From a functional point of view, a museum of arts is a space used for collecting works of art. This is, however, a spatial concept held prior to the 20th century: the center of focus in spatial design is the collections (focusing on “objects” as opposed to “users”). In the 20th century, the museum has evolved into a space for the interactivity between the viewers and the objects, with the concept of design shifting to that of placing equal emphasis on both the user and the object—at times the role of the user is even given greater emphasis in the design process without a conscious intent on the part of the designer. The coming century is one that we believe will be confronted with incredible waves caused by the impact of computers, the ultimate machines of digitization. At this juncture, we often say that we are going to have new ways of thinking, new cities and new concepts of space. However, what should these new things be? Will the spatial concept of the 21st century museum be anything like that manifested in Frank Gehry’s Bilbao Guggenheim Museum or in Peter Eisenman’s New York Staten Island Institute of Arts and Sciences, whose external appearances and interior spaces have astounded architects as well as others? Yet the spatial concept of these buildings still remains as “a house where people and works of art interact with one another,” a concept which belongs in the 20th century and needs to continually evolve, even as we are amazed by these buildings and are deeply inspired by them. (Let’s assume for now that these are the “quasi-digital” space emerging at the end of the 20th century.)

For a long time, City of Hsinchu, Taiwan has wanted to build an art museum. Before 1999, the idea is to build a “Hsinchu Museum of Arts” for collecting art works from the Hsinchu area and from elsewhere in Taiwan, a museum concept which is still confined to the 20th century. In early 1999, when Mayor Jen-Jian Tsai was about to begin this project, the mayor and I had a conversation about how the museum space has evolved through the times. Through this conversation, we decided to build a “digital museum,” which is characterized by the new digital epoch and digital arts, for this city of high-technology with a rich cultural history of more than 170 years. We wanted the new museum to have the potential of becoming a major showcase for Taiwan as well as for Asia, where architecture reflects the new era. What we imagined then is a “digital art” created from new ideas, made with new materials, and a “digital style” which resembles the Bilbao Guggenheim Museum and the Staten Island Institute of Arts and Sciences. Our ideas then gravitated toward the previously defined and classified “quasi-digital” space. This means that we are almost apace with the Bilbao Guggenheim Museum of 1992 and the Staten Island Institute of Arts and Sciences of 1987, and it was enough to make us feel satisfied.
This project is taking off under the collaboration of Eisenman Architects, New York, and the Graduate Institute of Architecture of National Chiao-Tung University, an effort which is striving toward creating a new model for “quasi-digital space.”

On June 24 of this year (2000), at 8:00 in the morning, a new idea struck us when Peter Eisenman and I were discussing this project over the phone. Our conversation was sated with lines like “why still stick to the old idea of building a museum?” “new ideas of possibility,” “symbol of new Taiwan,” “symbol of new century,” “hybrid project,” etc. Finally we settled on a new spatial concept (figure A). This museum is no longer just a building within a city, but a “distributed museum” that amounts to the whole city being connected together by a digital network. Following the city development plan, we choose the Po-Ai campus of National Chiao-Tung University as the center (the first class node); the train station in the old town district, the civic center of the new urban core district, and the Science Park in the technology district as the second class nodes; important historical buildings, public buildings and open spaces in each districts as the third class nodes; and each and every household connected by the world-wide-web as the...
fourth class nodes. A digital museum building will be erected at the Po-Ai campus of NCTU to serve as the engine of the digital art city. For the 2nd class nodes, interior remodeling will be done to merge new digital galleries into the original buildings. For the 3rd class nodes, large-sized billboards for digital arts and mini interactive I/O screens will be provided. From the point of view of the traditional urban space theory, a city like this entails more changes than the transformation of the nodes: its circulation and transportation means more than just roads and streets, its concept of zoning will be based on a new definition of the district, determined by the zone of influence of each node (figure B). As Peter and I completed the first stages of design, I feel that the theories of urban space by Kevin Lynch, Aldo Rossi and others face a possibility for an evolutionary jump.

Once the city of Hsinchu is completely connected by a new digital network at the various nodes, digital art will flow through the city spaces as the viewers within it interact with art works on display and with other viewers. The whole of Hsinchu City will be a digital museum. Hsinchu City will become a digital city while the original building for the museum will evolve into a node, a digital art center within a digital city. What shall we call the building that has gone through a spatial concept evolution? While Peter and I were still thinking, Mayor Tsai suggested the name of “Digital City Art Center.”

From “Hsinchu Museum of Arts” to “Digital Museum of Arts,” to “Digital City Art Center,” we keep thinking of how the meaning of space in human civilization is to evolve and extend. Will this new concept of space keep changing? My answer is that “it certainly will and it certainly should,” because we may still be in danger of lingering at the “quasi-quasi digital space” stage of the pre-digital era (the end of the 20th Century).

**Note**

Digital City Art Center, Hsinchu, Taiwan is a collaboration between Eisenman Architects, New York and Graduate Institute of Architecture, NCTU, Taiwan

Yu-Tung Liu is an Associate Professor of Architecture and Associate Dean of the College of Humanity and Social Sciences, NCTU, Taiwan.