A chiasmus is a rhetorical device rooted in parallelism and inversion. For example, Winston Churchill spun a chiasmus addressing politics when he stated, “Some men change their party for the sake of their principles, others [change] their principles for the sake of their party.” This seminar posits a chiasmus that addresses an inherent reciprocity between imagery and the city: cities make images, and images make cities. The first clause distills the role of the city as a producer and disseminator of imagery. Images inhabit the city in ways that affect its social, cultural, economic, and political realms. The second clause distills the role of imagery as a generator of urban form. Cities are built according to visual descriptions of spaces and systems, from the mundane to the profound.

A chiasmus, however, is more than the sum of its parts, for it implies an additional significance beyond the primary message contained within its clauses—a complex and fluid relationship between its components, not an absolute one. This seminar examines, in addition to the notions of cities making images and images making cities, the extent to which the city is a type of image in itself—not only a producer, disseminator, and product of imagery in the conventional sense of the term, but also a projector of inquiry and ideology.

Modes of projection are similar to modes of representation, in that both are types of imagery, but these two types are distinct in a significant way. Whereas to represent is to depict, to project is to throw forward. Projections may become representations once the act of projection is complete, but the realm of projection is a unique state of being that is antithetical to depiction. Projection is active—a state of becoming more than a realization. To understand the city as a mode of projection is in itself complicates its relationship to imagery, and this seminar tackles the implications of that understanding.

OBJECTIVES

To lay bare the ways in which, historically, cities have made images and images have made cities

To lay bare the ways in which projection and representation are similar and distinct, both historically and with respect to emerging digital and computational technologies

To consider the extent to which the city is a mode of projection in itself

To analyze historical and emerging practices of media production, dissemination, and reception in the public realm

To analyze the interdependency of technology and aesthetics

METHOD

This seminar is a research inquiry in which students participate in the formation of methods and outcomes that strive to realize its primary objectives. The inquiry is structured thematically, not chronologically, and it covers projective drawing, modeling, photography, cinema, and new media. Special emphasis is placed on the role of public murals in the late medieval era, the role of cinema in the 1920s, and the role of new media in the contemporary city. The seminar critically analyzes resonances between these eras relating to notions of image, representation, and projection.

Students, depending on their backgrounds and interests, produce written and/or graphic work that further the research inquiry, with an aim to publish the findings of the seminar. The premise of the seminar is based on a media installation by the instructor, URBAN CHIASMUS, which was part of the New Museum’s 2013 IDEAS CITY Festival in New York City, and a final outcome is likely to include a follow-up installation.