Grid Face: An Analysis of Architecture and Film

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Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Screen Production

This dissertation is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Screen Production at Murdoch University.

2016
ABSTRACT

Film is linked to architecture in the way that we perceive space. When we travel the walkway of a city promenade we are experiencing the significance of the space through our visual and spatial awareness, while creating movement through our feet. The renowned architect and theatrical set designer-turned-filmmaker, Sergei Eisenstein, believed that the journey through any architectural space is comparable to montage and movement in films, where our eye is similar to the camera (Eisenstein 1938, 116).

This Honours dissertation is an analysis of how architecture has been used in my short dramatic film, Grid Face (Farro 2016), to symbolically represent underlying notions of the narrative as well to support the mood and feel of the story. Within this dissertation I describe Graham Cairns’s ‘cinematographic space’ as a mechanism to understand the impact architecture has on film, and in particular within my film Grid Face. I will also detail how Eisenstein’s paper “Montage and Architecture” (1938) affected specific directorial decisions throughout all stages of production, as well as my overall approach in designing and creating my film to accentuate architectural spaces to maximise narrative and metaphorical impact.
Synopsis of *Grid Face*

*Grid Face* is a journey of creative self-discovery. It follows a man, Felix, who leads a double life as both a successful modern architect and a denigrator of urban spaces as a graffiti artist.

The film begins with Felix’s childhood memories, whereby his artistic father encourages him to destroy a doghouse he is vandalising in the name of art. This obscure incident is contrasted with a middle-aged Felix working in a large successful architecture firm. However, Felix is unhappy due to the constant repetition of regurgitated triangular designs he no longer cherishes. He is forced upon these designs from his ignorant client, George, who believes them to be innovative.

In order to escape from these creative stifles, Felix partakes in a daily tactical graffiti ritual before leaving for home, in which he paints the word ‘void’ in shady and less than reputable places. The creative struggle follows Felix home, where he suffers night terrors of entrapment and humiliation within his psyche. His anxieties accumulate to a crisis within his workplace, causing him to breakdown and destroy a resented building model at a promotional cocktail party. However, Felix’s trusting co-manager and partner, Grace, reassures him to take it with a grain of salt and do what he enjoys.

We learn through an illuminating dream sequence the wisdom of Felix’s Dad’s ‘teachings’. He offers Felix the notion, ‘Destruction is a form of creation’. This causes Felix to take action by colliding both his distinctive worlds of graffiti and that of architecture. He mindlessly unleashes an explosion of black painted figures and shapes onto his most recent building. However, his ill intent is ironically celebrated as modern art, causing him to retire and paint graffiti for his own pleasure. In this he takes public space without any consideration and creative conflict.
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Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to thank all the people that supported and assisted me in the creation of Grid Face. The generosity I received on this creative endeavour will not be forgotten. From the model makers to the musicians, I am forever grateful to all involved. If it wasn’t for the large amount of favours I asked from a group of immensely remarkable people this film would have not been made possible. I would like to specially thank:

Lewis Rodan, my best friend and colleague. Without your knowledge of cinematography and your passionate approach to filmmaking, this film would lack so many humanising qualities.

Robbie Stevenson, the most dedicated and pleasant sound engineer I have encountered. Thank you for your time and energy.

I would also like to thank my partner, Grace Andrews, who has supported me through the struggle that is filmmaking. Thank you for your care and motivation.

Lastly, I would like to express my gratitude to John McMullan. Your supervision has allowed for a vast string of constantly fluctuating ideas to form a unified picture. Thank you for your patience and expertise.
INTRODUCTION:

ARCHITECTURE AND FILM

Filmmakers, with the help of production designers, art directors, location managers, and countless other members of cast and crew, insert architecture into their films. On a practical level, architecture sets a scene, conveying information about plot and character while contributing to the overall feel of a movie. In more discreet ways, filmmakers can use their cameras to make statements about the built—or unbuilt—environment, or use that environment to comment metaphorically on any of a variety of subjects, from the lives of the characters in their film to the nature of contemporary society (Lamster 2000, 1).

In agreement with Lamster's views on the use of architecture in film, I have set out to produce a short film and dissertation regarding the interconnectivity of these two professions and art forms. The study of architecture within film led me to the theories of architect-turned-filmmaker, Sergei Eisenstein, who believes there to be an abstract link between traversing an architectural promenade and watching a well-crafted film, where the architect and/or director, both individually, or in collaboration, create a path for the mobile or immobile spectator (1938, 116). Thus, my thesis aims to analyse architectures broad relationship with film, through the metaphorical connection architecture has to film and how its presence on screen supports various aspects of storytelling. This will be done by analysing my short film, Grid Face (Farro 2016), and the work of others, in light of Cairns’s ‘cinematographic space’ (2013) framework, detailing how my understanding of the visual language of cinema has affected my choices and use of scene location scouting and overall directorial decisions.

My short film, Grid Face, is a journey of creative self-discovery, which depicts the life of a middle-aged man struggling with the creative anxiety he experiences in his profession as an
architect. Felix, the protagonist, is bombarded with demands to reproduce his own seemingly ‘innovative’ modern building plans, which he now considers to be clichéd and uncreative formulas. “Triangular regurgitated crap” is how he now refers to the once fashionable geometric modern designs. Felix created the geometric style in his earlier years as he made a name for himself as an innovator in the architectural market. As a result, he now perceives a stylistic entrapment and creative constraint from within his profession. In order to counteract his perpetual creative constraint, Felix illegally spray paints (and it turn, re-appropriates) public space and architecture at night through tactical graffiti rituals. Nevertheless, the triangular shapes and designs Felix resents follow him throughout the film, along with his bewildering childhood memories concerning creativity, destruction, and his father. Through this recollection of his father, Felix ultimately comes to the realisation that destruction is a form of creation, and decides to combine both worlds of graffiti and architecture to vandalise one of his recent modern buildings. However, instead of the expected and desired distaste from the public, Felix’s client, George, dishonestly asserts on a morning news program that the vandalism is in fact a commissioned, and therefore approved, artwork, which is subsequently glorified by the public.

Throughout the ensuing two chapters of this thesis I discuss key directorial decisions I made during pre-production, production and post-production stages of making this film, and in turn how they were affected by the existing body of work regarding architecture and films metaphorically-linked relationship. Furthermore, they also indicate how architecture within the filmic frame can contribute to successful storytelling. Ultimately, this dissertation is about two different concepts: architecture and cinema, as well as, architecture in cinema.

In the first chapter, ‘The Immobile Spectator’, I will discuss Seigei Eisenstein’s ideas regarding the relationship between architecture and film from his essay “Montage and Architecture” published in 1938. Giuliana Bruno, a modern key theorist on the subjects of travel, architecture, and film regarded Eisenstein’s essay to be a “pioneering meditation of film’s
architectonics” (2002, 55). Within this chapter I’m going to delve into the theoretical interplay of film, architecture and travelling with key reference from Eisenstein’s notions of the immobile spectator (1938, 116). Furthermore, I discuss the analogous notions of famous modern architect Le Corbusier, whom also relates traversing an architectural promenade to be effectively comparable to narrative (Bruno 2002, 58). Through traversing an architectural promenade, we receive a first impression with each new space or viewpoint. Eisenstein believes this ‘first impression’ contained within architecture to be comparable to montage in film. Additionally, the length and time of a walk through an architecture promenade, which emphasises a particular architectural structure, is similar to the significance created while viewing a long take in a film (Eisenstein 1938, 117). Moreover, I clarify how these spatial theories are reflected in my short film Grid Face, and the impact these concepts had on my decision making as a filmmaker.

Throughout the final chapter, I delve into films connection to architecture by analysing my film Grid Face, and the work of others, through Graham Cairns’s analytical guideline of ‘cinematographic space’ (2013). To understand architecture’s connection within cinema, I had to first understand the fundamentals of the visual language of cinema. ‘Cinematographic space’ is a term devised by Graham Cairns, which fundamentally is defined as, the spatial perception of any location displayed on screen by the director (2013, 161). Instead of the typical theories that are used to analyse film, I chose Cairns’s analytical framework due to its creation being centred on analysing architecture’s eminence within film. I will lay down concrete examples of how the interconnection between architecture and film is demonstrated through cinematic devices. This chapter will chiefly mark key examples in my film, Grid Face, where I have implemented architecture into the frame to support character, narrative, and theme through the use of purely cinematic devices and spatial understanding.

In my dissertation, I underline how the ubiquitous use of architecture within film plays an important role in reflecting and engaging with narrative, mood, and theme. Additionally, I explain
how architecture is film’s predecessor. I examine this significant role through the use of Eisenstein’s theory regarding architecture’s relationship to film, which examines the ways in which following a path of the Acropolis of Athens displays cinematic qualities with regards to montage, shot length and composition. I analyse the cinematographic space of my short film Grid Face, along with the work of others, to demonstrate the processes and cinematic devices I used in order to accentuate the architectural environments in order to improve storytelling. I do this through many individual decisions, including the use of a wide-angle lens to expand each setting, the use of symbolic geometric architectural settings which serve as a reoccurring motif, and by using montage devices in post-production to juxtapose contradictory environments.
CHAPTER ONE

THE IMMOBILE SPECTATOR

An architectural ensemble is “read” as it is traversed. This is also the case for the cinematic spectacle, for film—the screen of light—is read as it is traversed and is readable inasmuch as it is traversable. As we go through it, it goes through us. The “visitor” is the subject of this practice: a passage through light spaces (Bruno 2002, 58).

Film is linked to architecture in the way that we perceive space. When we travel the walkway of a city promenade we are experiencing the environment through our visual and spatial awareness, while creating movement through our feet. The renowned architect and theatrical set designer-turned-filmmaker, Sergei Eisenstein, believes that the journey through any architectural space is like montage and movement in films, where our eye is comparable to the camera (1938, 116). Both the director and the architect set a path for the spectators to follow, and through this path the meaning created depends on the visual phenomena the audience is confronted with (Eisenstein 1938, 116). Within this chapter, I delve into the theoretical interplay of film and architecture with key reference from Eisenstein’s notions of the ‘immobile spectator’ and specifically how the infamous modern architect, Le Corbusier, coincides with these concepts. Furthermore, I discuss how his metaphorical spatial theories informed the making of my short dramatic film, Grid Face, regarding traversing cityscapes during location scouting, and the shooting and editing phases of production.

Being a screenwriter is said to not be unlike being an architect (Bruno 2002, 65). The screenwriter creates plot, with motifs, with a storyline leading to an interesting interplay of events and crises. The architect creates an emotional journey like that of the filmmaker in a similar manner. They create a path for the spectators in the actual space to follow, where the form and
structure impact on the psyche of the individual. A critical piece of work that illuminates the abstract relationship of film, architecture and travelling is the paper “Montage and Architecture”, written by Sergei Eisenstein in 1938. Eisenstein set out to explain the notion of a moving spectator existing in both the architectural ensemble and within the filmic realm. His technique for achieving this perspective was to take the reader “on a walk”, where his essay escorts us on an architectural journey, or path, of the Acropolis of Athens (Eisenstein 1938, 116).

Ultimately, Eisenstein believed the filmic path to be a contemporary form of an architectural itinerary. He states in the introduction to his essay:

The word path is not used by chance. Nowadays it is the imaginary path followed by the eye and the varying perceptions of an object that depend on how it appears to the eye. Nowadays it may also be the path followed by the mind across a multiplicity of phenomena, for apart in time and space, gathered in a certain sequence into a single meaningful concept; and these diverse impressions pass in front of an immobile spectator.

In the past, however, the opposite was the case: the spectator moved between [a series of] carefully disposed phenomena, that he observed sequentially with his visual sense (1938, 116).

Here, Eisenstein distinguishes the relevance of the perceptual interaction that occurs between the immobile and mobile spectator. The literal walk in an actual architecture space can be said to be a ‘mobile’ spectator, due to the actual physical motion occurring while traversing the space, while the viewer of a film can be defined as an ‘immobile’ spectator (Bruno 2002, 55). Even when the audience member is seemingly motionless, there is a sense of mobility occurring where we follow the imaginary path laid out by the director of the film, transcending space and time. Both spectators are on a journey amongst an intelligent arrangement of spatial-visual phenomena. The pathway laid down for us by the director is thus the contemporary version of an architectural itinerary, ‘a spectatorial voyage’, absorbing the visual phenomena of a space (Bruno 2002, 56). Similarly, when you are traveling in a cityscape or architectural promenade, you are absorbing the space of your environment and consequently experiencing meaning through movement. In order to understand the power and effect of an architectural promenade, such as the Acropolis of Athens, we need to
travel with our feet: “This walk—a physical displacement—is a theoretical move whose itinerary binds the city voyage to film” (Bruno 2002, 56). Ultimately, the path laid out by the director, cinematographer, and editor in a film is, subsequently, the result of the pre-production step of location scouting, following by the production and post-production occurrences of filmmaking. An analysis of a space occurs during location scouting, and then a decision is made for whether the environment is fit for the film. It can then be supposed, that traveling and the pre-production stages of location scouting, are imperative aspects to creating a successful story for your audience.

The final ‘filmic path’ presented within *Grid Face* is the result of many cinematic devices, however it all began with my act of traveling around Perth with the motive to scout locations for this particular narrative. During pre-production, I was location scouting in the Perth metropolitan area in order to find a suitable space in which to capture the underlying themes that I wished to communicate symbolically throughout the film. The entire time the studies of Eisenstein’s “Montage and Architecture” (1938) was attached to my psyche during my excursions. As I walked through a modern shopping mall promenade near Perth Underground station, I tried to understand the meaning behind the modern architecture and geometric forms. Above me was a sea of yellow geometric lights and formations, haunting my every step, and beside me was a range of boutique fashion stores, restaurants and cafes. Furthermore, the paintings of street artists filled various walls along the passage. What I took from this space was, essentially, the zeitgeist of a modern city—an essence of street culture and modern marketing. Pleasant colourful graffiti, repeated geometric formations, and attractive women represented large corporate brands. Due to my protagonist’s anarchic qualities, I believed this specific path to be the perfect architectural and graphical setting to seamlessly capture Felix’s entrapment within his corporate workplace, as well as to represent his personal creative trifles against this culture (*Fig. 1, Fig. 2*).
The Architecture and décor within the shopping mall promenade near Perth Underground complemented the narrative and mood of *Grid Face* (Fig. 1, Fig. 2) through certain cinematic devices. The practical geometric lights in the walkway created the desired effect I wanted for the scene, where the harsh neo-noir-style lighting symbolically illustrates his double life and the inner conflict of Felix as the protagonist. Within the first shot of the scene (Fig. 1) the camera was placed low on a smooth steadicam vest to follow the slow fluid movements of his commute. This viewpoint was chosen in order to contain as many geometric lights as possible, which were amplified in the composition by using an extreme wide-angle lens. The physical movement of Felix in this scene is somewhat sluggish and bitter, as if he is carrying the weight of an entire sea of

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*Figure 1: Establishing shot: Felix walking through Perth Underground promenade.*

*Figure 2: Consecutive shot: Felix walking anxiously in a modern architectural promenade.*
repetitive parametric shapes on his shoulders. I decided to shoot this scene late at night on a
weekday to capture that secluded space and to emphasise the lonesome psyche Felix possesses in
his daily life. In the following shot (Fig. 2), the same technical devices are used while Felix restlessly
takes off his tie, showing his discomfort and weary emotional state. This is further heightened
within the architectural environment he dislikes so much. Besides our view of Felix, our ‘first
impression’ of all the combined spatial data of the scene is primarily focused upon its architecture
and décor, which displays the context of the film and conveys a certain mood of modernity, while
further characterising the protagonist Felix.

Eisenstein believes the Acropolis of Athens to be the prime example in explaining how
architecture replicates the particular impressions we receive from viewing a film; regarding shot
design, shot length, and juxtaposition. Throughout his essay on “Montage and Architecture”
(1938), Eisenstein directly quotes and uses drawings from Auguste Choisy’s *Historie d’architecture*,
(1889, 413) such as in Fig. 3, to communicate the metaphorical notion in which walking along the
architectural path of the Acropolis of Athens is comparable to watching a film. The entirety of the
structures and buildings were essentially dedicated to the worship of Greek’s deities of that era.
Choisy explains that the prominent structures at each point in the architectural itinerary were
strategically designed to offer concentration on a single formation without the distractions of the
other great structures: “The Erechtheion with its caryatids is in the background. One might fear
that the graceful caryatids would appear crushed by force of contrast with the gigantic statue of
the goddess; to the prevent this, the architect sited the base of the statue in such a way that it shut
out the view of the Porch of the Caryatids” (1899, 413). At each point in the path, demonstrated
in Fig. 3, only one architectural shrine was governing the attention of the viewer: “at point C, the
Erechtheion; at point B, the Parthenon; and at point A1, Athene Promakhos” (Eisenstein 1938,
121). Indeed, there are clear-cut storytelling tactics at play here, where a unified picture composed
of motifs and visual connotations is the direct result concerning the form of the path designed.
This notion to arouse a particular ‘first impression’ with each new viewpoint is comparable to montage in film.

Figure 3: Analysis of the Acropolis – Auguste Choisy – “Histoire de l’Architecture” 1899.
Eisenstein discovered through this conjectural journey through the Acropolis, that the formation of a favourable ‘first impression’ was a persistent concern of early Greek architects. This notion correlates with the effect of the film shot, where first impressions are created regularly through montage and juxtaposition tactics developed commonly through the post-production stages of filmmaking. Within my film Grid Face, I used Eisenstein’s notion regarding ‘first impressions’ through the use of montage and architecture in the post production stages of the film’s creation. For example, the still shown in Fig. 4 displays my protagonist Felix peering off screen to the right, after he has been humiliated by his power hungry client George. The consecutive shot in Fig. 5, shows Felix’s dad smoking and laughing on the opposite side of frame, symbolically acknowledging Felix’s presence. The colourful sunset and peaceful nature of this consecutive shot (Fig. 5) shows their difference in values and life choices, with Felix’s flat and artificial architectural environment juxtaposed with his Dad’s natural and colourful locale. The composition of each shot is similar, where each character stands of equal size when shown in comparison. Thus, the emotional reaction we receive with this act of montage is heightened through the use of different architectural environments, with their own unique connotations. Ultimately, the first impression and notion I wanted to communicate is Felix’s connection to his Father, and how his perception of his father’s potential judgement and approval affects his psyche. This example demonstrates the power of montage and how the architecture within the shot

Figure 4: Felix in his office peering off frame.
contributed to the narrative of the film through the juxtaposition of the different locales of Felix’s workplace and that of his fathers. Furthermore, it demonstrates how our immobile journey through the viewing of Grid Face is comparable to following the path laid out by an architect, with its first impressions appearing with each new space.

The geometric architectural décor of Grid Face served as visual motif within the film in order to capture Felix’s creative style entrapments. The geometric shapes are in almost every environment Felix encounters, creating a modern parametric hell in which he resides. Eisenstein states that there are motifs of architecture that add to the carefully designed path architects create for the spectator. Specifically, when describing each main point of the Acropolis of Athens, he writes: “This one, principal motif ensures the clarity of the impression and the unity of the picture” (Eisenstein 1938, 121). The geometric and triangular visual motif displayed here in Grid Face, shown in right corner of the frame above within Fig. 4 is implemented within architecture itself, in order to metaphorically connect the two worlds of architecture and film, as well as to unify the film’s themes regarding Felix’s current artificiality of style and ideological entrapment. This geometric architecture and décor can be frequently seen lingering above Felix’s head within Grid Face, in order to symbolically indicate the stylistic attachment to his psyche.
Furthermore, Eisenstein remarks on cinematography’s predecessor; the medium of the painting: “Painting has remained incapable of fixing the total representation of a phenomenon in its full visual multidimensionality. (There have been numberless attempts to do this). Only the film camera solved the problem of doing this on a flat surface, but its undoubted ancestor in this capability is—architecture” (1938, 117). Painting has no temporal dimension which limits our understanding of a spatiality, and thus narrative. Conversely, through the visual medium of film, with its cinematographic and montage-based movement, we are able to see more visual phenomena with temporality, where further meaning can be generated. Eisenstein believes architecture to be film’s predecessor, due to a spatial environment that presents visual meaning, and occasionally narrative, through temporal movement across a dimensional plane (1938, 117).

Eisenstein discusses the impact of the length of time in which the spectator is observing the architectural promenade. The distance from each main point of the Acropolis is significant in its length creating more gravity through its viewing of the montage sequences. Anthony Vidler, an architect and researcher, commented on Eisenstein’s findings: “discovering the possibility that there was a distinct relationship between the pace of the spectator’s movement and the rhythm of the buildings themselves, a temporal solemnity being provoked by the distance between buildings” (1996, 23). Similarly, this effect can occur in a film through Eisenstein’s ‘tonal montage’ technique,
where the distance between buildings in the Acropolis can also be comparable to the amount of time I gave to certain shots within *Grid Face*. For example, the long 45-second static shot (Fig. 6), where George has a private discussion with Felix about his talent and errors, creates a feeling of gravity due its length compared to the fast cuts surrounding it. When the spectators are confronted with this particular shot, they examine and decode its meaning due to its time on screen, just as we would do while passing a particular building or monument within an architectural promenade. Deconstructing the shot, we can understand the context of Felix’s work environment, demonstrated through a wide angle, and how the architecture displays modernity and wealth in its design. Just as a film director creates a feeling of drama through ‘tonal montage’, or “a writer draws out the end of a book in order to render the conclusion all the more satisfying, the architect can choreograph a route to create maximum drama” (Mohith 2015, 61). In the scene, Felix and George are numerous levels up in an office, looking down on the regular people going about their business on the ground level. The decision to shoot on a high angle was made to demonstrate George’s delusional importance or superiority over the rest of society, which symbolically represents his egomania. Furthermore, we do not see the two characters’ faces from a clear angle, which creates a greater focus and contemplation on the modern architectural locale they are immersed in. Their tense conversation, heightened with somewhat intense body language, adds a negative connotation to their relationship and the corporate world within the film, and accordingly, the artificial and geometric architectural environment within the shots depth-of-field.

The great modern architect and theorist, Le Corbusier, carries the spirit of Eisenstein’s notions relating architecture to movement and film. For Le Corbusier, “architecture was built around a series of unfolding views, encompassing and celebrating the movements of the body” (Mohith 2015, 61). Eisenstein’s notion of architecture creating first impressions coinciding with filmic montage is expressed during a series of lectures to architecture students in 1942, where Le Corbusier stated:
Architecture is interior circulation more particularly for emotional reasons: the various aspects of the work — a symphony whose music never leaves us — are comprehensible in proportion to the steps which place us here, then take us there, permitting our eyes to feast on the walls or the perspectives beyond them, offering up the anticipation or surprise of doors which reveal unexpected spaces” (Talks With Students 2003, 46).

Here, it is clear Eisenstein was a great aficionado of the architectural aesthetics of Le Corbusier, paralleling his own studies of the ‘promenade architecturale’ with Le Corbusier’s book *Vers une architecture* published in 1923. Both Eisenstein and Le Corbusier analysed Choisy’s writings on the Acropolis, acknowledging its precise symmetry, picturesque compositions and consecutive spectacles. Ultimately, Eisenstein and Le Corbusier admired each other’s work and shared common ground in many ways, as Le Corbusier once acknowledged in an interview; “architecture and film are the only two arts of our time,” he went on to state that “in my own work I seem to think as Eisenstein does in his films” (1928, 49). Le Corbusier elucidated the dynamic importance of the architectural promenade, labelling certain architecture as either “dead or living” by the amount of sequential movement presented (2003, 46). Thus, it can be said that an architectural promenade is successful in its impact if it has montage devices and/or cinematic qualities, which occurs through travel, thus ratifying this theory to concrete architectural theory.

Evidently, Eisenstein’s writings and films have clearly influenced *L'Architecture D'aujourd'Hui*, a short film created in 1929 by Le Corbusier and Pierre Chenal. The film illustrates the many perspectives and physical engagements of Le Corbusier’s renowned modern villa in Paris, for “they anticipated the movement of Eisenstein’s shots and montages” (Vidler 1993, 23). The still frame grab from the short film, displayed in Fig. 7, is one example of the various viewpoints included in the film, with French families filling the architectural space. Day to day human activities are documented within the architectural environment, with the camera following the movements of its inhabitants, mainly through panning shots, exemplifying the space in motion. The short film, originally served as a showcase of the villa in motion, unconsciously demonstrates Eisenstein’s and Choisy’s notions regarding montage and architecture, hence it shows architecture’s firm
connection with film. Overall, these examples show us how Eisenstein’s writings are reflected within the realm of architectural thinking and revealing its essence to be cinematic, where architecture “is appreciated while on the move, with one’s feet . . .; while walking, moving from one place to another… A true architectural promenade (offers) constantly changing views, unexpected, at times surprising” (Le Corbusier 1931, 24).

While traversing and location scouting around Perth, my knowledge of cinema has impacted the way in which different architectural spaces generated specific meaning, revealing how both art forms influence each other simultaneously. In cinema, specific architectural sites and spaces are connected to different filmic genres. For example; “The railroad and the open landscape generated and shaped the western, outer space defined the domain of science fiction, the car determined the road movie, and the house delimited the border of melodrama” (Bruno 2011, 27). For my film, *Grid Face*, I chose to shoot the tactical graffiti scene in the introduction, within a dingy dark alleyway in Perth due to its clear connection to the on-location sets of from film-noir genre movies. Bruno states “The landscape of the city ends up interacting closely with filmic representations, and to this extent, the streetscape is as much a filmic ‘construction’ as it is an architectural one” (2011, 27). In this regard, the urban streetscape of New York, with its unique architecture and light spaces, is linked to the eerie and paranoid genre of film noir. Bruno clarifies this notion with his reference

*Figure 7: a frame grab from Le Corbusier’s and Pierre Chenal L’Architecture D’aujourd’Hui.*

While traversing and location scouting around Perth, my knowledge of cinema has impacted the way in which different architectural spaces generated specific meaning, revealing how both art forms influence each other simultaneously. In cinema, specific architectural sites and spaces are connected to different filmic genres. For example; “The railroad and the open landscape generated and shaped the western, outer space defined the domain of science fiction, the car determined the road movie, and the house delimited the border of melodrama” (Bruno 2011, 27). For my film, *Grid Face*, I chose to shoot the tactical graffiti scene in the introduction, within a dingy dark alleyway in Perth due to its clear connection to the on-location sets of from film-noir genre movies. Bruno states “The landscape of the city ends up interacting closely with filmic representations, and to this extent, the streetscape is as much a filmic ‘construction’ as it is an architectural one” (2011, 27). In this regard, the urban streetscape of New York, with its unique architecture and light spaces, is linked to the eerie and paranoid genre of film noir. Bruno clarifies this notion with his reference
to the views of Donald Albrecht, architect and curator: “Life on the New York urban pavement absorbs the city streets of Hollywood and the shadowed interiors of film noir, creating a composite urban landscape” (Bruno 2011, 28). Thus, it can be argued that film noir is characteristically urban in nature due the connotations attached to its various architectural environments.

Focusing on the architecture and style of Felix while he traverses Perth’s urban landscape, we are confronted with an alleyway which designates to film noir settings comparable to New York and Los Angeles. Felix is wearing a suit, while holding a black bag, alluding to the fashion that detectives wear in typical film noir and neo noir movies, such as David Fincher’s *Seven* (1995). As shown in *Fig. 8*, the cinematographic space captured in a chase scene within *Seven* is one example of how filmic representations have added to a body of knowledge concerning how we feel about certain cityscapes in reality, and through the act of viewing films. Within the alleyway scene in *Grid Face* (*Fig. 9*), Felix is seen haunting the urban jungle with a mysterious goal in mind while remaining composed throughout his shadowy journey, creating the sensation that he is about to commit a serious crime. I intended to construct a somewhat eerie atmosphere with the shadowy aesthetic of this alleyway. The connection between the screenshot from *Grid Face* in *Fig. 9* and the selected still from *Seven* (*Fig. 8*) demonstrates an analogous passageway, with comparable architectural aesthetics and cinematic qualities. Both cinematographic spaces present a timeworn brick wall, and the
lighting in both examples present a grim and moody eminence. Furthermore, the use of a wide-angle lens in each instance allows for a greater outlook on the locale. Overall, the two architectural spaces are linked to the genre of film noir and neo noir in reality and throughout film, due to a collection of spatial styles accumulated throughout cinema’s history. Accordingly, this affects how we observe architecture in a physical space, where certain film genre connotations will be attached to an architectural promenade in both cinema and reality depending on the sites design attributes.

Ultimately, Eisenstein’s essay on “Montage and Architecture” (1938) regarding the similarities between the path of a film and an architectural itinerary, has impacted my understanding of cinema’s link to former art forms as well as granted me the knowledge to acknowledge architecture to be films predecessor (Eisenstein 1938, 116). Consequently, this research has affected directorial decisions within all stages of production in my short dramatic film *Grid Face*. Key decisions included the deconstruction of an architectural promenade while traversing spaces in regards to the pre-production phase of location scouting, and the post production stages concerning the power of montage, specifically with the juxtaposition of different architectural locales. Ultimately, Eisenstein’s examples “not only link montage technique with architecture, they vividly underline the even closer, immediate link, within montage, between mise-en-cadre and mise-en-scène” (Eisenstein, 1930, 134). Moreover, the architectural and filmic works

*Figure 9: Felix walking in dingy Perth alleyway in Grid Face.*
of Le Corbusier coincide with Eisenstein’s notions regarding movement through an architectural space being significant in reading its meaning. Also, this brief discussion regarding filmic genres link to certain types of architectural spaces allows for film and architectures relationship to be twofold, due to each medium affecting each other’s significance. As a filmmaker, it is important to understand the motives and meanings of the organisation of architecture employed within the physical world, and within the filmic realm. Just as an auteur has accomplished a great path to follow within cinema, filmmakers should also be mindful when traversing an architectural promenade in order to read the sequential movement these architects have created for its spectators. Film certainly encompasses everything, all art forms, and as filmmakers we must delve into all practises to make better films.

The second chapter of my thesis will centre upon Graham Cairns’ notion of cinematographic space, which fundamentally is defined as the spatial perception of any location displayed on screen by the director. I will detail how this theory has affected my overall approach to implementing architecture into my film, Grid Face, and elucidate an in-depth analysis of how architecture has been used to accentuate story, theme, character and mood.
CHAPTER TWO

THE CINEMATOGRAPHIC SPACE OF

GRID FACE

Cairns supposed that in order to appreciate the link between architecture and film, we must first recognize the visual language of cinema (2013, 161). ‘Cinematographic space’ is a term devised by Cairns, which fundamentally is defined as the spatial perception of any location displayed on screen by the director. A cinematographic space is analysed through the deconstruction of a set of sequential shots within a film, where aspects such as lighting, composition, production design, camera movement, and montage are taken into account. In acknowledging the above cinematic devices I am able to properly understand how these elements accentuate the architectural spaces within any given scene of Grid Face. The term’s primary use is to mark a significant distinction between that of ‘physical space’, which Cairns defines as the actual physical environment, constructed set or place (2013, 161). Ultimately, the director’s chosen way of shooting a scene effects the way in which we perceive this filmic spatial data which, of course, differs extensively from an actual physical location. The two terms “represent a distinction between ‘what is filmed’ and ‘the way it is filmed’: real space and its mediated perception” (Cairns 2013, 161). Within this chapter I will explain how to analyse cinematographic space in order to properly understand the impact architecture has on film, and in particular within my film, Grid Face.

The cinematographic space assembly begins from the director/cinematographer’s initial experience of the physical set. Consequently, the physical space is then warped on-screen through the use of cinematic devices, as well as, the spatial and cinematographic style of the director. Beginning with the camera, a number of factors are put into play, regarding shot size, camera
movement and lens type. The type of lens used in that physical environment deeply effects how
the architecture is depicted, for example, a wide-angle lens may exemplify the architectural
environment more so than the use of telephoto lens depending on the focus/subject at hand.
Moreover, the movement and positioning of the camera deeply effects our understanding of the
architecture on screen, as well as, the decision of where to place a light source. Additionally, the
positioning of a symbolic prop and the thoughtful arranging of furniture may encourage more
meaningful compositions and motivate certain movements from the actors. All of this is then
affected by the style of post-production used, concerning the shot length, jump cuts, and pacing
etc. (Cairns 2013, 161).

Cairns incorporates all these simple means of cinematic constructions in order to gain an
insight into the spatial vision of the director. He writes a simple three step guide to understand the
components that make up this cinematographic space:

(i) the design, selection and specific organisation of the illumination and
the set, defined here as ‘aesthetic factors’; (ii) the compositional
arrangement of props and the corresponding effects this has on actor
movements, referred to as ‘compositional and choreographic factors’, and
(iii) the movements of the camera during the filming process and the
subsequent interweaving of images in the editing process, defined here as
the ‘filming style’. (Cairns 2013, 161)

The final spatial style presented is the result of the variation of these three sets, nevertheless, there
are “links between each and they can be employed in any number of possible configurations”
(Cairns 2013, 161). Seen in the work of directors such as Yasujiro Ozu and Alfonso Cuarón, the
variety of cinematographic spaces that result from the deviations is consequently enormous. The
following brief discussion on Cuarón and Ozu seeks to demonstrate how cinematographic space
is the result of deliberate and particular combination of Cairns’s three factors of ‘aesthetic,
compositional-choreographic and filmic’ (2013, 161).

The spatial style of Cuarón is at its core based on the routine of long moving takes, which
he uses in order to create a sense of fluidity in his films. These deep space compositions allow for
numerous movements to be presented at the same time on screen, across an expansive setting, ultimately creating complex compositions with various actions. The constructed cinematographic space permits for the multidimensional manoeuvrings of actors and crew. Cuarón’s style is also enhanced with the removal of the cut, making the spectator more transfixed on what is occurring on-screen due to its temporal realism. The fluid and multifaceted spatial style presented within Cuarón’s films is the unique arrangement of elements that make up any cinematographic space (Cairns 2013, 161).

By way of distinction, Ozu employs the ‘aesthetic, compositional-choreographic and filmic’ elements, in different ways and configurations in order to present a much more static and fragmented image of space (2013, 161). Ozu consistently films his shots from a floor-level perspective with a static camera. The direction he gives the actors is usually restricted to narrow spaces within his static low-level framing, which is, “emphasised by the use of architectural elements as sub frames which, in turn, elicit a clear pictorial quality from individual shots” (Cairns 2013, 162). However, the static feel we experience when observing a single shot is warped with Ozu’s rhythmic and accented editing style. His final cinematographic space is a mixture of still and disjointed sequences. These two brief summaries of the spatial style of Cuarón and Ozu aims to suggest how the unique arrangement and use of these three factors of: ‘aesthetic, compositional-choreographic and filmic’, ultimately effects the final cinematographic space (2013, 161).

Now that we have a basic understanding of Cairns's three-part ‘cinematographic space’ analytical framework of aesthetics, compositional-choreography, and filmic techniques, I will explain the intended meaning behind my decisions as a director and editor within various scenes from my film. In Grid Face, we follow the path of Felix on his journey of creative self-discovery, where we encounter the many different stimulating architectural environments he presents himself in. With each new setting, a different mood and meaning is attained or reinforced, predominantly through the emphasis of architecture. For instance, in the introduction of the film we view his
modern corporate work environment, which serves as a sort of contemporary prison where his originality and creative efforts have dried up. This is juxtaposed with the grim and dingy alleyways he graffiti’s at night where he feels more at peace. Additionally, the scenes of his unorthodox childhood display deteriorating architecture in order to differentiate from his modern locales he inhabits as an adult. Generally, I wanted each architectural space within Grid Face to emit a certain feeling relating to either freedom or entrapment.

Figure 10: Establishing shot - Felix driving into his minimal geometric home.

The overall spatial style of Grid Face has a mix of many different constituent factors, ranging from handheld erratic sequences to smooth and unified arrangements. Nonetheless, throughout the film I primarily used wide-angle lenses in order to emphasize the architectural spaces within the frame. The analysis of a particular scene, where Felix’s modern home is first revealed, displays Felix unwinding alone in his living room while reflecting on his life choices. The establishing shot shown above in Fig. 10, presents Felix driving into his lustrous minimal and modern home in a wide-angle static shot. I chose this home in order to attempt to convert the architectural space into one of the primary actors of the film. The enormous modern home continues the geometric visual motif presented within his corporate environments and thus the same feelings of entrapment are attached to its architectural components. Ordinarily, this contemporary style home alludes to feelings of accomplishment and happiness, however I aimed
to create a sensation of loneliness and insignificance within Felix’s life, displayed through his weary body language and inferiority within the frame (Fig. 12). Although the house is luxurious and beautifully designed (Fig. 11), the surrounding objects and architecture discern Felix in his brooding self-pity and loneliness. The congested space between Felix and his intricately designed materials visually represents his lack of success regarding personal relationships and peace of mind. This is also shot through a wide-angle lens, which epitomizes and enlarges the space and makes Felix appear exaggeratedly small and even more physically distant that he is in reality. Furthermore, Felix’s inferior size is warped through the use of a high angle shot in the consecutive viewpoint (Fig. 12) where Felix is seen drinking whiskey in a tired and subdued manner. The lighting of the space highlights Felix’s elegant possessions on the left-side of the frame (Fig. 12). Conversely, Felix
is evenly lit and less pronounced around the interior of the house in order to distinguish his lack of emotional connection to his home. Thus, the use of cinematic devices has indeed distorted the truthfulness of the physical space of that environment, in order to further enhance story, mood, and characterisations with the accentuation of architecture.

A key scene that demonstrates how my spatial style emphasised architecture to enhance the mood and themes of *Grid Face*, can be viewed within the scene where Felix is scrutinising himself in the modern geometric bathroom that serves his offices (Fig. 13). This scene is the first indication that symbolically represents Felix as having a double life, which is conveyed through the action of putting on a balaclava. This obscure and esoteric location was specifically chosen for a number
of reasons. Firstly, its random geometric and triangular design reflects the style of Felix's architectural designs. This interior architectural space is used to reflect Felix’s sense of entrapment within his triangular artificial style. Within \textit{Grid Face}, this notion is echoed in almost every scene set within a corporate modern space where the accompanying body language presented has negative and sluggish qualities. He also reiterates these opinions while talking to Grace privately in the film, stating that this style of architecture is ‘triangular regurgitated crap.’ Secondly, I wished to create a visual motif for this ‘triangular regurgitated crap’ style throughout the film, in order to reflect the film’s core stylistic and aesthetic themes. The lighting of this scene creates a soft half shadow on his face which alludes to his double identity as a conformist modern architect and as a defacer of architectural spaces. Another reason I chose to shoot in this architectural interior is due to its sharp geometric lines. The composition of the consecutive shot in Fig. 14, is slightly claustrophobic whereby the piercing and sharp elements of the room surround Felix while he precariously analyses himself. For instance, the triangular shape in the right-side of the frame leads into Felix’s body. This is also reiterated in the left-top-side of the frame (Fig 14) with the highlighted triangular practical light lingering above Felix’s reflection. The entirety of the short scene is comprised of two shots: a medium close up and a wide shot. Both of these were captured with a wide-angle lens to show the relevant triangular designs of the architectural interior, while the use of handheld camera movements contributed to the tension of the scene due to its precarious and shaky motions. These unstable camera motions were used in order to gain a sense of subjectivity with Felix’s apprehensive emotional state. Furthermore, his professional attire and modern environment contrasts with his balaclava, creating a visual metaphor regarding his fragmented and convoluted lifestyle. The resulting spatial style of this scene is due to an assemblage of singular directorial decisions, however, the primary force of visual significance was from the structural design of the location. Overall, All elements embrace the underlying themes of the film,
which include: double-identity, false artificial styles, and personal creative entrapment.

The analysis of the cinematographic space presented within the cocktail party scene in *Grid Face* (Fig. 15), encapsulated a number of the film’s key themes. The way in which the scene was shot started off clean and simple, through smooth dollies and stationary shots. Towards the climax of the scene, where Felix has a nervous breakdown and publicly destroys his building model, harsh and erratic hand-held camera movements were used in order to dramatise the actions of the actors.

As for the architectural space, I chose an aesthetically pleasing environment in order to convert the architectural setting into one of the principle actors of the scene. The enormous modern cube-like foyer (Fig. 16), has a minimal amount of furniture which is positioned in such a way to show

![Figure 15: Minimalism and shame. (Felix ruminating)](image)

![Figure 16: Felix critiquing his "artificial designs."](image)
the vast empty space between Felix and his associates. This visually represents the lack of personal connection he has with them. Again, this is emphasized through a wide-angle shot, indicating his seclusion in relation to the clusters surrounding him. All the leading lines of this particular shot (Fig. 16) was created through the architectural components of the building. For instance, in the background there is a bridge that leads into Felix’s eye line. Furthermore, on the top right quarter of the shot (Fig. 16), the shadows created from the outside car park leads to the triangular building model near the centre of the frame. The ambient natural lighting of the scene beautifully lights Felix’s face (Fig. 15) creating a dramatic and soft half-filled face shadow alluding to his mixed feelings about his career and life choices. The natural lighting of the architectural space achieved this effect without the need to add film lights, which consequently, made operations on the day much more convenient thanks to the lighting designer of the structure. Moreover, the colour pallet of the building is analogous to the elements I added in the scene to symbolically suggest the conformist and bland nature of his workplace (Fig 15, 16, 17). The strategically-placed triangular-like building model behind Felix in Fig. 15, also shares the same colour pallet and dynamics of his formal attire, connecting both the symbolic prop to his character and indeed to the entirety of the architectural space. A static high-angle shot (Fig. 15) with the subject fairly close to the lens was chosen to create a sense of claustrophobia, as well as for its power of showing the vulnerability that Felix is feeling. Overall, the architectural elements of the foyer in this scene was captured through certain cinematic devices to aid the narrative of Grid Face, and carry on the themes and visual motifs.

A key example of the accentuation of architecture in the cinematographic space of Grid Face can be seen within a particular recollection of Felix’s childhood memories (Fig. 18). After Felix smashes his building model in the cocktail party of the foyer (Fig. 17), he recollects a single peculiar memory from his childhood. Captured handheld from below the child’s head on a wide-angle lens, we see a young Felix looking up towards the neighbour’s luxurious house. Both these shots were
seemingly transitioned due to the parallel hand-held camera movements. The juxtaposition between the deteriorating childhood house (Fig. 18) and the home in which he lives in now (Fig. 19) illustrates his childhood’s desire for modern architecture and a wealthy lifestyle. The first impression’s we attain with each flashback showcase extremely different locations—demonstrating how far Felix has come in life from his humble beginnings. This montage of dissimilar architecture alludes to Eisenstein’s idea of the ecstatic first impressions created with montage within the film and architectural realms (1938, 118). Ultimately, each presented architectural building within *Grid Face* alludes to distinctive connotations that effect the mood and narrative of the film.

*Figure 17: Felix reminisces of a random childhood memory and dream after smashing his model publicly.*

*Figure 18: Childhood memory where Young Felix observes neighbouring modern house.*
Towards the end of the film, Felix is seen viewing a news report on the recently vandalised modern triangular building he designed, and consequently, the building in which he defaced (Fig 20). The cinematic devices I chose in this scene aimed to illustrate Felix’s involvement with the vandalism. This was achieved through a low wide-angle shot displaying Felix under the photos presented on the live news report. More obviously, the black splattered paint on Felix’s head and shirt mimic the same painting style within the news’s composition. The feelings that carried Felix throughout the film were finally expressed through the act of defacing this particular style of building. The defaced triangular geometric building resembles all the previous environments with a comparable style, in which Felix demised with a passion. In his opinion, these style of buildings
deserved to be mindlessly defaced with black paint. Accordingly, Felix’s endeavour to conquer this style of architecture, made architecture itself an antagonistic character. The reoccurring visual motif of the film was finally addressed with a climactic resolve. Thus, through the accentuation of architecture within the cinematographic space of Grid Face, I was able to drive narrative and explore character.

What each of these examples and sequences demonstrate, is that “the construction of spatial perception on screen is a complicated procedure involving a multitude of complimentary factors including the characteristics of cinematographic construction identified earlier” (Cairns 2013, 168). In each example, different combinations of: ‘aesthetic’, ‘compositional and choreographic’ and the ‘filming style,’ constructed diverse spatial perceptions. Balanced and controlled in some while disjointed and erratic in others. Ultimately, the analysis of the spatial style of Grid Face demonstrates the way in which the cinematic and emphasised architectural spaces affect the narrative, mood, and themes of the film.
CONCLUSION

In my dissertation, I have underlined the prominence of architecture within cinema and analysed how it has played an important role in reflecting and engaging with the narrative, mood, and themes of my short film, *Grid Face*. In chapter one, I examined this significant role through the use of Eisenstein’s theory regarding architecture’s metaphorical link to film, which examines the ways in which following a path of an architectural promenade is similar to watching a well-crafted film. In particular, I detailed how these different viewpoints along the path of the Acropolis of Athens displays cinematic qualities with regards to montage, shot length, and composition. In turn I related this metaphorical theory to the features and aspects of my film *Grid Face*, and how it influenced key decisions in pre-production, production and post-production.

Furthermore, I referred to Graham Cairns (2013), who claimed that every director has a different spatial style which through careful analysis can demonstrate architecture’s effects within cinema. In chapter two I analyse the cinematographic space of my short film *Grid Face*, along with the work of others, to demonstrate the processes and cinematic devices I used in order to accentuate the architectural environments so as to improve storytelling. I did this through many individual decisions, including the use of a wide angle lens to expand each location, the use of symbolic geometric architectural settings which served as a reoccurring visual motif, and by using montage devices in post-production to juxtapose contradictory environments. In this way, *Grid Face* acts as an analytical piece that studies the different cinematic mechanisms that filmmakers employ to communicate themes and ideas through the accentuation of architecture within cinema.

This dissertation is about two distinct notions: Architecture and cinema, as well as, architecture in cinema. In the first chapter, I examine how traversing an architectural promenade is related with the act of viewing a film. In the second chapter, we examine specifically how
architecture is accentuated within my film in order to aid all aspects of the story. Ultimately, it was my primary aim for *Grid Face* to integrate the art of architecture into the art of cinema. Filmmaking encompasses all art forms, and as filmmakers we must understand the various kinds of arts and how they influence storytelling.
References


Films

