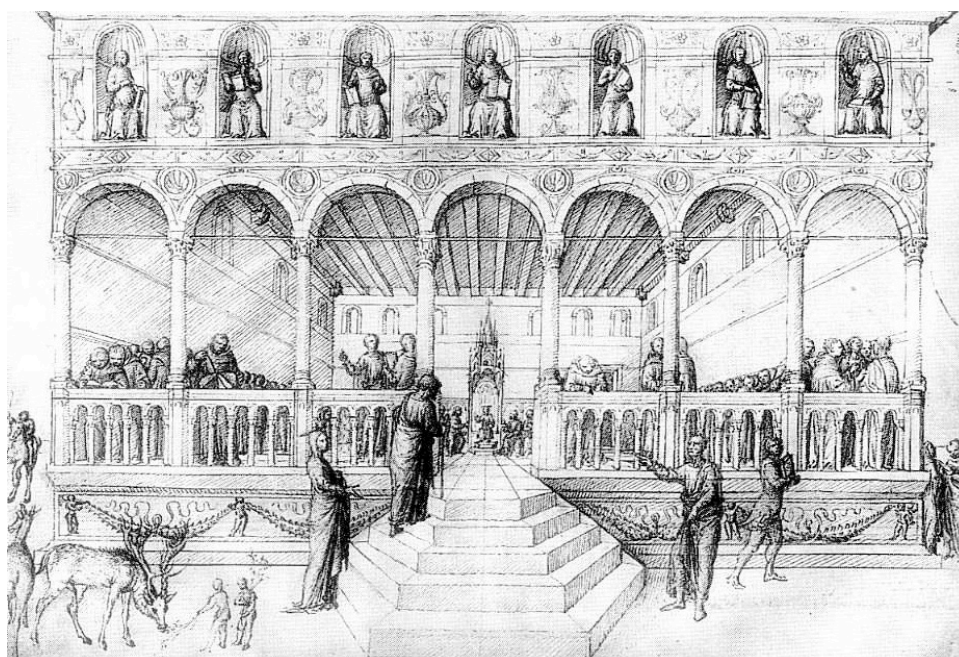

Figure 1: Jacopo Bellini, Christ Disputing with the Doctors, c. 1545 (Cabinet des Dessins, Louvre), as quoted in Penny, Nicholas (1990), 'Architecture, Space, Figure and Narrative', p. 36.

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[1] This can be seen in Penny, Nicholas (1990), 'Architecture, Space, Figure and Narrative', *AA Files*, no. 20, autumn, 34-36. The Annunciation (c. 1445-7) by artists Domenico Veneziano and the Adoration of the Magi (c. 1470) by Sandro Botticelli delineate religious symbolic meaning, as well as the Christ Disputing with the Doctors (c. 1545) by Jacopo Bellini which narrates the spectacle of a religious event.

In the light of the study that symbolism plays an important role in the pre-understanding of visual presentations, it can be argued that spatial symbolisation is also crucial to the reader's pre-understanding of spatial narrative in image media. It is thus important to discuss firstly linear perspective in the fifteenth century because it reflects the reconstruction of visual spaces, as well as the symbolic meaning of imaginary space that it reproduced. According to Erwin Panofsky, 'the perspectival view … rests on the will to construct pictorial space, in principle, out of the elements of, and according to the plan of, empirical visual space.'[2] Panofsky further states that perspective '… may even be characterized as one of those "symbolic forms" in which "spiritual meaning is attached to a concrete, material sign and intrinsically given to this sign." '[3] Secondly, as this paper focuses on representational media relating to the transformation from empirical visual space to spatial narration, the drawings and image media, i.e., perspective and later dynamic perspective, Chinese landscape painting and moving image, which are composed by associating artists' or painters' spatial experience with narrative events, will be discussed.

As varied drawing medium implies different viewpoint of composing the scenes and stories presented in pictorial images, this paper argues that the difference of spatial representation in drawing media may also suggest different approaches of spatial narration and the unfolding of events in the scenes. The paper thus intends to further discuss the difference of pictorial composition and narrative means between perspective and Chinese landscape painting. It might be able to discover the cultural variation for the development of these two representational media. Moreover, following the development of contemporary moving images and digital media, dynamic and multiple ways of composing spatial configurations and narratives have been generated. Due to the homogeneity of contemporary representational media, the cultural transition of spatial narration might become vague. It would thus be important to explore whether specific cultural identity of traditional drawing media could be transformed into modern presentation when the artist and the viewer's viewpoint is fully dominated by digital tools.

Perspective and the change of viewpoint

In terms of devising pictorial space, perspective drawing might be originally applied to the conveyance of religious narratives and the sovereign power of ancient kingdoms.[4] In Alberto Pérez-Gómez's words perspective is '… a pregnant infinity, full of symbolic connotations, which established a hierarchy with reference to the temporal power of the king or the spiritual power of the church'.[5] Although Pérez-Gómez mentions this concept for cases in the seventeenth century, it is also evident that perspective synthesises the power of geometry and the meaning of symbolic reality during earlier periods. In effect, once losing its immanent symbolic sense, linear perspective is presented as the projection of convergent lines from the observer or painter

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[2] Panofsky, Erwin (1991), *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, trans. Christopher S. Wood (New York: Zone Books) p. 7.

[3] Panofsky, Erwin (1991), ibid., p. 41.

[4] See Penny, Nicholas (1990), 'Architecture, Space, Figure and Narrative', ibid., p. 34-36.

[5] Pérez-Gómez, Alberto (1983), *Architecture and the Crisis of Modern Science* (Cambridge and London: The MIT Press), p. 175.

and should be read from a certain viewpoint.[6] Thus, in considering that perspective is a means for delivering narratives and events in architecture, the existence of the vanishing point plays a predominant role in visual perception as well as in pictorial composition. Although the painter could have various ways of structuring spatial scenes, the presentation and interpretation of narrative images through perspective might not be flexible. This can be found in *The Annunciation* drawn by Domenico Veneziano in 15th Century for example.[7] (Figure 2) In these paintings, symbolic objects and characters are closely related to projecting lines and vanishing points.
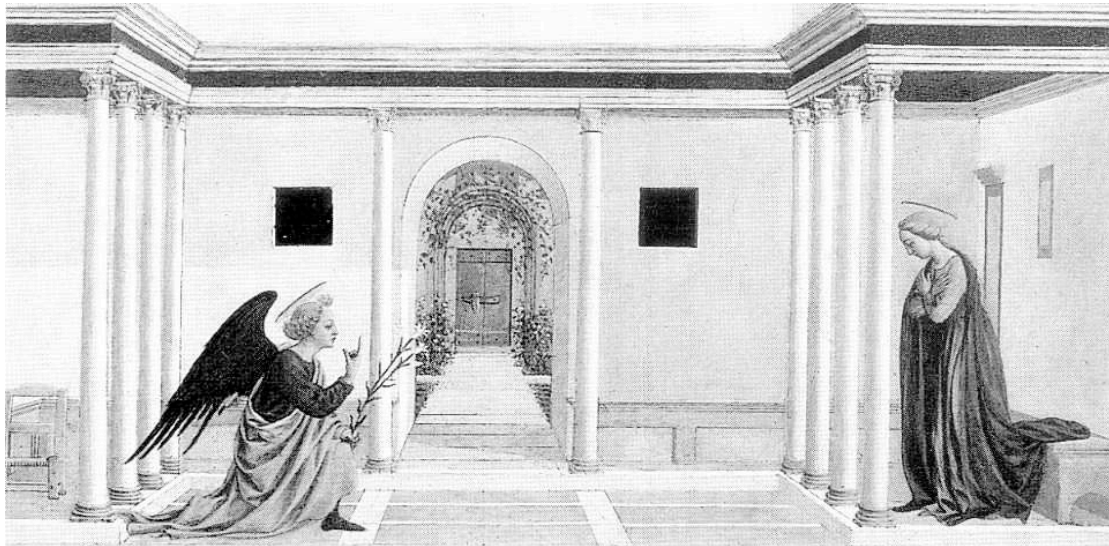

Figure 2: Domenico Veneziano, The Annunciation, c. 1445-7 (Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge), as quoted in Penny, Nicholas (1990), ibid., p. 35.

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[6] Pérez-Gómez, Alberto (1983), ibid., p. 104. Once perspective lost its immanent symbolic sense, Pérez-Gómez states that 'perspective was only a vehicle for producing "the marvelous world of man" from a given point of view.'

[7] See Penny, Nicholas (1990), ibid., p. 35, 36.

In spite of the limit of perspective, Jan Vredeman de Vries's 'moving perspective' (Figure 3) and Giovanni Battista Piranesi's etchings of Le Carceri (The Prisons) not only challenged the tradition of perspective but also expressed dynamic and shifting viewpoint of pictorial spaces. With respect to Vredeman's perspective, the 'eye point' of the viewer need not be in the centre, and can be located according to the position of the viewer, i.e., the right or left of center, although the vanishing point and horizon line can be distinguished easily. With the flexible openness on the walls of the interior, the observer not only can see through the boundary of the space, but also can perceive a dynamic spatial narrative as well as the presentation of a spatially unfolding device which is equipped with multiple hinges. Even though the vanishing point of the painter's view still dominates the viewer's perspective as well as converging most parallel lines at it, the manifold locations of vanishing points on the horizon and the movement of the characters imply the temporality of a narrative and suggest the original mechanism of moving images.

With regard to Piranesi's etchings of The Prisons (Figure 4), free and multiple etched lines were employed to compose the scenes of antique monuments and complex spatial narratives, in which Piranesi's precision along with his exceptional power of observation and imagination can be perceived. The viewer might thus be confronted with a potentially unsettling perspective and would be psychologically impacted by the 'bold chromatic contrasts of light and shadow'.[8] In addition to the sense of the unfinished that is presented in the first state of each of the fourteen pieces, the beholder's imagination might be filled with 'wonder, a deep sadness and a sense of mystery'[9] through viewing the towering and innumerable staircases, extended vaults and multilayer balconies. In associating the sense of incompleteness with the projection of the images of beams, ropes, chains and wheels that were portrayed by dynamic etched lines, these etchings can be interpreted as a series of stage design for showing dramas in the Prisons. Moreover, because of the existence of suspensory ropes and chains, disordered beams, staircases pointing to various directions as well as the dramatic spatial scenes, the viewer might be drawn into an emotional climax that was produced by the composition of unexpected and multiple spatial narratives. As a synthesis of Piranesi's precision of rendition and randomness of etching lines, on the one hand the spatial scenarios of the Prisons was presented as a reproduction of the fragments of mystical and antique monuments, in which every element was made identifiable. On the other, within the ambiguous layers of etched lines and the 'bold chromatic contrasts of light and shadow' (Figure 5), the artist's personal experiences and confrontation with the society could be simultaneously perceived.

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[8] Ficacci, Luigi (ed.) (2001), *Giovanni Battista Piranesi* (Köln: Taschen), p. 11.

[9] Hofer, Philip (1973), 'Introduction', in Piranesi, Giovanni Battista (1973), *The Prisons* [*Le Carceri*] (New York: Dover), xii.

Chinese landscape painting and its multiple viewpoints

In contrast to the perspective drawing that is characterised by one visual horizon, Chinese landscape painting possesses multiple viewpoints. With respect to the way of representation and the composition of pictorial space, the spatial aesthetic of Chinese landscape painting (Figure 6) is entirely different from perspectival drawing. It is clear that the pictorial formation in Chinese painting does not conform to the rule of perspective. 'Rather, space or objects in painting are fragments of reality, and the placements and management of them are determined by the emotions and inspirations of the artist'.[10] Moreover, the above paintings suggest a dynamic route of perceiving the images and the spaces presented in the works, by which viewers can grasp them randomly and simultaneously. Because of its unscientific way of composition, Chinese landscape painting can be regarded as a representation of imaginary spaces portrayed by animated landscape narratives and with multiple viewpoints.

Within the emptiness between each group of mountains, rivers, atmosphere or cloud tion and permeability of brushwork to represent the vitality of landscapes and these elements' natural characteristics. In addition to the presentation of non-realistic space, the void of the composition and the indefinite sense of nature were utilised by the artist to represent his/her travelling experience and the perception of natural phenomena, through which poetic and spatial imagination of the landscape could be generated. Moreover, in illustration (Figure 7) the emptiness of the painting would allow the painter or the owner or both to write down their conception of the painting and to put a stamp on it. The painting is not a literal reproduction of realistic landscape but an expression of the artist's thoughts and creative imagination. Li Xiaodong thus states:

> The creation of a painting adopts the limits of brush and ink to express the limitless imagination; it invites the viewer to make their own associations and relive the feeling that the artist attempted to capture at the moment of creation.[11]

The limitless imagination in Chinese painting is not only generated by the utilisation of brushwork, but also is created by the way of 'shifting perspective'. Mountains, trees, and other natural elements are characterised by brushwork which is performed through the free ink drawn on the permeable material of silk or Chinese paper. In respect of representing the inspiration from nature, the 'shifting perspective' 'opens out a fresh view at every turn of the path'[12] in a journey where the viewer unrolls the scroll to appreciate or experience the vista of a painting.

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[10] Li, Xiaodong (2002), 'The Aesthetic of the Absent', *The Journal of Architecture*, 7, 87-101, p. 92.

[11] Li, Xiaodong (2002), ibid., p. 92.

[12] Sullivan, Michael (1999), *The Arts of China* (4th edn.; Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press), p. 168.
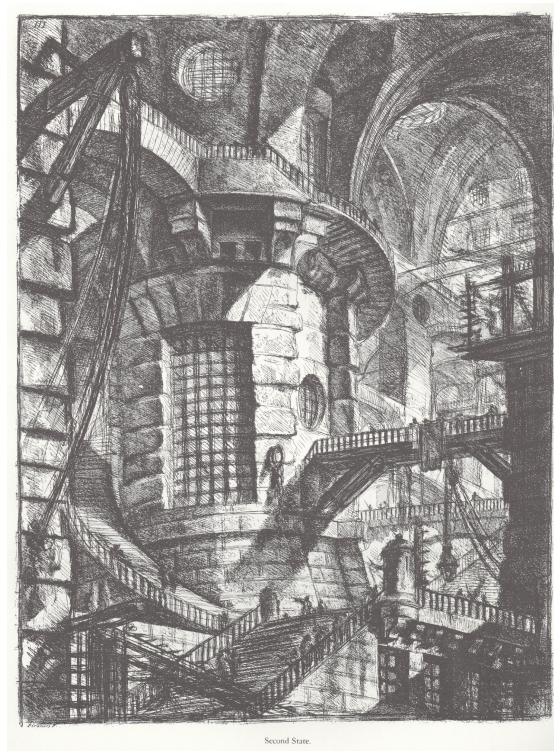
Figure 4: Piranesi, Giovanni Battista (1761), Carceri [plate III, second state], in Scott, Jonathan (1975), p. 79.

Figure 5: Piranesi, Giovanni Battista (1761), Carceri [plate XIV, second state], in Scott, Jonathan (1975), p. 99.

Figure 6: Pilgrims and travelers in a landscape, painted in the boneless style. Detail of a wall painting in Cave 217 (P70), at Dunhuang, Gansu. Tang Dynasty, eighth century.

Figure 7: Ni Zan (1306?-74), *The Rongxi Studio*. Hanging scroll. Ink on paper. Ht. 73.3 cm. Yuan Dynasty, dated equivalent to 1372. National Palace Museum, Taipei.

From the above discussions, it can be discoered
that mobile and temporal propositions of spatial narratives in image media have been explored in Vredeman de Vries's dynamic perspective and Piranesi's etchings as well as in Chinese landscape painting. In terms of the narration of spatial narrative, Vredeman's drawing proposes a linear but flexible route unfolding along the horizon line, from which the dynamism and temporality of architectural events can be perceived. Nonetheless, due to the limit of the horizon, the viewpoints of both the artist and the viewer are confined to the setting of the 'eye point' or are merely developed horizontally. In relation to Piranesi's dramatic etchings, on the one hand the viewer can grasp the rendition of the spatial narrative depicted by the artist, on the other the reader will be confronted with the ambiguity and the complexity of the etched lines as well as experiencing the dynamism and multiple viewpoints presented by unstable ropes, chains, wheels and immense staircases. The intervention of these dynamic el-

ements in the composition might project a sense of perplexity in that not only a tension between these diverse elements and the monumental space was generated but also indescribable sufferings related to these objects and the prisoners could be discerned from the etchings.

In relation to the sensory aspect of pictorial composition, it can be stated that the dramatic and dynamic pictorial space that is characterised by the free etched lines is analogous to the indefinite space portrayed by the brushwork of Chinese landscape painting. Due to the organic configuration of some soft structures, i.e., ropes and chains, shifting perspectives coexist with the perspective that is formed by extended vaults, multilayer balconies and immense staircases. The observer could thus experience the performance of various spatial elements on the one hand and an endless spatial narrative on the other. Nonetheless, in addition to the composition of perspective setting there is a great difference between Piranesi's etchings and Chinese landscape painting. That is, the spatial characteristics shaped by these fragmented objects in the etchings are identifiable, but the spaces moulded by the natural elements in Chinese landscape painting are blurred or unsettled. Furthermore, a representational gap existing in Chinese landscape painting may forge the imaginary reality in pictorial space as well as opening up poetic imagination within the process of reading the landscape and the implied narratives.

In discussing the temporal characteristics of narratives that are presented and can be perceived from the above-mentioned drawings, i.e., Vredeman's dynamic perspective, Piranesi's etchings of Carceri and Chinese landscape painting, it can be argued that the flexibility of drawing composition and the drawings' materialisation may play a significant role in the reading of spatial narratives. In the journey of reading a Chinese landscape painting, especially, the beholder can unroll the scroll to view the vista and complexity of a landscape as well as sequentially unfolding spatial scenarios in the work. This viewing action is analogous to the act of seeing a film, through which temporal dimension and mimetic nature are integrated and activated with pictorial spaces. Accordingly, in order to explore the complexity and temporality of architectural events and spatial narratives in representational media, it is necessary to introduce and further discuss the filmic medium.

Moving image and the narration of spatial narratives

Being possessed of temporal and dynamic nature and closely associated with the other arts in many ways, the filmic medium performs in the role of communication as well as for the purpose of stimulating the viewer's imagination. According to Kevin L. Stoehr, '[f]ilm, in most cases, presents an intriguing dialectic of narrative mediation and visual immediacy.'[13] By means of experiencing the visual immediacy of given images and scenes, the viewer can grasp the narrative conveyed by the composed moving images as well as taking part in the dialectic of narrative mediation between the fiction created by the film-maker and the imagination generated in his/her mind. Due to 'the dynamic and temporal nature of cinematic experience and art', 'the filmic art form intensifies the interpretive challenge' to the representation of moving pic-

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[13] Stoehr, Kevin L. (2002), 'Introduction: Integrating Images and Ideas', in Stoehr, Kevin L. (ed.), *Film and Knowledge*: *Essays on the Integration of Images and Ideas* (London: McFarland), 1-16, p. 02

tures.[14] Obviously, apart from the issue of narrative, the filmic medium is distinguished from other arts for its cinematic presentation, of which moving images are temporally and dynamically composed and demonstrated. Alberto Pérez-Gómez and Louise Pelletier suggest that film offers the potential for transcending the limitation of 'the technological, enframed vision through the juxtaposition of different realities.'[15] Moreover, 'the cinematographic montage provokes a disruption of the spatial and temporal perspective. Its narrative confounds the linear structure of filmic time, deconstructing homogeneous, geometric space.'[16] It is the synthetic activity of a film 'that underlies all of human experience and cognition', with which 'a flux of moving images' are juxtaposed in order to generate multiple new meanings or diverse interpretations.[17]

Through the juxtaposition of moving images, montage in Sergei Eisenstein's term, fragments of moving images are recomposed or re-edited by the film-maker in accordance with the story line. In terms of the capacity of montage, Eisenstein also states that it is a powerful aid in the resolution of the task of 'presenting not only a narrative that is *logically connected*, but one that contains a *maximum of emotion and stimulating power*.'[18] In contrast with perspective, the presentation of filmic medium can engender multiple and dynamic viewpoints as well as a sensuous way of narrating spatial narratives. Advocating architectural representation beyond perspectivism, Pérez-Gómez and Pelletier argue that 'the shadow of cinematographic projection re-embodied motion and retrieved tactile space from the perspective frame.'[19] Sergei Eisenstein also suggests that the creative process of montage shall proceed in the following way: '[b]efore the inner vision, before the perception of the creator, hovers a given image, emotionally embodying his theme' ; further, the artist's task is 'to transform this image into a few basic partial representations which, in their combination and juxtaposition, shall evoke in the consciousness and feelings of the spectator, reader, or auditor, that same initial general image which originally hovered before the creative artist.'[20] Accordingly, the creation of filmic medium can not only convey the theme of a narrative by means of the juxtaposition of fragmented images, but can also evoke feelings and memories of the reader and spectator through the artist's act of bringing together these originally disconnected images.

Being a channel for juxtaposing multiple images, 'the projection of cinematographic montage is analogous to the experience of an embodied, subjective spatiality'[21] and is possessed of the potential for reconstructing multiple imaginary spaces. In comparison with the static space that is constructed by architectural elements, the dynamic configurations of both spatial and temporal dimension in filmic medium would contribute to the transformation from images to spatial narratives and further stimulate

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[14] Stoehr, Kevin L. (2002), ibid., p.2.

[15] Pérez-Gómez, Alberto and Pelletier, Louise (1992), 'Architectural Representation Beyond Perspectivism', *Perspecta*, 27, 20-39, p.36.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Stoehr, Kevin L. (2002), ibid., p.2.

[18] Eisenstein, Sergei (1986), *The Film Sense*, trans. Jay Leyda (London: Faber and Faber), p. 14.

[19] Pérez-Gómez, Alberto and Pelletier, Louise (1992), ibid., p. 36.

[20] Eisenstein, Sergei (1986), ibid., p. 33.

[21] Pérez-Gómez, Alberto and Pelletier, Louise (1992), ibid., p. 38.

the reader's imagination as well as the association with realistic events. The technique and conception of montage suggest multiple or non-linear ways of composing and experiencing spatial narration. Hence, it can be argued that the cinematographic device is an inclusive medium for representing sensory experience and architectural events within related narratives.

Digital images and spatial simulation

Following the invention of digital drawing media, the way of drawing and composing objects and spaces has been changed greatly. Digitalised drawings or computer animation based on virtual reality can efficiently produce simulative images and spatial compositions through digital computation. The interfaces of communication between works and designers or readers have become commands and screen. The designer and the viewer perceive immaterial spatial images and dynamic variation of forms and layers rather than experiencing the texture of material surface or layers of inks (colours). In relation to the way of drawing, three dimensional drawing tools, AutoCAD for example, WCS or UCS (User Coordinate System) system plays a dominant role in the drawing process. The construction of three dimensional spaces is closely determined by the forming or deforming of objects. 3D drawing softwares set up efficient and productive drawing environments, as well as a general and homogeneous working system. Although it is possible to create flexible and dynamic forms and spaces, the designer's and the viewer's viewpoints need to follow perspective or orthogonal vector. In terms of the composition of spatial sequences and the narration of spatial scenarios, linear perspective still acts as a determining factor, even though various ways of perceiving spaces and objects can be utilised.

Conclusion: spatial narration and its cultural transition

From the above discussions, it can be discovered that digital media do not only present as powerful means for producing dynamic and fluid forms, objects and spaces, but also act as universal channels for data processing and for visual and spatial communication. However, in terms of the composition of spatial frameworks and the setting of operational interface for designers, digital means may base on international format without much concerns for conveying cultural identities. In other words, digital media or computer-aided drawings are utilised mainly for objective simulation rather than for subjective cultural representation. Nonetheless, in the light of Chinese landscape painting and the technique of montage, it can be suggested that a series of dynamic images with multiple viewpoints can be generated by associating filmic medium with digital images.

Because of the composition of non-linear spatial narration in moving images, the reader may have a sensory reading experience that are similar to the unfolding of the scroll of traditional Chinese landscape painting. In terms of the transformation of cultural identity in traditional painting to the presentation of digital media, some artists have produced numerous digital works to achieve this goal. For example, the digital artworks by a contemporary Japanese group - teamLab, intend to transform traditional way of viewing and experiencing the world to digital art, as well as reflecting 'on the Japanese conception of nature as something that includes, enfolds, and embraces people and the things they make'. In the exhibition of 'teamLab: Dance! Art Exhibition, Learn & Play, Future Park' in Huashan 1914 Creative Park, Taipei, 2017, the viewer can perceive dynamic and imaginative digital images and spatial auras. The work 'Nirvana' that is created by transforming from Jakuchu Ito's square paintings for instance, the image of 3-D animals and spaces is animated by the colour difference of pixel squares, and thus multiple layers and viewpoints of spaces along with a digitalised composition of traditional square paintings can be experienced. (Figure 8) In addition, some works express the material diffusion of ink and colours as well as spatialising traditional calligraphy through digitalised brush paintings. (Figure 9)

TeamLab's digital arts exemplify a cultural transition from traditional paintings to the utilisation of contemporary media. Hence, it can be concluded that digital media may have potential for delivering specific cultural references or for representing cultural characteristics by considering the essence of cultural representation and related spatial conceptions. Although digital media act as universal means for visual and informational communication, it is possible to convey a sensory dimension of spatial composition if the designer can transcend the limit and functional viewpoint of modern media.

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Figure 8: teamLab, 2013, Interactive Digital Work, 8 channels, photograph, Tseng, C-p.

Pérez-Gómez, Alberto and Pelletier, Louise (1992), 'Architectural Representation Beyond Perspectivism', *Perspecta*, 27, 20-39.
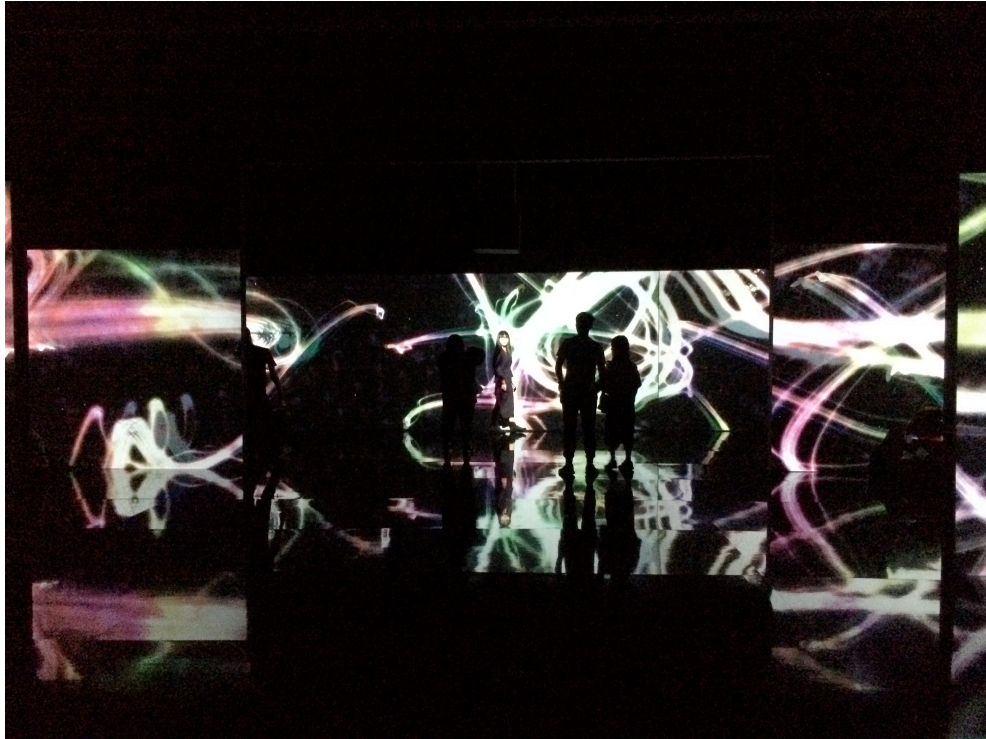
Figure 9: teamLab, 2014, Digital Installation, 7 channels, photograph, Tseng, C-p.

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