

The Beautiful and Virtual Architecture in the Post-modernization

—Style Study of Taipei Model Houses in 2007~2009

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Abstract: The sky of downtown Taipei downtown has been covered with large posters of the advertisements for presale houses since 2007. There are many splendid and magnificent modern buildings standing on the vacant lots between roads and buildings. Does it symbolize economy recovery? Or does it show that the virtual space made by contractors is ruling our lives? It's Taiwan's unique sales pattern to experience the "imaginary" space through the "real" space, forming the post-modern urban landscape.

The reality itself (people's material and symbolic existence) totally appears and immerses into the context of virtual images. It's a make-believe world (Manuel Castells; 1996). The existence of model houses is a post-modern phenomenon, an imagination projected by self-satisfaction. When consumers step into a model house, they will acquire the pleasure of imagination from the space, so they will gain the sense of satisfaction even if they can't purchase the house.

The study reviews the model house styles in Taipei from post-modernization perspective (based on the illustrations of Charles Jencks and Fredric Jameson etc), and explores model house's real imagination in Taipei metropolis mainly with Jean Baudrillard's simulation concept, simulation and reality. Model houses are a symbolic representation of the hyper-commodification and an experimental field of architectural style and pattern.

Key words: *virtual, simulation, model house, style, modernism, post-modernism.*

1. Introduction

1.1 Environment and Background

1.1.1 Taipei Metropolis under Globalization

Taipei, the largest metropolis in Taiwan, ranges from the north of Taiwan, Taipei City, and Taipei County to Keelung City. As the economic and political center of Taiwan, it has well-developed transportation and abundant educational, medical and cultural resources. It appears a little narrow in space, with numerous skyscrapers, Taipei is the most populated city in Taiwan where many different cultures exchange.

In the 1990's, Taiwan was greatly influenced by hi-technology, pop culture and internationalization. Its international exchange channel was unblocked, so well-known architects from foreign countries could join in the design of domestic cases. For example, Michael Graves participated in the design of the National Museum of Prehistory in Taitung, Toyo Ito designed Main Stadium, the new building of National Taiwan University, College

of Social Sciences, and Taichung Metropolitan Opera House and supervised their construction. International competition and cooperation seemed to become a trend.

The era of Globalization features cultural heterogeneity and creolization, and localization movement and post-modernism are in a perfect harmony. It's well-known that post-modernism also attaches importance to localization. Post-modernism is a reflection, criticism and even an intentional transcendence to modernity. (Huang Ruqi, 2002). Taiwan is the shortest transfer station in Asia, and this is the most representative of its globalization.

1. 1.2 Post-Modern Taipei Urban Culture

Post-modernism can be considered as the first global stylization of North America (Fredric Jameson, 1991; p20), and it's more globalized and internationalized and easier to integrate more cultural languages. Taipei is the most internationalized metropolis in Taiwan, as well as a specially-representative post-modern urban space.

Claude S. Fisher, an early-stage scholar on urban cultural theories, thought metropolis didn't isolate people, instead they offered various chances for them to establish many social relations and recognitions, and to form material cultural groups(Wang Jiahuang, 2005; 115). The abandoned space, odd lots or obsolete buildings to be developed in Taipei Metropolis form a scene with vegetable garden in the golden mile of Hsinyi District (where Taipei101 is located), peasants in metropolis; the enclosed innovative fair that views the street as daily life; and temporary but beautiful model houses, all of which are special cultural activities.

Edward W. Soja (1996) pointed out that post-modern urbanization or the urban form and its change analyzed with post-modernism, is a change of epistemology and opinion, as well as a critical and elastic reconstruction on the previous Positivist and Marxist urban study. A term intentionally keeping temporary elasticity as mentioned in the "Thirdspace" with the intention to master the atmosphere of opinions, events, and images and meaning that keeps transferring and changing. Thirdspace can be described as a creative reorganization and extending, based on the first spatial vision angle with the "real" physical world as the focus and the second one that reproduces and interprets reality through "imagined" space. Architecture reflects what a society views as the most important, and in Taiwan, "model houses" can be the place that represents post-modernism most thoroughly.

1. 2 Motive and Purpose

Living in Taipei since 2001 and having interest in the concrete jungle, the author often visits the lanes and streets to seek surprises. As the author came from the rural areas, the difference between urban and rural becomes the focus of the author's observations. In Taiwan, model houses are featured and temporary in construction, and the models in countryside are even more different from the ones in cities. Based on the observation on Taipei for many years, the author takes the style study as the main research approach to explore the signification of the temporary construction and state the styles it represents.

2 Research Approaches and Framework

2.1 Research Approaches

There are mainly two research approaches in this study as follows:

2.1.1 Documentary Analysis

To explore the origin of Taiwan's model houses with the relevant theses of masters and doctors and also from architecture magazines, journals, and books in Taiwan and find out how globalization and post-modernism initiated Taiwan's social and urban spatial development through the relevant book of Taiwan and abroad.

2.1.2 Style Study

Charles Jencks used to point out the importance of the rise of symbolism in post-modern design and the double coding of symbols. He also quoted many literary analyses and style study's to disassemble the building elevation's signification (Yang Yufu, 2004; p139). The purpose of style study is to acquire a more effective study and understanding on design through mental analysis and experience after the study and then analyze the style representation of works in different periods.

2.2 Research Framework

Document probing → Theoretical exploration → Style analysis → Conclusion.

3. Literature Review

3.1 Formation of Virtual Space

Model houses started with the pre-sale system of the 1970s (Du Xinying; 2000, Xiao Jingwen; 2005, Zhong Qifang; 2008). It served as a reception center in the early stages, which was a temporary building next to the construction site for the use of discussion, business-handling, sales and building model exhibition. It also introduced the unique culture of Taiwan ---Construction Site Show as a promotional activity to solicit customers. As a spatial construction for selling pre-sale houses, reception centers showed a "local spirit", which specifically demonstrates that the house pre-sale system is produced in the Capitalist space of Taiwan Island(Du Xinying; 2000). As a temporary construction, model houses were more inclined to its function than exhibition in the early stage; in more recent years it is firstly used for experiencing actual resident space, spatial needs and function, discussion, business handling, sales and then moved to the newly-built building after its mission ends, and finally restores its early-stage function as the reception center.

3.2 Virtual Reality under Post-modernism

In the concrete jungle-like metropolitan area of Taipei, the forgotten vacant lots are filled with beautiful buildings that have only exist for a short time. The appearance of model house brings a lot of imagination to the city. The old buildings and the added "protruding culture" co-exist in our life space. This disordered space with the co-existence of the old and the new is the space image of Taipei. As globalization sweeps , Taipei also shows the phenomena of post-modernism; mixed but not pure, eclectic, unclear, chaotic but not clean, clear and uniform(Xiao Mo: 2002: p344) . Its appearance has complicated and profound social and cultural causes (Xiao Mo: 2002: p347). Post-modernism is a retroaction and a challenge to Modernism, which experiences the disharmonious "beauty" on its own. The post-modern phenomena in Taiwan, however, are not directly influenced by the Western countries; but a process of diversity culture and colony. The existence of model houses is a post-modern phenomenon of its own. Just like Disney Land, it can easily remove people's wariness towards urbanism and create an ideal and safe place, and part of its charms is from its virtual world.

3.3 Post modern Architecture and Model House

Post-modern architecture first appeared in the USA after 1965 and then spread to the industrialized countries in the world. Architects are the first group who used the word "Post modernism" systematically (Fredric Jameson, 2001; p176). Post modernism is a diversified and unstable notion, which is caused by its opposition to uniform modeling or ideology (Diane Ghirardo, 2001; p7). They share the common ground that they all oppose centralized unity.

Therefore, throughout Taiwan's architectural landscape environment, the new and old constructions mix together like poetry. The unauthorized temporary construction has become pop culture and popularized, various

mosaic styles permeate the whole city with different colors interspersing the space. Post modern culture has been totally popularized. The gap between high culture and pop culture, between belles-lettres and light literature is disappearing (Fredric Jameson, 2001; p174). They deny Utopian nature, nor need individual style; their target is to please people; they pursue popularization instead of elegance (DieJin). Post-modernism doesn't want to change the city, and instead, it wants to live in the city, the city of Consumer Society (Fredric Jameson, 2001; p174).

Reception centers and model houses are both heterogeneous places in metropolis, real but virtual. Just as Michel Foucault used to say, "They really exist and form the real base of society, and they are those counter-sites, a virtual location effectively formulated, where real base and all different real bases that can be found in culture are represented, contradicted and reversed simultaneously."

In the architecture field of the strictest sense, Post-modernism has found a clearer and longer-lasting definition. As a new and unique cultural style and production process in the formal field of architecture, it draws attention undoubtedly (Fredric Jameson, 2001; p4). Under this post-modern environment, model houses are constructed temporarily but are beautiful buildings with experimental technique. Though it's just like a flash in the pan, it still reflects alternative spatial thinking in the pluralistic society.

4 Theory Discussion

4.1 Self-projection and Self-satisfaction

The beautiful model house creates a real world with big French windows, bright light, SPA massage bathtub, personal forest garden, and waterscape and river bank. It is just under people's feet - it's like a virtual reality.

These various symbols have their own lives. Just as Baudrillard stated, we are in a new simulation generation formed with model, symbols and codes. In the post-modern world, the boundary between simulation and entity has undergone implosion and the exact experience and base to reality has disappeared as well (Steven Best, Douglas Kellner, 1991). Model houses are treated as real house models, and this beautiful construction has met self demand, even more perfect than the actually constructed buildings, and the difference between the real and the unreal has been gradually blurred.

4.2 Simulation's Hyperreality

Jean Baudrillard added symbolic values into the consumption process, and then commodity becomes a symbol with symbolic values, and objects have special symbolic and cultural implication. Objects themselves are not only the messages they deliver and the message carrier itself also possesses profound meaning, because it changes people's feeling and practice. When describing the system of objects, Baudrillard deconstructed the framework of a system of objects on four aspects, the object's functionality (objective), non-functionality (subjective), dysfunction, and consumer society. He also thought that the system formed by objects had dominated the main body, and deprived the potential nature as a human being, so people were more and more like objects.

Consumption's meaning lies on that consumers maintain the sense of identity with society through purchasing the symbols represented by objects, and in Baudrillard's opinion the origin of consumption is led by desire.

In the post industrial age, reality is presented with imitation, including copying and simulation etc, which produces a hyper-reality that is even more real than reality. When we can't tell phantom from reality, the implosion of meaning thus occurs, so the symbols lose their referential function on objects.

4.3 Was it Beautiful? Or didn't even exist!

Gary, Leader of American Avant-garde, abandoned traditional norms on architectural design, and pursued the uncompleted state of works to overturn classical forms. He created a series of heterodox and unconventional design techniques, to design buildings in the view of pure art and sculpture and devote to building's flexibility and economy(Lao Wo, 1998; p65).

Model houses are symbolic products used by constructors to sell buildings, and there is no finished product for realistic inspection under the construction after sales system. In Baudrillard's simulation, the symbol is neither real nor false; all symbols can be exchanged with each other. The symbols and codes such as power and media first exist, and then "reality" will be produced out of them, so the real is the false, and vice versa. In the post modern world, reality has been replaced by the world simulated with symbols.

Leaflets and handouts, pictures, on-spot model houses, model houses, and on-spot salesman, are used to pack and make a beautiful newly-completed house, so the house has been built in your mind and imagination. However, after the whole building is completed, many problems arise.

4.4 The Simulated Hyper-real Truth of the Rich

The pre-condition for simulated hyper-reality is an affluent society and the phenomena of excess resources; the style study of model houses under this circumstance represents the code's value and the reflection's price. Then there are classified descriptions that are more substantive to distinguish Modernist styles from Post-modern styles and the internal sorting. Observing the Post-modernism from the perspectives of Charles Jencks, Fredric Jameson and Jean Baudrillard, we can also conclude that a model house is a representative product and become popular just in Taiwan. Through the style study, we can judge and analyze the image and sense of value behind symbols, as well as consumption code and simulation's classification.

5 Style Study

This research takes the model houses in Taipei as the main analytic target to present contents with analysis. The first part takes the construction of the works as the object, to analyze the relation between the humanistic environment where the works are in and the works; the second part takes the whole works as the object, namely, the works themselves; the third part analyzes certain abstract part of the works.(Yang Yufu, 1998).

Level	Analysis Item	Analysis Contents	 Analysis sample: (located across Da-an Forest Park)
Level 1: Intuitive Experience	1-1 Positive Features	Subject matter, general impression, feeling, atmosphere	1. Extend the visual space both horizontally and vertically 2. Molding frame, the scenery outside the windows can also be perspective through the scene. 3. To show great molding aesthetic feeling, and omit the decorations. 4. The main artistic conception of the architectural type lies on the integration of indoor and outdoor space. 5. Wide Square is the living space for interpersonal exchange activities.

	1-2 Negative Features	Subject matter, general impression, feeling, atmosphere	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ugly surrounding environment (viaduct, older communities). 2. The whole construction and outer square are both man-made concrete and steel tubular structure, less harmony with nature.
Level 2: Disassembling and Deformation of the Works	2-1 Disassembling of different levels	The relation between the partial and the whole	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The relation between the whole construction and the space scenery where it is in: viaduct intersection, the well-marked construction in the openness. 2. The relation between the square and the construction: the crowd staying at the front square. 3. Concept: the construction itself shows artistic achievement of hi-tech sense. 4. The relation between construction and uses: exhibition and reception center.
	2-2 Disassembling of the same level	Modeling elements	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Molding and picture composition are inclined to be represented with lines. 2. Continuously use of the latest hi-technology to the design process and the construction and try to make breakthrough on the application of technology on construction. 3. The construction itself becomes a huge scenery sculpture.
	2-3 The “Positive” units found after disassembling		The construction itself is a work of experimental construction space, applying hi-tech and advanced materials to challenge architectural technology.
	2-4 The “positive” units appearing for the most times as calculated		It has the connotation of post-modern construction and experimental nature and highlights its features in cities.
	2-5 State the reasons for the “positive” before and after the deformation and reconstruct them		The vertically extended space forms distance. It applies hi-tech structure, challenge construction’s limit to attract attention.
Level 3: Symbolic Meaning and the levels of Design Technique	3-1 Design Technique		Molding is represented with lines. The construct rue itself has adequately shown the molding aesthetic feeling, so the molding concept that decoration first, and then extension and expanding, can be omitted, the construction has its own life.
	3-2 Symbolic Meaning	Probe the relationship between the works and background elements such as environment, culture, society, politics, and economy etc. Connotation , Thematic Meaning, Option and Thoughts etc of the Works	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The styles of model house follow market requirement. 2. Model house satisfies people’s vanity. 3. Model house is used as molding experiment of temporary construction.

Figure.1 Style Study

In this study, 24 samples of model house styles are collected, including 15 samples of Post-modern architectural styles and 9 Modernist architectural styles. The Post-modern styles include 10 high-technology, 2 metaphor and 3 Straight reviv ones.

Modernist architectural style



Post-modern architectural style

High-technology



				
Metaphor				
Straight revi				

Figure.2 Style Study

6. Conclusions

6.1 Symbolic Representation of Hyper Commercialization

All communication forms are based on the production and consumption of symbols (Roland Barthes: 1978), (Jean Baudrillard: 1978). People purchase commodity (a symbol's identity is dissolved) and then fulfills the dream of social status improvement. Model houses are the model of the houses for living; and it implicates "functionalist" elements such as social status and renown, which is why objects can circulate in the form of meaning.

As technology advances and industrial production develops, social environment is full of mutable and enriched materials, as well as superfluous material market. Taiwan's real estate market has been declining since 2007 with high regional vacancy rate and reduced housing loan from bank to prevent a real estate bubble, which could be felt from the pre-sale house ad messages that showed changes of target customers and woven dreams. As symbolic consumption, model houses got rid of its exhibition function, but its tide also ebbed as the actual transaction declined.

6.2 The Coexisting of Post-modernism Styles and Modernism Styles

There have been many post-modern buildings in Taiwan, such as Taipei 101 etc. Post-modernism is viewed as a broad language that breaks down the barrier between high and low cultures with double codes and multiple integrated voices, so it may cause poor compromise (Charles Jencks, 1977; 175). Post-modern space is a special phenomenon in history. It's rooted in conventional tradition and it's unlimited, unclear and irrational in zoning or the transformational between the partial and the whole. The boundary of Post-modern space is not clear and the space can extend unlimitedly. Just like in other fields, it's evolving but not revolutionary, so it also includes characteristics of Modernism, especially in the layering and compaction developed by Le Corbusier (Charles Jencks, 1977; 105). The lost space in urban space or the third space is both the space where a model house

flourishes. Though it's not a permanently real building, it's an outpost to reflect market climate as well as business dealings and investment activities.

When the market depresses, the styles of model houses go back to economic and functional orientation, and emphasize simple and single styles without any decoration with modernism and abandon some traditional architectural models and decoration forms. When the real estate market revives, the post-modern architectural styles emphasizing diversity, vividness and pluralism will appear. The models houses in Taipei adopt the integrated styles of both post-modernism and modernism and reflect the urban construction of the society.

6.3 Model House as a Test Site for Architectural Style

A model house has a short lifecycle, and in architects fancy world the gorgeous buildings gradually become real. The architectural ideas that can't be fulfilled, can find a place that allows their full play in the heterogeneous space to write down Taiwan's alternative architectural aesthetic taste.

Though in reality, as a temporary and hypothetical project, model houses are mostly designed by interior designers who probably don't hold architect's license and gets rid of the limitations such as practicality or construction budget etc, it can be used as an experimental architectural spatial design to be presented with "narrative content", which means that the Post-modern architectural form doesn't follow function, but "fiction" instead. (Lao Wo, 1998; p21)

Post-modernism, is a new culture produced from the creation, appreciation and practice of modern culture since the birth of modern culture (Bonnell, V.E./Hunt, L., 1999). Robert Venturi thought that the appearance of architectural aesthetics was usually because that architects had overcome the contradiction between the inner and outer space of the building, overcome or adjusted the contradiction between architectural proposal (space requirements and space function) and architectural appearance, maintained or adjusted the aesthetic ambiguity between the large-scaled and small-scaled elevation, and then develop an intriguing aesthetic feeling. Just as Venturi said, only buildings and space like this are poetic, are good buildings (Yang Yufu, 2004; p137).

The different styles of model houses reflect the relation of market demand. When the real estate industry booms, model houses spring up like mushrooms in the city with various models and styles; while the market depresses, it appears in the simple form of a reception center. Appearance of model houses reflects the temporary but beautiful architecture of Taiwan in the post-modernization.

6.4 Implosion of Virtual Consumption and Real Consumption

In the occurrence conditions of Jean Baudrillard simulation, all occurrences of Post-modern are under the strictest conditions. If code's value can be overrated, then it will enter into symbolic consumption, or else it will withdraw from it, which shows commodity's fluidity. The above-mentioned has pointed out that the appearance of the model house phenomena is in the circumstance that virtual truth is satisfied. When Taiwan's house price rises, pseudo-demand of purchase increases, and real-estate securities become marketized; what is the indelible for the real estate operators is to satisfy hyper-reality. Model houses seem to represent architectural styles, with frequent appearing of Post-modern styles. When we can't distinguish the virtual consumption from real consumption, implosion happens, and then symbols lose their referential function on objects.

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