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ENVELOPE

04 **ARCHITECTURE**
+ FILM

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MISSION STATEMENT

This journal is the fourth instalment of the *Red Envelope* series, and is themed 'Architecture + Film'. It was published by LWK + PARTNERS in September 2021 and aims to encourage debate and challenge on a global stage what this most unique set of conditions offers for readers interested in architecture, design, development, theory and the built environment.

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FOREWORD

"Photography is truth. The cinema is truth twenty-four times per second." - Director Jean-Luc Godard

I would argue that both architecture and film stir a restlessness in us, sparking our unconscious to imagine the impossible, to rediscover what was forgotten and to reimagine how our urban futures might be.

The relationship between architecture and film is intimate. The synergistic connection between the two exists as both media are cultural expressions around space, people and time, seeking to address the human condition through spatial narratives. The architect is the director of their work, as they are constantly in the act of making realities from fictions, while in reverse, the film director is the architect of storytelling, and builds via visual sequences. In this issue of the *Red Envelope*, we seek to examine the intimate and, at times, bombastic relationship between architecture and film, drawing on modernism, futurism and many things between.

The diminishing involvement of citizens in socio-political engagement over the past two decades has altered the scale of our societies' collective imagery, in turn lessening people's influence on spatial development. The importance of architecture for the future of the urban realm is beyond the exclusive responsibility of urbanists and architects. It is critical to expose these topics to our societies for them to engage and shape their futures; but how can we achieve this in an age when the moving image is perhaps controlled and artfully manipulated like never before?

Architecture exists, like cinema, in the dimension of time and movement. One conceives and reads a building in terms of sequences, much like film. To construct a building is to envisage and establish effects of contrast and connections through spaces which we pass. In the continuous sequence that (passing through) a building is, the architect works with metaphorical cuts and edits, framings and openings. In the mind, yet through the hand, the architect creates a depth of field, reading space in terms of its mass, producing a superimposition of different screens or planes legible from constructed intersections of movement, which are to be found in all buildings.

What is the interaction between architecture and film? The cinematic essence of the architectural experience and the inherent architecture of cinematic expression is multi-faceted. A duality exists, and each is considered an art form brought into fruition by specialists, assistants and colleagues. Irrespective of their inherent nature as the realisation of collective effort, both architecture and film are arts of the Visionary, the Auteur, the Artistic Creative Genius. The relationship between these two could be (and therefor are) studied from an array of viewpoints.

How different directors represent a city, such as Fritz Lang in 'Metropolis' (1927) or Walter Ruttmann in 'Berlin - die Sinfonie der Grosstadt' (1927), or how buildings and rooms are presented, as in German expressionist films with their fantasy architecture suspended between dream and reality, signifies cinema's voice on both the realities and possibilities of built experiences.

There are those, such as Peter Greenaway or Paul Nelson, who blur the boundaries usually from architecture into stage design or film. Nelson, an architect, created beautiful projects both as a building designer and set designer. His project 'Maison Suspendue' (1936-38), a house in which individual rooms are suspended within a steel and glazed cage-like structure, is as illusory as any of the concepts expressed through the art form of the moving image. Conversely, we could speculate on the nature of buildings that the virtuosi of cinematic architecture would have constructed had they not decided to devote their architectural vision to the art of cinema.

Establishing a sense of place is the fundamental endeavour of architecture and urban design, and the first undertaking of architecture is to establish man's place in the context of his environment. Keeping this at the centre of our thoughts, there are almost no films that do not include images of architecture or the urban realm. Whether buildings are shown in the film or not, the framing of a shot, or the implication of scale or lighting, already infers the establishment of a defined place.

Through the structuring of place, space, setting, scale, volume and other characteristics of architecture, the framing of human existence is woven intrinsically into cinematic expression. German philosopher Martin Heidegger stated: "We are thrown into the world. Through architecture we transform our experience of outsideness and estrangement into the positive feeling of domicile."

In the same way that architecture articulates form and space, it also arguably manipulates time. Architecture is not just about taming space; it is also a defence against the fear of time. The discourse of beauty is fundamentally the language of timelessness. Restructuring and conveying time; speeding it up, slowing it down, halting and rewinding it – reordering it – is as essential in cinematic endeavour as it is in architectural expression.

Space and mind, and place and event are not exclusive of each other. Mutual definition is present, joining inescapably into a shared experience. The mind is in the world, and the world exists through the mind. Experiencing a space is a dialogue, a kind of exchange.

Humans and the technology we have created has irreversibly changed nature and our environment; perhaps the existing models of architectural thinking are not sufficient. Architecture alone cannot offer answers. Architect Giancarlo De Carlo argued that architecture is an indeterminate discipline, never becoming fully specialised, like a filmic vision. He believed that architecture's challenge lies in constantly expanding its scope and imposing no boundaries on it...letting the camera endlessly roll on.

Today, film helps capture and present to the viewer ideas that otherwise might remain within the professional realm. The relation between architecture and film enables reflection on the importance of architecture as an essential element in every development that involves space, time and people. By screening films on society, urbanisation, architecture and environmental issues, people are exposed to new images that can transform their perception faster than their realities will do during their lifetime.

Our journal seeks to be a global chronicle of the people, places and ideas that aim high, pose questions, challenge conventions, and force us to reevaluate our own perceptions. The essays laid out ahead operate within the disciplines of the built environment and the moving image, while furthering interdisciplinary understanding across four contrasting horizons.

The relation between architecture and film enables reflection

Our editor, Rima Alsammarae, addresses the ancient traditions around storytelling through theatre, the narrative string intrinsically binding both architecture and film. With theatre dating back thousands of years to the Bronze Age, the craft of stage design reveals an intricate evolution that reflects not only the varied stories of people throughout history, but also of sweeping cultural progress. Yet, where does that leave stage design today, as modern technological mediums continue to drastically impact our experiences?

Whilst in Japan, in a fascinating piece entitled a *A Serendipity of Architecture & Time*, Osaka-based writer Nader Sammouri explores the relationship between architecture and film as both archives of urban development, with a special focus on modern Japanese film.

Architecture has long been used as a secondary character in films, setting the scenes by providing context, foreshadowing storylines and reaffirming tone. In their highly engaging piece entitled *Thresholds of Cinematic Space*, Parikshit Nema and Nipun Prabhakar examine how architectural elements from staircases to doorways, windows to key holes, and other building features, are placed with intention and often relied on by directors for subtle storytelling. Here, cinematic examples from the US, Iran and India shed light on the use of the door as a poignant frame.

We end this issue of the *Red Envelope* with an interview with Dr Juhani Pallasmaa, a Finnish architect, author and professor emeritus. Dr Pallasmaa discusses the symbiotic relationship between architecture and film, and how the latter enriches the development of the built environment.

Perhaps the future role of the architect will be the translator of narratives around spaces, whose mission it is to uplift our societies. Buildings and the urban environments capture and codify images of culture and life; similarly, the narratives of space shape our experience and expectations of present realities, as well as those yet to take place. The question remains: are narratives formed around space in architecture inevitable? What sort of narratives should be attached to spaces, both existing and future ones?

In our search for honest architecture and urbanism, perhaps the real path to discovery might not be in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes in which we view the ones right in front of us.

Kerem Cengiz
Managing Director - MENA
LWK + PARTNERS

EDITOR'S **MESSAGE**

If you have a creative spirit, drawing parallels between different art forms can be an intrinsic sensibility. While architecture is of course much larger than an art form, and must always serve a purpose, at its core, it is a creative field that can be poetically tied to other forms such as music, dance and cinema.

The stories in this journal illustrate just that. Not only do the pieces ahead discuss the basic and natural relationship between the two, but also how they benefit from one another. How does cinema use architecture to further its storytelling? How does cinema rely on architecture to reflect the past, document the present and envision the future? And, conversely, how does architecture draw from cinematic techniques and the visual and emotional experiences it imparts on audiences? These questions are addressed on the pages ahead, drawing from the global world of film, with examples taking us to India, the US, Iran and Japan.

Perhaps, what I found to be the most interesting connection between the two is their shared ability to be localised. In an increasingly globalised world, where urban and cultural experiences mirror one another regardless of their place, film and architecture, when masterfully done, are more than the sum of their parts: they are statements of the zeitgeist, sponges that expel the now and the here.

Take for example a few of the world's most well-known architectural examples: the Chrysler Building in New York, the Golestan Palace in Tehran, the Leaning Tower of Pisa, the Burj Khalifa in Dubai or the Sagrada Familia in Barcelona. All of these buildings offer nuanced experiences for the end-user. Not only do they provide visual stimulation, enhanced by sequential spatial journeys, but they also serve as commentaries on the social, cultural and political implications that were necessary and timely for their realisations.

Similarly, cinematic classics such as *Citizen Kane*, *Tokyo Story*, *8 ½*, *Mirror* or *The Battle of Algiers*, narrate the human experience while also being examples of the human imagination. They offer a glimpse into the looking glass, and bring to the forefront complex social, cultural or political issues either subtly or aggressively. And in doing so, cinema – like architecture – not only mirrors the moment, but also the place. Both become physical records of history with the ability to reach and impact millions of people.

This journal, 'Architecture + Film', is the fourth instalment of the *Red Envelope* series, which aims to highlight important topics related to the built environment. While the first three journals were perhaps more obviously 'architectural', this journal takes a slight deviation to expand the discussion. Like a tree with many branches, architecture is a conversation with countless extensions and looking at it through film (and vice-versa) has been a refreshing point of observation. It has allowed me (as I hope it allows you) to view both architecture and cinema through a new lens, focusing on details and elements that were perhaps in the background before, but which are certainly in the foreground now.

Rima Alsammarae
Editor

STATEMENTS OF THE ZEITGEIST, SPONGES THAT EXPEL THE NOW AND THE HERE.

HOW DOES CINEMA USE ARCHITECTURE TO FURTHER ITS STORYTELLING?

HOW DOES CINEMA RELY ON ARCHITECTURE TO REFLECT THE PAST, DOCUMENT THE PRESENT AND ENVISION THE FUTURE?

THRESHOLDS OF CINEMATIC SPACE

Architecture has long been used as a secondary character in films – setting the scenes by providing context, foreshadowing storylines and reaffirming tone. From staircases to doorways and windows, building features are placed with intention, and often, relied on by directors for subtle storytelling. Here, cinematic examples from the US, Iran and India shed light on the use of the door as a poignant frame.

Words by Parikshit Nema and Nipun Prabhakar

DOORS ALSO EXCLUDE AND CAN BE EMBLEMATIC OF A SOCIETY'S INTRICACIES IN FILMS

To build a place is a fundamental objective of both architecture and cinema. While architecture lets one navigate space in three dimensions, cinema provides the same experience by the relative motion of camera, subject and place across time. This creates a virtualised third dimension into (or out of) the screen, which is best exemplified in the cinematic legend of terrified viewers running away from the screen of the Lumiere Brothers' early film *Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat* (1896). Dr Juhani Pallasmaa, a Finnish architectural thinker, contends that the presentation of a cinematic event is inseparable from the architecture of space, place and time, and a film director is bound to create architecture, sometimes actively but often unknowingly. Modernity saddled both disciplines with the hopes and aspirations of societies in a state of churn and flux, obligated to craft national culture and identity.

Doors and windows are perhaps the most vital architectonic elements, especially in the Global South. The utilitarian function of circulation and ventilation are very important to non-western societies situated in the tropics. Doors in particular are also markers of identity and culture, providing an interface as well as a border between public and private spaces. Some doors invite, some exclude, some constrain and others liberate. One can look through transparent doors meant to entice you into becoming a consumer. An imposing iron door with warning signs against trespassing and a ferocious dog might ward you off.

In the physical and schematic aspect, all too familiar to a conventional architect, it's the facade that presents the building to the world, but at the user's human scale, it is the door that creates situations, movement, drama and consequently, feelings. In cinema, doors and frames have been pivotal in creating drama and exhibiting the situational constraints. Doors act as both membrane and barrier between what is and what could be. Doors that teleport across space and time in fantasy and science fiction genres are the most famous and literal iteration of this function.

IN DRAMA, DOORS ARE USED TO SIGNIFY GROWING EMOTIONAL DISTANCE AND ISOLATION BETWEEN CHARACTERS

For example, in *The Matrix Reloaded* (2003), we are introduced to a hallway of green doors that are shortcuts for certain programmes to quickly access any part of the matrix. While in *The Chronicles of Narnia* (2005, 2008 and 2010), the wardrobe transports people on earth to the fantasy land of Narnia. Then there are scenes that have gone on to achieve iconic status, like Jack Nicholson's face in *The Shining* (1980) peeking through an orifice in an axed door to terrorise his family, or Judy Garland in *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) entering the technicolor world of Oz through a door.

In dramas, doors are used to signify growing emotional distance and isolation between characters. As the classic film *The Godfather* (1972) closes, we see Diane Keaton's character get literally shut out of her husband's life when an aide of his closes the door. The scene foreshadows the character's diminished stature and their eventual acrimonious separation in the sequel. This is typical of set-based films where architectural elements are practical props with symbolic significance.

On the other hand, the films of Iranian director Abbas Kiarostami deploy and actively mobilise the on-location vernacular architecture and natural landscape of rural Iran. The architectural elements actively frame the cinematic narrative and create situations that drive the plot.

The first film of the series, *Where is the Friend's Home?* (1987), has a remarkably simple plot at its core: a young boy must find his classmate's house in a nearby village to return his notebook so that the friend can do his homework and avoid expulsion from school.

The film opens with a close shot of an ajar door set to the sound of a noisy unsupervised classroom, owing to the teacher being late. The kids are soon disciplined by their teacher's arrival. The strict authority of adults over children is a recurring theme from here on in the film, which creates the primary conflict in the plot. The door is pivotal here; in the narrative, it provides the students respite from the panopticon that they are subjected to, while forcing the viewer to assume information from aural cues as it introduces ambiguity.

Once the protagonist enters the neighbouring town of Poshteh, the scale of the daunting task of navigating an architectural maze without landmarks becomes apparent. The task of establishing a place is now central to both the character as well as the viewers, and one cannot help but feel the helplessness of the boy, staring at unfamiliar houses and doors that provide little clue for the quest. The task at hand requires the protagonist to transgress into private spaces and solicit their help in his search, and as such most encounters happen at doorsteps. There is an elevation-drawing-quality to shots that minimise perspective and punctuate space with the doors and windows. Later in the evening the lit windows project their obscura image on dark walls.

To Frame Something is to Accord Importance, Leading the Eye and Mind to it

In another sequence of the same film that shifts action back to Koker where the boy's grandfather and other men sit around and chatter, we are introduced to a craftsman who fabricates doors for a living. As part of a sales pitch, he promises to make a door so strong and enduring that it would be exhibited in a museum in Tehran. This whimsical conversation prompts questions about how changes in construction and materiality hint at social transformation and modernity. An atomising society demands greater security and separation from the commons and urbanisation fuels the rise of nuclear families detached from their roots. An elderly man in Poshteh who is also a craftsman of doors and windows, albeit those of wood and more traditional designs, then helps the boy in his quest, but without success. The film's resolution is punctuated by four door situations – the first two at the boy's home in Koker, and the rest at the classroom where the teacher and protagonist enter the scene. Ushered into a room where he can finally do his (and his friend's) homework, a howling wind soon bursts open the door to dramatic effect and we are taken to the classroom the next day. The friend has seemingly resigned to his fate of imminent expulsion before the boy arrives just in time to reveal he has done the homework for both of them.

The visual and dramatic effect of doors in *Where is the Friend's Home?* is akin to that of a refrain in Persian and Urdu *ghazals*, anchoring scenes and plot but adapting to the variety of particular themes the film touches on. Doors therefore can be seen as supportive elements to a film, and analogous to architectural frames that outline a construction.

Doors also exclude and can be emblematic of a society's intricacies in films that portray social issues. In such films they become a site of transgressive potential. The 2010 Indian film *Mumbai Diaries* (*Dhobi Ghat*) dealt with characters skirting around social norms and entering spaces they are not supposed to, given their social status and identity. An unlikely friendship blossoms between a washerman and an upper-class photographer when she invites him into her uptown apartment instead of keeping him waiting for her laundry at the door, as is customary. In many Indian films, a sense of belonging is portrayed by involving doors, like in *Katha* (1984), shot in state-built community housing (*chawls*). The main character immediately nails his name plate on the door of his house as soon as he becomes a permanent employee at work. The door here is an expression of people's aspirations and pride; an inscription on a hard-earned trophy in a sluggish, stagnating economy.

In addition to names, doors often bear ornamentation and construction details that affirm identity. To frame something is to accord importance, leading the eye and mind to it; paintings have frames, photographic and cinematographic compositions have frames, metaphysical concepts have epistemological framings. As a significant rectangular element in living space, they have the effect a piece of art does. Thus, one is inclined to agree with Kiarostami when he says that we are not able to look at what we have in front of us, unless it's inside a frame.

A Serendipity of Architecture and Time

Osaka-based writer Nader Sammouri explores the relationship between architecture and film as both archives of urban development, with a special focus on modern Japanese film.
Words by Nader Sammouri

Imagine life today without cinema. A sense of discontinuity would arise from a lack of visual links between our mental images of what architecture, structures and people looked like in the past and how they may evolve to look like in the future.

The collaborative effort to construct buildings in a city concludes architectural scenarios that define culture, space and time. While architecture houses our human stories, cinema records their narratives, unintentionally allowing viewers to witness the built environment vicariously. Spaces without architecture become elusive because architecture renders spaces real. With walls in a city, spaces become contained, measurable and inhabitable. They seize to exist. Without walls, there are no cities, and perhaps without film, there are no memories.

"We can't catch hold of time, and thus we make movies," said Kentaro Takeguchi, a Kyoto-based architect and the cofounder of Alphavilla Architects, an international award-winning architecture planning firm. He added: "Architecture is an element that undoubtedly has a major influence on movies."

Takeguchi and his team are guided by a design philosophy of constantly challenging and pushing boundaries that define architecture's relationship with its occupants, and in a broader sense, with the rest of the city. Just like how a film director curates scenes with cinematic frames to draw the audience in, Takeguchi deconstructs walls and floors, redefining form and function to provide new perspectives of living.

Architecture anchors human civilisation and serves as a canvas for the real world. With cinema, it is documented as history. Cinematography can also present endless vantage points reinterpreting civilisations and existing cultures, reconfiguring their images, and outlining the human condition as well as accumulating future possibilities.

ENVELOPE 04

"We can't catch hold of time, and thus we make movies."

When investigating Japanese cinema, one can hardly fail to notice the architectural background that stages the movies and gives them a unique identity. Japanese film is distinctive in many ways, and at its core, it uses traditional Japanese-style townhouses and temples with their gently curved ceramic roofs in framing scenes, and as a backdrop for stories. All these elements render the culture real.

The acclaimed film director Yasujirō Ozu (1903–1963) presented the Japanese flavour by using traditional Japanese buildings and structures as visual anchors in his movies. By tracing his films one after the other, one can notice how they accurately document the mutational progress and recovery of post-war Tokyo, emphasising the relationship between space and collective memory. Cinematography, therefore, unintentionally archives the architectural style of the time.

Many incidents have shaped Tokyo city throughout history, from its establishment as a capital in 1603 to the great Kanto earthquake in 1923 (when Ozu was just entering the world of film), to World War II, which Ozu witnessed. One can assume that a life of continuously witnessing the elimination of architecture must have contributed to the rise of his films. The Japanese house is very private. Fortunately, through film, storytelling penetrates the private perimeters. Many westerners were able to access Japanese culture through its cinema and observe its timeline. Ozu's *Tokyo Story* (1953) emphasises Japanese lifestyle and its architectural elements with slanted ceramic roofs, stone lanterns, sliding Shoji screens, hanging scrolls, tatami mats, *chabudai* low tables, *zaisu* cushions and *engawa* verandas. These elements made Ozu's movies an architectural catalogue for Japanese architecture.

"*Tokyo Story* is an ordinary film, but what may have gotten people's attention, especially westerners, is that it deeply examined an ordinary Japanese life far from the stereotypes of the geishas and samurais that were assumed," Takeguchi elaborated.

The evolution of Japanese cinema also demonstrates how the materiality of the urban environment has grown rougher with time. Traditionally, the Japanese were advocates of delicate architectural textures that exist in harmony with nature, like flimsy paper, light-weight sliding screens, paper scrolls and straw-based screens and mats – something unique to Japan. With time, traditionally-used Japanese elements have declined, as modern movies increasingly reflect more 'advanced' concrete textures.

Is there no time for harmony with nature anymore?

"Old tradition doesn't complement capitalism. Traditional Japanese architecture is close to the natural environment, but natural materials are being destroyed by resin and other chemical substances because the latter is more affordable, easier to maintain and requires less craftsmanship. From the vantage point of fast-paced capitalism, new and popular things are better. However, in the end, only sustainable matters stand the test of time," Takeguchi remarked.

At the other end of the spectrum, Tokyo has also been depicted in countless local and foreign films as the futuristic icon of Japan – a symbol of modernism and progress, and an inspiration for both the Japanese and the rest of the world.

A popular aspect of Japanese productions is animation, which has gathered anime fanatics worldwide in the sub-culture of Otaku (おたく). With its meaningful spiritual qualities, Japanese anime never fails in archiving architectural details while adding twists of fantasy.

Makoto Shinkai is one of the greatest anime artists of our generation. His animated films like *Your Name* (2016), or *Kimi no Na wa* in Japanese, explores architecture in the utmost detail, making them wondrously animated. His style is grounded, showcasing architecture and the urban environment almost exactly as it exists in reality. On the other hand, Hayao Miyazaki's representation of architecture in his Ghibli studio productions is rather special, as it breaks through the limitations of what is architecturally possible and opens the mind to new possibilities.

Miyazaki's Oscar-winning animated film *Spirited Away* (2001), for example, accentuates concepts that lift the viewer to a whole new spiritual realm, like exaggerating the glow of the warm orange light on washi paper, casting its shadows under a local festival's terrace parapet, or highlighting the beauty of moss partially covering a stone lantern, with Japanese characters meticulously engraved on it.

Thus, anime can copy the urban identity or exaggerate it, creating a sort of heightened reality. From there, it has the abundant potential of becoming an Olympic stage for human emotion.
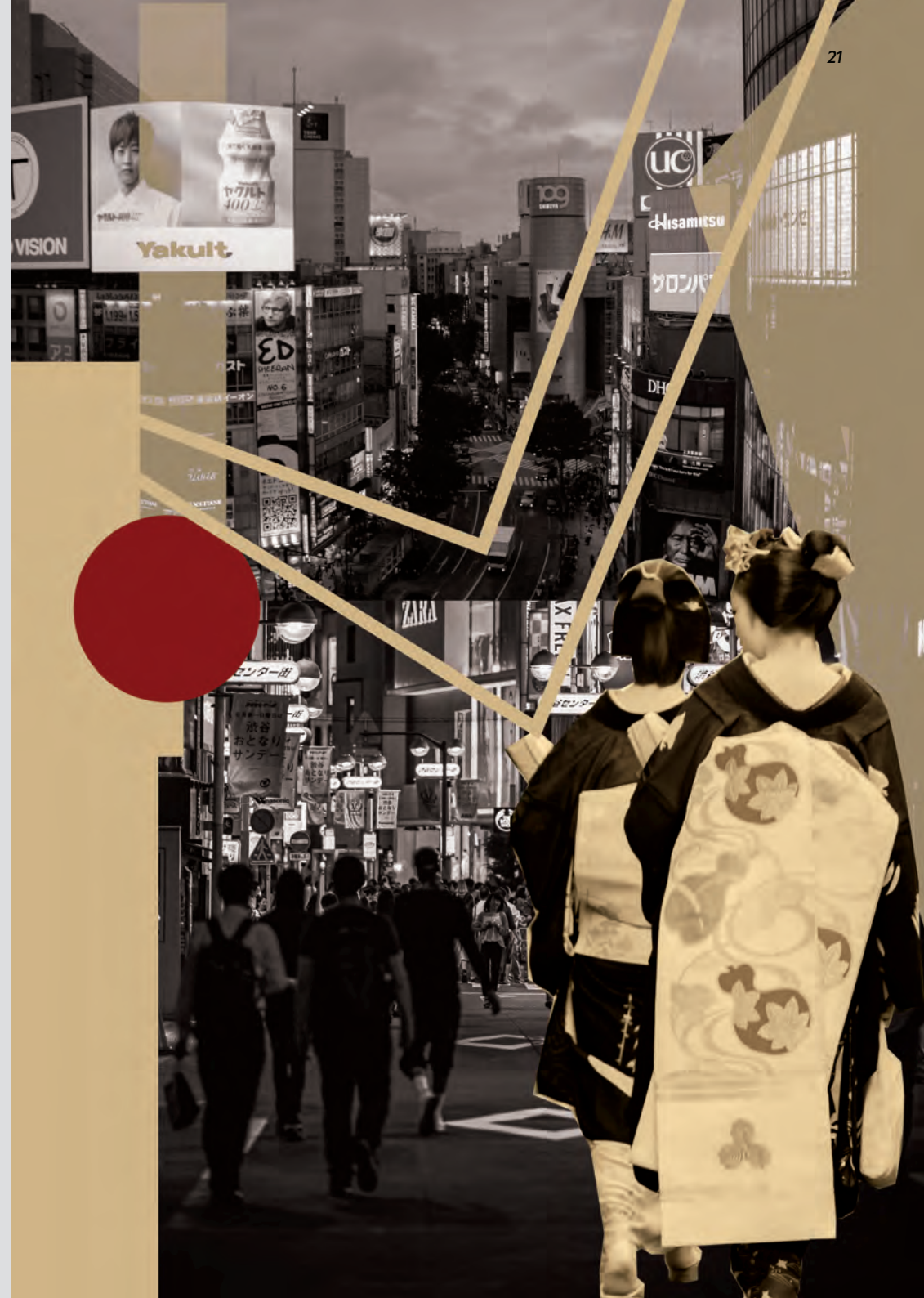
Architecture in cinema takes a new realm in science fiction movies, breaking well-known boundaries with awe-inducing artifacts.

"When it comes to the classics, *Star Wars* and *Blade Runner* come to mind with their futuristic depiction of cityscapes and brutalism. Their visual motifs expand the boundaries of what we perceive as modern design," said Takeguchi.

Blade Runner (1982) is a Hollywood science fiction film set in a dystopian version of Los Angeles in 2019. It is said that some of its city scenes were inspired by Tokyo's Shinjuku district, particularly its narrow alleyways and neon lights.

Architecture is a frozen moment of a series of decisions that houses people, affects their outlook and shapes their physical reality. Cinematography unintentionally keeps reporting significant elements in our life, expanding the sense of time in our minds.

But what is cinema today? And how is architecture represented through it?

"For millennials and Generation Z, the perception of space has become virtual. Movies have become less necessary as the new television now exists everywhere in social media platforms," said Takeguchi

With their video narratives, screens have evolved from cinema and television to computers, gradually inching closer to our minds and faces in the form of smartphones. What's more to come? Virtual reality? Where we mentally set foot into and beyond the physical screen and advance to experience imagined architecture as reality? That is when time, space and architecture unite.

From the outset, stage design was an engineering feat, particularly as such spaces grew to accommodate audiences of thousands. And more recently, common theatre design worldwide has lent itself to the globalising western typology, typically featuring an end, thrust and arena. But with the advent of radio, film and television, many were quick to quip that theatre was dead.

Theatre is one of the oldest art forms, shared between our generation and our recent modern ancestors. Persisting throughout the past several thousand years, the continuation of theatre indicates that storytelling is, at the most, an innate human pleasure and, at the least, an undying, popular form of entertainment, where the boundaries between reality and fantasy blur, even if for a short period of time.

Stages, or at least what can be identified as a stage, have taken on greatly diverse formations, reflective of cultures, engineering capabilities and artistic programmes. However, from Greece to India and Japan, stage design has always been committed to the faculties of imagination, creativity and invention. The oldest existing 'theatrical areas', located on the island of Crete and dating back to 2000 BC, consisted of L-shaped, open-air spaces built of stone with a rectangular stage; however, during the Hellenistic period, theatres became more ornate, with the raised stage and scene building undergoing radical changes. Later, as the Romans conquered Greek colonies, they encountered Greek theatre design, and applied the Greek theatre model throughout their empire, albeit with notable differences in materiality, scale and covering. One particular element added to theatre design by the Romans was closing them off from the outside world, which was achieved by rearranging spatial heights, further connecting interior spaces and extending roofing structures where needed.

Elsewhere, like in India, the oldest existing stages are similar to the Greek model (although the Sanskrit theatres of India were quite different, and shaped either rectangular, square or triangular). In China, playhouses were built as square or rectangular structures with a small stage at one end covered by a roof.

From the outset, stage design was an engineering feat, particularly as such spaces grew to accommodate audiences of thousands. And more recently, common theatre design worldwide has lent itself to the globalising western typology, typically featuring an end, thrust and arena. But with the advent of radio, film and television, many were quick to quip that theatre was dead. However, what we've witnessed in the past century is the opposite: an ever-closing gap between the stage and the audience. As film brought audiences closer to theatrical productions, it also created new priorities for designers who had to reconsider the positioning of architectural elements in a way that translated onto large cinema screens. The notion of the 'movie set' too, arrived, branching off of more traditional forms of stage design.

Designing for Live Stream

With theatre dating back thousands of years to the Bronze Age, the craft of stage design reveals an intricate evolution that reflects not only the varied stories of people throughout history, but also sweeping cultural progress. So where does that leave stage design today, as the modern tech revolution continues to drastically impact our experiences?

Words by Rima Alsammarae
Images courtesy of Yinka Ilori and Eschaton

Artistically, there is an interesting space being created by personal theatre. Eschaton is a liminal place between intimate and meditative – almost akin to playing a video game like *Myst* – and interactive and audience-driven.

As film entered our homes through television sets, and our hands through smart phones, audiences can now enjoy shows and plays from around the world without having to move even so much as an inch. And this change in dynamic is largely responsible for the ongoing Personal Theatre Revolution.

Perhaps one of the most well-known names in stage design at the moment is British artist and stage designer Es Devlin, known for her work on The Weeknd, Kanye West and Jay-Z's tour designs; Sam Mendes' production of The Lehman Trilogy; and most recently, The Brit Awards 2021, which she worked on with British-Nigerian multidisciplinary artist Yinka Ilori.

The Brit Awards 2021 was the largest live event to take place in the UK since the country went into lockdown in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The presenter stage consisted of composite recycled plywood modules that were strategically layered and illuminated by LED strips to create the impression of a three-dimensional, multicoloured maze rising up behind the podium. According to Ilori, the use of colour and pattern was one of his and Devlin's main strategies to interact with people at home watching the ceremony, whose experience of the show were greatly enhanced thanks to film and editing cuts.

"The experience you got when you're in the audience is different from the experience you get when you're watching the show at home," said Ilori. "When you're at home, you can see all these amazing tricks, cutaways and shots, which are so beautiful. I actually prefer to watch the show from home, because you can see the stage in its entirety," he said.

As technology continues to advance at unprecedented rates, developments in Internet, artificial intelligence and virtual reality greatly impact all ways of life, changing not only how we receive our experiences but also how we design them for others. One particular example is the pioneering nightclub experience Eschaton, which combines cabaret, immersive theatre and video games, all on Zoom. The project plays between film and design by combining both in their latest forms.

Produced by Tessa Whitehead and Brittany Blum of Chorus Productions, Eschaton's realisation also relies on the work of engineer Emma Strenshinky, stage manager Kristina Vnook and production designer James Fluhr. Visitors are welcome to explore a series of rooms online where they can experience anything from a burlesque performance to a murder mystery. Positioned at the forefront of the Personal Theatre Revolution, Eschaton shares in many of the benefits of the movement.

ONE PARTICULAR EXAMPLE IS THE PIONEERING NIGHTCLUB EXPERIENCE ESCHATON, WHICH COMBINES CABARET, IMMERSIVE THEATRE AND VIDEO GAMES, ALL ON ZOOM
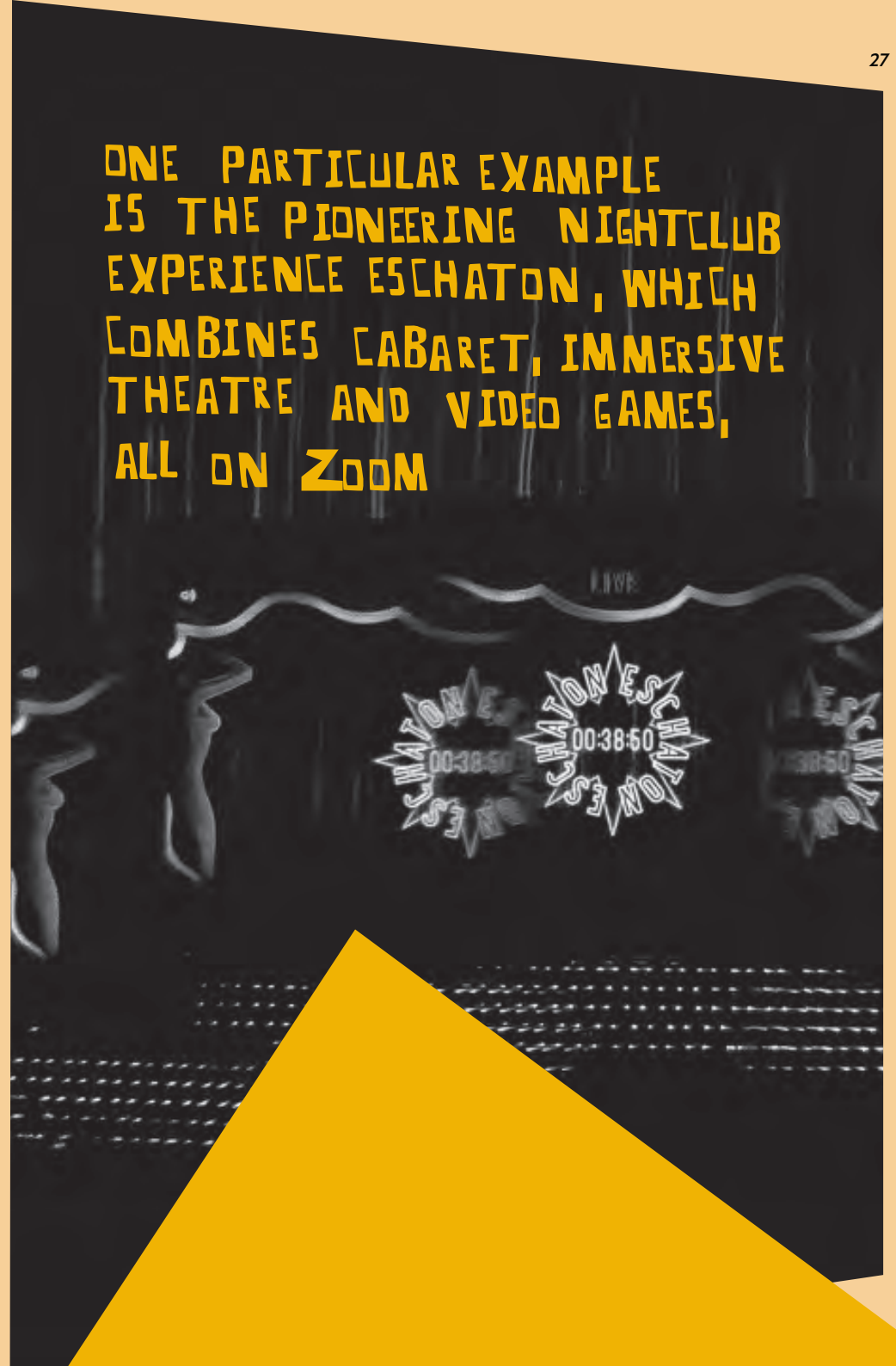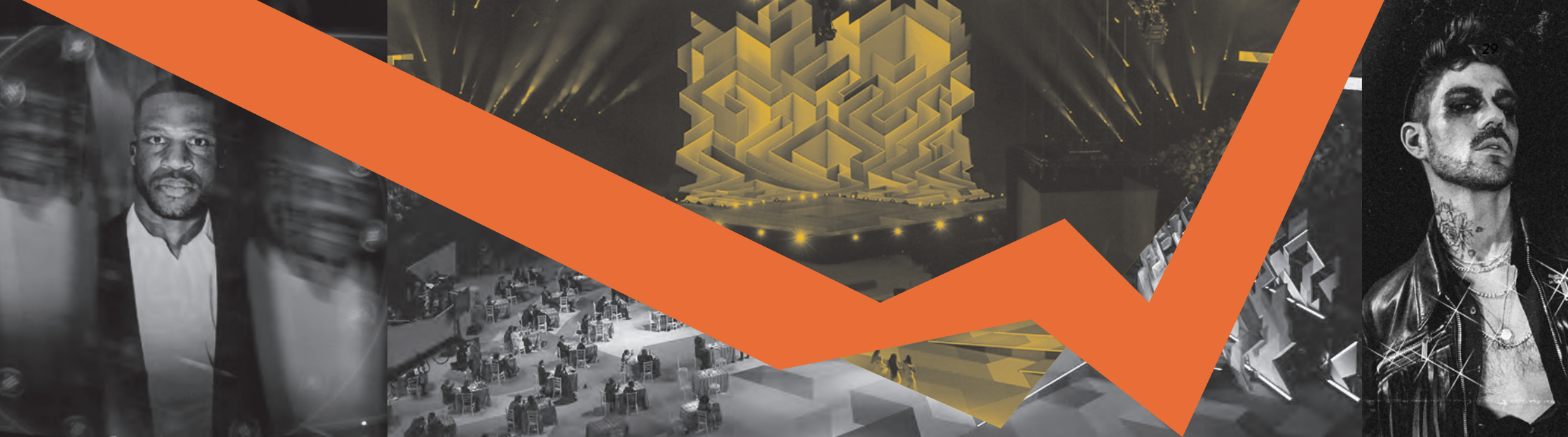
"All you need is a laptop and Internet," said Whitehead. "And an insatiable curiosity is helpful too."
She added: "Artistically, there is an interesting space being created by personal theatre. Eschaton is a liminal place between intimate and meditative – almost akin to playing a video game like *Myst* – and interactive and audience-driven. Eschaton also has the element of extreme accessibility, both physically and economically, which affords us a unique and diverse audience."

According to Fluhr, who goes by the name Memphis Cowboy, the team started with identifying what the Eschaton world felt like, how it operated and what they wanted the audience to feel when they "stepped inside our doors". He added: "Because our story is also deeply layered and we only have one hour with our audience, we had to engineer where the design needed to tell part of the story versus where it just needed to keep a certain vibe alive and allow other elements to continue the narrative along.

"Each beat from entering our website to finally meeting our performers is crafted to carry you deeper and deeper into our story and therefore our world. And because Eschaton spans web design, video and virtual rooms, we rely on design as a core mechanic that ensures no one gets lost – in the wrong way."

The main difference between Eschaton and other experiences is that it's constantly alive – the team never stops making design choices. They strive to be brutally honest with themselves, and readily admit when something no longer works. "To constantly design and throw away is hard, but to watch something continue to live and breathe is worth the reward," he said.

"Each beat from entering our website to finally meeting our performers is crafted to carry you deeper and deeper into our story and therefore our world."

"In a world where social shareability can make or break ticket sales, stage and production design has to balance between serving its live audience and serving its digital extended audience."

Experiences like Eschaton are increasing by the minute, as mediums for entertainment become more and more limitless. Just as theatre is no longer restricted to playhouses, film is no longer restricted to the 'big screen'. Designers and producers alike have to work together to continue meeting the needs of the ever-growing tech-reliant consumer.

"In a world where social shareability can make or break ticket sales, stage and production design has to balance between serving its live audience and serving its digital extended audience," said Fluhr. "This need is now more real than ever. Audiences want to see what world they are entering, so it is up to the design to seduce them and pull them in from the first visual stimulus."

The need to ensure that a story stays true while also being able to translate across all necessary mediums is intensifying the pressure on production design, and such ongoing shifts in the industry greatly impact the long relationship between stage design and film. How will technology continue to grant access to shows that are virtual, be used to design a stage that doesn't exist, or sell tickets to seats that aren't physical?

"While we will pass our institutional buildings down from one generation to the next, they have proved that they don't always serve us and have become prohibitive and limiting in their operational costs and structures," said Fluhr. "Storytelling is an immediate need, a response to culture and society, and it sometimes needs to happen now [instead of] three years from now when the space or structure opens up.

"I truly believe we are at the brink of an experimental theatre and entertainment renaissance where we will see an abundance of new stages being discovered, invented and designed."
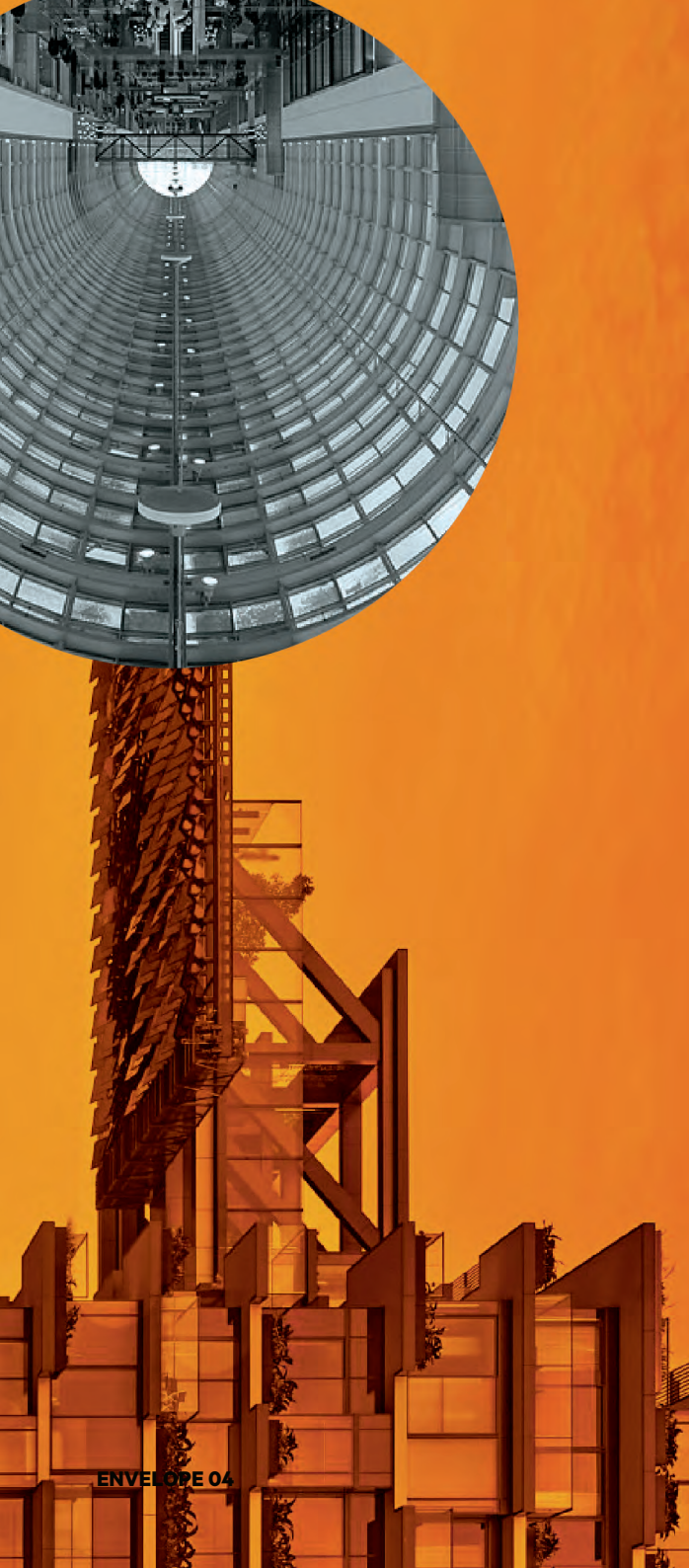
Q&A: Dr Juhani Pallasmaa

With more than two dozen books, 300 essays in over 30 languages and several built works including Helsinki's Kamppi Centre (2003-2006), Finnish architect, author and professor emeritus Dr Juhani Pallasmaa is among Finland's most esteemed figures and theorists in the field of architecture. His publication, *The Architecture of Image: Existential Space in Cinema* (2001), in particular, highlights the symbiotic relationship between architecture and other art forms, especially cinema. "In its inherent abstractness, music has historically been regarded as the art form which is closest to architecture," he wrote. "Cinema is, however, even closer to architecture than music, not solely because of its temporal and spatial structure, but fundamentally because both architecture and cinema articulate lived space."

Here, Dr Pallasmaa offers further insight into the relationship between both cinema and architecture, and how filmic influences can be found colouring the lines of our spatial experiences.

In *The Architecture of Image*, you write: "In many schools of architecture around the world, the most recent interest is cinema." How has this interest manifested?

At large, architecture schools everywhere seem to be developing towards a strictly professionalistic orientation and an uncritical use of computerisation and other technologies. However, there are still schools, or individual teachers, believing in the importance of sketching and embodied participation, wider cultural and artistic thinking. They include studies in the experiential structures and strategies of other art forms in their pedagogic approach. Cinema is the art form that is closest to architecture as both are grounded in the notion of experiential, lived and existential space. Cinematic events necessarily create an interaction between the event, person and setting, which is, of course, the starting point of architecture. There are schools of architecture, like the Washington University in St Louis, which give courses in the analyses of cinematic techniques and expressions.

I do not necessarily suggest the making of films in architectural studies (although that could be very enriching), but studying the experiential and mental structures, the interactions of narrative and space, individual human character and the characteristics of place, as well as atmosphere and emotion.

> "Cinema is the art form that is closest to architecture as both are grounded in the notion of experiential, lived and existential space."

You also write: "both architecture and cinema articulate lived space." Can you expand on this?

Architecture and cinema are engaged in the integration of space (place) and life, and the interplay or continuity of material conditions and emotive evocations. In contrast to the abstract and humanly meaningless space of physics, lived and existential space refers to space that is experienced and interpreted through its purposeful human occupation.

Would you say that some of the most famous architects today are drawn to replicating the cinematic experience in their architectural work? Or is there a deeper connection between the two fields?

There are a few filmmakers who also studied architecture, such as Michelangelo Antonioni, as well as architects who have explicitly expressed their interest in cinematic techniques, like Jean Nouvel. I personally have not directly used any cinematic techniques in my design work, but I have often been inspired by cinematic as well as painterly works. All arts articulate the human condition and express its experience. Literature and poetry offer equally stimulating parallels to the realm of poetic thought.

You mentioned Jean Nouvel and John Portman as examples of architects who draw from cinema in their work – do you agree with the sentiment of their approach to building design? Do you have any points of contention with their work?

I mentioned Jean Nouvel especially because of his own explicit confessions and the apparent cinematic techniques in his juxtapositions and montages of spaces, structures, scales and details.

I mentioned John Portman solely for the reason that certain of his gigantic commercial spaces are similar to some spaces in early futuristic films, such as William Cameron Monzies' *Things to Come* (1936).

"All arts articulate the human condition and express its experience. Literature and poetry offer equally stimulating parallels to the realm of poetic thought."

"Architectural meaning are always about the world and the human situation, not about themselves or their author. "

For me, Nouvel's architecture is very skilful and self-assured in its dramatics, but it lacks a human resonance, intimacy and humility. As for Portman, his architecture is too commercial and manipulative, although some of his spaces are visually quite effective.

Nouvel said: "Everything is theatrical. I have worked for a long time as a scenographer, even on social housing...scenography is the relationship between objects and matter that we want to display to somebody who is watching. In effect, in every building there is a way of proving a three-hundred-and-sixty-degree view over the landscape, as in Lucerne. The use of the word scenography doesn't bother me as long as it is used in the right sense." What do you think of this quote? Do you agree or disagree? Do you have anything to add?

All architecture, from urban spaces to inhabited rooms, creates settings or scenes. Architectural entities are deliberately staged situations, and, consequently, ideas of staging and scenography are built into architectural imagery. At the same time, however, architectural settings are infused with the possibilities of use and with experiential and mental meanings. Architectural meanings are always about the world and the human situation, not about themselves or their author.

There are scenographic constructions for entirely closed and predetermined events, as in theatre, whereas architectural settings possess a distinct freedom, open-endedness and choice. The ethical virtue of architecture is to enable, liberate and stimulate.

> "Architecture is also parallel with dance, as it directs and choreograhs our movements – physical, perceptual and mental, real and imaginary – through spaces and places.
> Yet, architecture is choreography only in a metaphoric sense."

What do you view as pitfalls to architects having a cinematic approach to built work?

All arts are engaged in human existential dimensions and issues. At the same time, every art form has its specific ontology, structure and focus. It is important to understand both the existential commonalities of the arts and their individual origins and evolutions. In his book ABC of Reading, the legendary modernist poet Ezra Pound argues: '[...] Music begins to atrophy when it departs too far from the dance... poetry begins to atrophy when it gets too far from music [...].' We could add that architecture withers when it gets too far from the poetic world and myths

Cinema can be a powerful inspiration for architects, but regardless of the similarities of these arts, they are distinct and different arts. Architecture is also parallel with dance, as it directs and choreograhs our movements – physical, perceptual and mental, real and imaginary – through spaces and places. Yet, architecture is choreography only in a metaphoric sense.

Can you share examples of successful cinematic architecture, as well as examples of unsuccessful cinematic architecture?

Due to the innate similarities of cinematic and architectural techniques, all impressive buildings are bound to project cinematic features. As I have suggested above, passing through a building is a cinematic experience with its characteristic dynamics, shifting scales, articulations of materials and details, and illuminations. Le Corbusier's 'architectural promenade' also has cinematic connotations. Architecture also provides panoramic views as well as zooms into spaces and details.

Alvar Aalto's buildings, for instance, are very cinematic in their smooth choreography of movement, articulations of scale and intimacy, materiality and texture, details and light. In fact, Aalto was a founding member of a radical film club in Finland in the early 1930s. In my view, Aalto's work is more deeply cinematic than the buildings of Koolhaas, or perhaps, Aalto's architecture is cinematic in the classical manner of directors, such as Jean Monet and Orson Welles.

You said you're working on a new book – could you share some information about it?

At the moment I am engaged in five new book projects in four countries: a collection of twelve essays in Greece; a book on my eight lectures at the University of Arkansas in the US; a book length conversation with a Chinese architect to be published in Beijing; a book on my design work and writings in the USA, and; a correspondence book between the ex-deputy-mayor of Helsinki and myself to appear in Finland. Besides, I have several books of mine being translated into other languages. Besides, I write a new essay every three weeks.
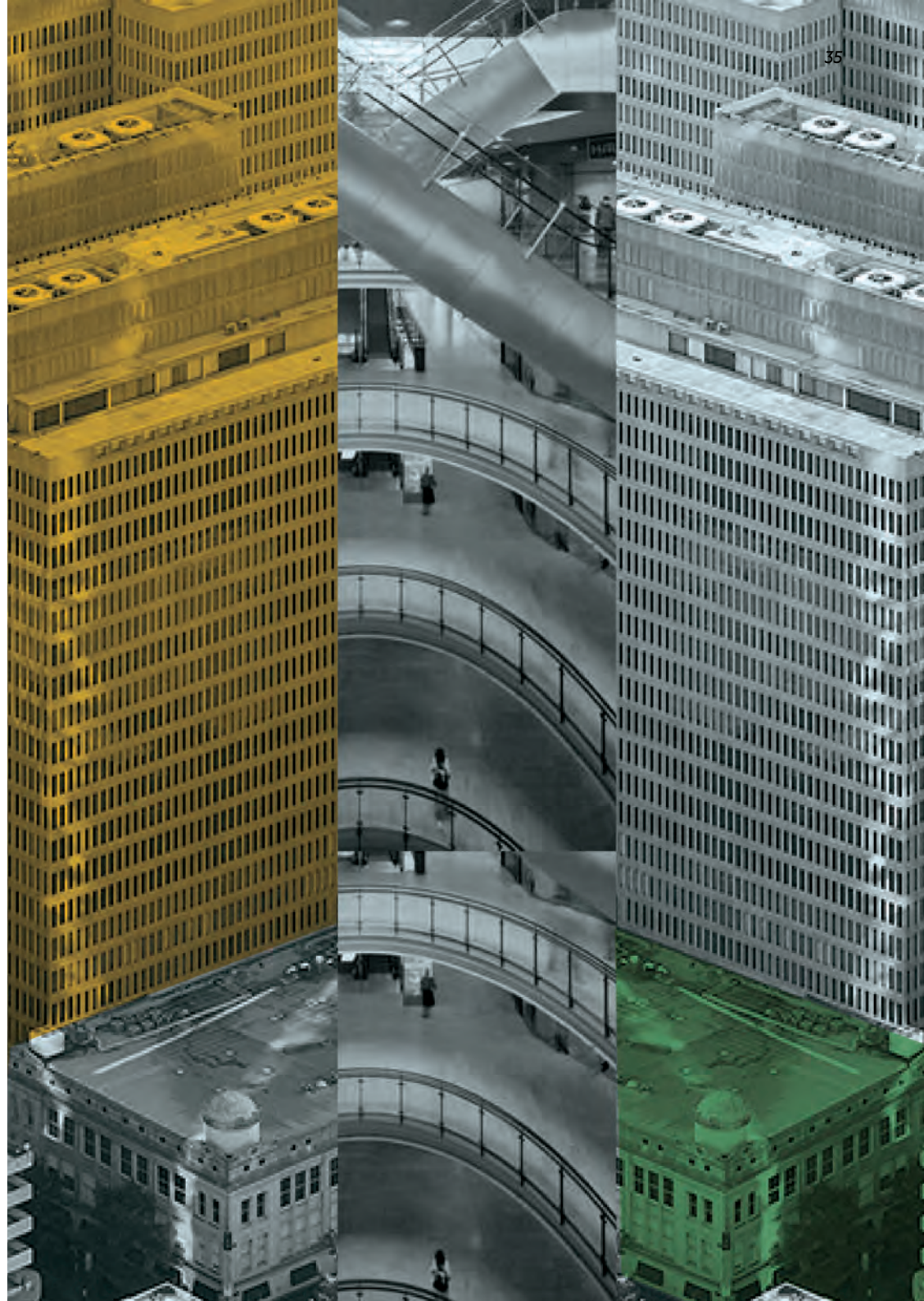
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NOTES

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