



‘A House for ...’: Exercises in Filmic Architecture

Raymond Lucas

Introduction

In this chapter I discuss teaching practices in architecture, in particular the opening up of space for teaching outside the strict requirements for a professionally validated degree. My discussion centres on the development of the curriculum at Manchester School of Architecture (MSA) for Masters-level workshops, undertaken in 2014, which aimed to shorten the distance between research and pedagogy and to give students space outside of the traditional ‘silo’ of the studio to explore issues of interest to them. Alongside this development, I produced my own workshops including one entitled ‘Filmic Architecture’. This latter was framed as a series of discussions on film theories, in which participants were asked to select a film director and to analyse their work through a set of exercises. They then had to design a house for this director, to be shown as an appropriately edited short film. The house could be modelled physically or digitally, and either derived from existing footage or assembled from their own shots of the city. The concept of what constitutes a ‘house’ was left wide open, so that students could reflect on the understanding of their chosen director, derived from their research.

This self-contained workshop was not unique to MSA; indeed, architecture schools across the world have engaged similarly with cinema. It nevertheless afforded some freedom from the pressures of a tightly regulated programme of professional education. Moreover, the workshop was set apart by its focus on the underlying principles of cinema. Comparable teaching elsewhere has considered the image of the city in film, the character of urban wanderers, relationships between cities and their cinemas, and the persistence of utopian

— -1
— 0
— +1





and dystopian fictions. But in 'Filmic Architecture', we went further to consider such fundamentals as montage, narratology, genre, sound design, spectatorship and embodiment.

Here I explore how a cross-disciplinary workshop can encourage students to develop critical skills in ways seemingly detached from their everyday design practices. It was not my intention to train a new generation of film production designers (although some students have subsequently moved in that direction), but rather to inform their practice as students and practitioners of architecture. In the fulfilment of this aim, my objectives were threefold: to facilitate the development of poetic responsiveness within an increasingly prescriptive educational model; to develop skills of critique and translation in a cross-disciplinary setting; and to provide a site for experimentation in which architecture might be produced according to a more open-ended brief.

Architectural Educations

Architectural education is often discussed as a field in its own right, with its own literature and theories. This often addresses the idea of the studio, in which education is centred on activities modelled to replicate the operations of an architectural office. It is an education often characterized today in terms of 'becoming' an architect, with teaching itself bearing the hallmarks of a kind of storytelling (Thompson 2019: 2, 7). Attaching a fundamental identity to being an architect feeds much of the mythology of the profession and its celebration of individual genius, at the expense of the broader practice that makes possible and contributes dynamically to the work of making architecture.

Architectural schools have a duty to meet the requirements of regulatory bodies, such as the UK's Architectural Registration Board (ARB) and Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), through the delivery of a heavily prescribed programme of study. The purpose of this is fundamentally sensible. It allows degrees in architecture to cover much of the education of future architects, whilst leaving a significant element to be completed during years-out in practice. In the United Kingdom, courses are validated on a five-yearly cycle, alongside the regular checks and balances applied to contemporary university programmes. All of this makes for a packed curriculum, with students in architecture reported to be amongst the most stressed and overworked in the academy (Xie et al., 2019). There is considerable pressure in the curriculum for every element to work towards fulfilling a standard set of criteria, mapping the course to the

-1 —
0 —
+1 —





profession's expectations. The contemporary model of architectural education further demands that students be taught on a business model, with a focus on innovation, and leading to a managerial approach to the responsibilities of architects. This offers few opportunities to think outside of conventional commercial practice.

Most architecture courses in the United Kingdom have the following components: history and theory, technology, design studio and professional practice. These have local variations (such as our own *Architectural Humanities* in Manchester, which replaces history and theory) and differences in emphasis and approach, but the ARB still expects students to receive an education in architectural history as well as adjacent disciplines such as fine art. This expectation is loosely framed, offering some scope for interpretation. Future architects are required to demonstrate knowledge of building regulations, to be able to complete designs of sufficient complexity, to respond to issues of sustainability and the climate crisis, and to place their work within a historical and intellectual context. Students must pass every element of the course: they cannot fail a single module. This creates an atmosphere which can make them cautious and risk averse.

The problem is addressed by Tatjana Schneider (2015), who positions her own desire for more *slack* in architectural education as a radical political act, framed by her engagement in cooperatives and collectives, in Glasgow and Sheffield, committed to alternative forms of architectural practice.

What if educators embraced change as inevitable? What if they saw education not as a product filled with finite dimensions and ingredients, but as a framework that can be filled with other elements? To realise this, we all need some slack space. The tight-fit-functionalism that has become the norm for architectural education needs replacing with softer solutions that leave this slack; slack to think, develop, explore and experiment. (Schneider 2015: 93–4)

The workshop described here fits this description, in so far as it affords space for experimentation and inquiry. Whilst *slack* might not be the best term for it – and in concluding my argument I suggest *smuggle* as an alternative – the workshop gives students ample opportunity to reflect on what architecture might be, and these reflections often feed into their dissertation topics.

The literature in architectural education tends to focus on how design is taught in a studio context, often at the expense of considering how history and theory might be made relevant, or of the best ways to learn technical details beyond memorizing model solutions. The culture of the architectural studio is very



— -1
— 0
— +1





different from that of the art school, since a persistent feature of architectural studios is the grouping of students into teams, known as 'Units', often led by charismatic practising architects who set projects, give advice, critique work and pass judgement. There is a real risk that such leadership can become blinkered by the cult of personality that develops around these individuals. Indeed, as a discipline, architecture continues to be troubled by the myth of the creative genius who can intervene in the built environment through the sheer force of his or her will.

Further fissures in architectural education divide those characterized, respectively, as practitioners and as academics. Over the past few decades, universities have raised their expectation that staff should have doctorates rather than professional qualifications. This has been encouraged, in part, by wider pressures to participate in research audits, such as the UK's Research Excellence Framework (REF) and comparable exercises in other countries, which leave it to various institutional gatekeepers to decide what kinds of publication and activity count as research. As architectural education is a long-drawn-out affair, requiring five years of university education and at least two years in practice to gain the legally recognized and protected title of Architect, the pool of individuals who are both fully qualified architects and have PhDs remains relatively small. This leads to specialization and territoriality, widening the division between academia and practice. In the words of Peter Cook:

I think architectural education is in great danger, and has been for the last 20 years or so, of being hijacked by those whose real interests are words rather than buildings ... I feel very strongly that architecture has a tremendous inherent structure of its own ... It is a mirror of society, and it responds with incredible richness. It is this aspect, in architectural education, that is in danger of being hijacked by those 'academics' who are able, perhaps by virtue of their intellectual credentials, to make 'normal' architects feel very inferior. (Cook and Hawley 2004: 6-7)

The situation Cook described in 2004 has only been exacerbated over the ensuing years. His words reflect a widely held frustration concerning the place of architecture schools within the contemporary university. They say something about the perceived value of the professional architect in the face of a structure which sees little merit in their activities, but which cannot function without them. Indeed, the very same universities, for which courses in architecture are financially attractive, devalue the professionals required to teach their key elements. While I write this, perhaps, as one of those academics so scorned by

-1 —
0 —
+1 —





Cook, I have observed a similar disdain for architecture in the way research is counted by outputs in 'highly ranked' journals based in rationalist disciplines such as planning and environmental management.

Despite its ambitions for autonomy, architectural education is not immune from the influence of national and international trends in higher education policy, and the confluence of professional regulation and universities geared towards gaming the systems of ranking and external assessment makes for a tightly knotted curriculum. These tensions between autonomy and intellectual dependency on other disciplines are discussed by Martha Pollak (1997: ix–x), with reference to Stanford Anderson's approach to leading the architecture school at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). Pollak shows that histories of architectural education are an important part of the wider history of the discipline and can tell us much about processes of architectural knowledge production. In a chapter of Pollak's volume, Danilo Udovic-Selb (1997: 239–66) underlines the importance of architectural education to the formation of the built environment. His position is that since architecture inevitably conforms to prevailing social expectations, it is impossible to produce work of absolute novelty. Instead, architecture reproduces itself through the generation-by-generation reinterpretation of existing works (Udovic-Selb 1997: 258).

Design teaching often attempts to replicate some of the conditions of architectural practice. Groups of students are issued with a programme or brief to fulfil, a site to work on and other factors to consider, depending on the stage of their education. In postgraduate teaching, these groups are often organized thematically, and as noted earlier, they are often described as Units. The Unit system has been a persistent feature of UK architectural education. Sometimes Units are identified only by number: Unit 1, Unit 2; other schools give them thematic names or titles. At MSA, we have *Ateliers* instead of Units, grouping students from the final year of the architecture BA and the two years of MArch study on common themes such as (though not limited to): building re-use (*Continuity in Architecture*); computationally informed design (*Complexity Planning and Urbanism*); urban and infrastructural design (*Infrastructure Space*); and feminist critiques of existing practice and proposals for alternatives (*Praxis*). Whilst valuable and intellectually coherent, the Unit system is often blamed for creating silos within the school. Competition sometimes emerges between Units, and students can find themselves at odds with the leadership of their group without any opportunity for escape, having committed to their choice – through a competitive election in which Unit leaders lobby for students to join them – for an entire academic year.



— -1
— 0
— +1



Persuasive arguments have been made to the effect that the primary purpose of the atelier is not to teach design but to ‘socialize’ students into the profession (Banham 1990: 295; Jacob 2015: 174). Architectural historian and theorist Reyner Banham, in particular, frames his discussion in terms of a much earlier critique of the professionalization of architecture, instigated by W. R. Lethaby in the early twentieth century, whilst Dana Cuff (1991: 112) discusses the enculturation process when a new graduate joins what looks increasingly like a toxic workplace, more than thirty years after she conducted her ground-breaking ethnography of an architectural practice. Professional architects, she shows, are not expected to have time to pursue any interests outside of a narrowly permitted set of activities. They must be devoted to the discipline and the profession, without distraction. This is a model that persists in some places, and it is reproduced by the studio system. Curiously, in proposing a solution for architectural education, Banham discounts everything beyond the Western canon. This position, increasingly out of step with contemporary efforts to decolonize the curriculum, is not one I would subscribe to myself; nevertheless, Banham’s core idea, that architectural education acts primarily to socialize students into the profession, does hold true to an extent. It may need to change if practice is to free itself from the damaging influences of financial and short-term development priorities.

This underlines the need to introduce elements into the architecture curriculum which cut across studio groupings. In our taught Masters programme, this crosscutting includes research workshops, professional studies groups, individual dissertations and externally facing projects. The workshop teaching brings together students from the various ateliers and is not tied to their ongoing agendas. It enriches students’ conversations and widens their understandings of each other’s approaches to architecture.

Workshop Teaching at MSA

I am concerned here not just with the detail of the workshop I lead, but with the broader curriculum. Our two-year professionally validated Master of Architecture programme (commonly referred to as MArch) expects students to establish individual trajectories informed by their interests as future practitioners, while still conforming to regulatory pressures. Internal developments at MSA led to the creation of the workshops: research-led studio units which have gone by a number of different names in their seven-year history. Assisted by programme leader Sally Stone, we developed a space for the workshops in the first year of



the MArch, with topics determined by ongoing staff research.¹ The intention was to close the gap between research and teaching within a studio rather than a seminar context.

This challenged some of the more academically oriented staff to engage with the physicality of studio, and to reconcile the often distant and jargon-heavy language of architectural theory with the realities of making things. The point was not to judge the performance of students by strict criteria of success or failure but to provide an opportunity for experiment and play. This playfulness would vary from workshop to workshop, but an essential element of the workshop I describe is what Johan Huizinga (2002: 60), in a work dating from 1949, called *serious play* (see Figure 7.1). In an increasingly closed and conformist programme, with students acutely aware of the financial investment in their education, the workshop opened a space within the curriculum for poetic sensibilities to grow and flourish. Crucial to this objective was the indirect nature of workshop tasks, which served to distract attention away from the imperative to solve problems, in favour of an immersion in the enigmatic (Benjamin 1999: 232).

To this end, we have run workshops on the following topics, each from its own perspective and involving methods ranging from archival research, mapping and GIS to model-making and live projects:

- User Representations in Architecture (Alan Lewis)
- Transdisciplinary Urbanism (Deljana Iossifova)
- Large Data Architectural Research (Łukasz Stanek)
- Prefigurative Architecture (Leandro Minuchin)
- Architectural Counter-Projects (Isabelle Doucet)
- Lost Spaces (Tom Jefferies)
- The Age of MTV: Media, Urban Culture and Identity (Léa-Catherine Szacka)
- Postwar Infrastructure (Luca Csepely-Knorr and Richard Brook)
- Control and Display: Mapping the Bodies of Manchester (Stephen Walker)
- Remember Reveal Construct (Sally Stone and Laura Sanderson)

My own, long-running and continually evolving workshop, 'Filmic Architecture', was an opportunity for me to revive my interest in film and architecture, dating back to my earliest research projects.² This workshop has operated in parallel with others I have designed focusing on architectural drawing (such as 'Hard and Disagreeable Labour', named after John Ruskin's description of learning to draw) and the ways knowledge is produced in architecture ('Knowledge Production in Architecture', which built on some discussions from the *Knowing From the Inside* research project as well as on



— -1
— 0
— +1



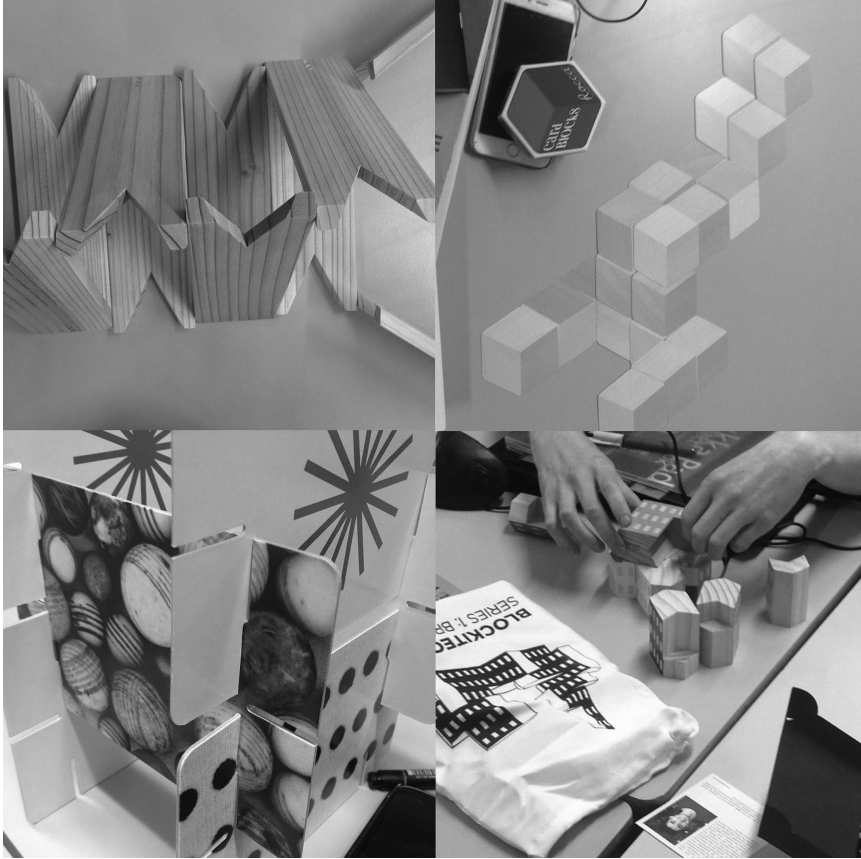


Figure 7.1 Using architectural toys to develop designs. Toy-play employs a distancing strategy that encourages students to think with alternative structural logics, including Charles and Ray Eames's interlocking planar structures with 'House of Cards', Kuma Kengo's 'Tsumiki' timber elements, 'Blockitecture' building blocks and Rocca isometric playing cards. Photo courtesy of the author, November 2016.

my continuing engagement with architecture and anthropology). The 'Filmic Architecture' workshop, however, has proved to be both durable and adaptable, even in the Covid-19-blighted academic year of 2020–1. Compared with other workshops I have run, 'Filmic Architecture' produces fresh results every year, continually surprising and delighting me with the inventiveness of the students who take part in it.

I have some personal history with this. In the final year of my own architectural education, I was struggling with the design of a cinema, having produced the design exclusively through sequences of acrylic paintings depicting perspective views of the project. Their opacity made it difficult for many critics, and



I was asked to spend more time on the project under the supervision of the late Professor Per Kartvedt, a notoriously mischievous raconteur well known across the Glasgow architecture scene and largely responsible, with Jonathan Charley, for revitalizing the intellectual agenda of the Masters programme at the University of Strathclyde. This was to prove an important intervention and, in my continued work on the project, I discussed the way I saw its various perspectives being held together by elements from cinematic theory. I had begun reading Eisenstein's essays on montage theory and found many parallels with architectural ideas of the threshold. This led to Kartvedt's supervision of my thesis on the topic, taking key concepts from film and looking at their architectural implications: what did narrative theory or ideas of spectatorship enable us to think about in architecture? The work was supported by funded research on Scottish documentary pioneer John Grierson³ but was eventually abandoned as a doctoral project when a studentship became available elsewhere.⁴ The resulting MPhil (Lucas 2002) has therefore always represented unfinished business, and I would frequently use cinematic metaphors and examples to illustrate ideas when speaking with students or working on later research. This early project established much of the language of my research and, some years later, I found myself wondering if this might also be beneficial to my own students at MSA.

Films as Precedents

Resort to precedent is a recognized way, in architecture, of examining and learning from existing buildings. Similar to, but carrying less weight than, the use of precedent in the legal profession, architectural examples might demonstrate particular uses of materials, planning and organization, or details such as windows and thresholds. These precedents are used as proof of concept since, unlike other disciplines where some degree of mass production is the aim, architectural objects are too large to operate with prototypes. In the case of the 'Filmic Architecture' workshop, however, we used films as precedents – as ideas to think with. Scenes were carefully selected to describe key ideas in each session of the workshop. These would vary from year to year, but with an aim to go beyond the accepted canon of what is generally accepted as 'architectural cinema': films such as Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927), Alfred Hitchcock's *Rear Window* (1954), Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining* (1980) or Ridley Scott's *Bladerunner* (1982), all of which cast long shadows over the field. I could not avoid them all, of course, and I opened with a discussion of alternative spatiality in film, using key scenes

— -1
— 0
— +1





from Jean-Luc Godard's *Alphaville* (1965), Andrey Tarkovsky's *Stalker* (1979) and George Lucas's *THX 1138* (1971).

These latter examples were selected for good reason. In the first, Godard's strategy for appropriating Eddie Constantine's portrayal of the hard-boiled detective Lemmy Caution⁵ mirrors his approach to the city of Paris, in which he shows us only the modernist anonymity of the city, not its familiar landmarks and boulevards. He excises everything that makes Paris unique and identifiable, giving us the monstrous city of Alphaville in its place. The second example is Tarkovsky's loose retelling of the Strugatsky Brothers' novel *Roadside Picnic*, in which a mysterious and unexplained event has created the Zone: a space where the laws of causality have broken down. At the centre of the Zone is the Room where a visitor's greatest desire is said to be granted. As in *Alphaville*, the science fiction is enacted with minimal technical means: editing, tension and the reactions of the guide – the Stalker of the title – are used to express the dangers of the Zone without showing them explicitly. Navigation of this space is unclear; the direct straight line is impossible even when the destination is visible. The Stalker ties rags to metal bolts and uses these as rangefinders in a manner that recalls Ingold's (2000: 327–40) contrast between wayfinding and navigation. The Stalker knows how to find a way through the Zone where its shifting nature would render a static map meaningless.

My third example of spatiality comes from an early film of George Lucas which builds on familiar science fiction tropes of a subterranean society under authoritarian rule, in which behaviour is controlled and regulated by prescribed mood-altering drugs. The film's soundscape is one layer of spatial expression; another layer is provided by a prison scene where the soundstage is stark and white – there are no details, just other prisoners who enforce the mental state of imprisonment upon themselves and each other, a social constraint similar to Foucault's (1995: 195–228) discussion of Bentham's Panopticon. The film's hero THX 1138 – having discovered that once free of his drug regime he can exercise free will – simply walks in a straight line to make his escape.

The first workshop task was to make a retroactive storyboard of the filmmaker's works. Scenes from a number of films were selected and the conventions of simple storyboard drawings were used to break these sequences down. This is an analytical process which requires of students to learn a simple, new representational language with comic-strip style sequences and movement arrows showing the action in each scene. This was then developed through further iterations by layering soundscape and dialogue, using detailed movement notations and making architectural drawings such as plans to show

-1 —
0 —
+1 —



sequencing analytically. The storyboard task subtly built the visual vocabulary of the students who were new to film studies and asked them to understand what makes their chosen director's work different from that of others (Figure 7.2). Interesting conversations ensued around the ways in which directors in the Hollywood system would make use of its sophisticated codes: what marks out a director such as Steven Spielberg from the masses of other directors operating within the same system?

Sound is an element of cinema often neglected in architectural and filmic discourses; there is, however, a distinctive spatiality to the designed soundscape of cinema. Taking some ideas from the work of Michel Chion (1994) and from Walter Murch's (2001) writings on sound in film, common interests quickly emerged with more architectural writings such as by Jean-François Augoyard and Henry Torgue (2006), who look to extend the scope of architectural sound beyond the controlled environment of the auditorium, suggesting that sound can be designed for deliberate effect. Starting from an appreciation of the messiness of sound, they analyse how it is produced and give instructions for replicating its effects. Films such as Peter Strickland's *Berberian Sound Studio* (2012) explore the role of sound in building the cinematic image. The narrative involves a British sound recordist who has been invited to an Italian studio specializing in horror films and follows his descent into madness as he works with increasingly gruesome sounds for an unpleasant film. The film opens the

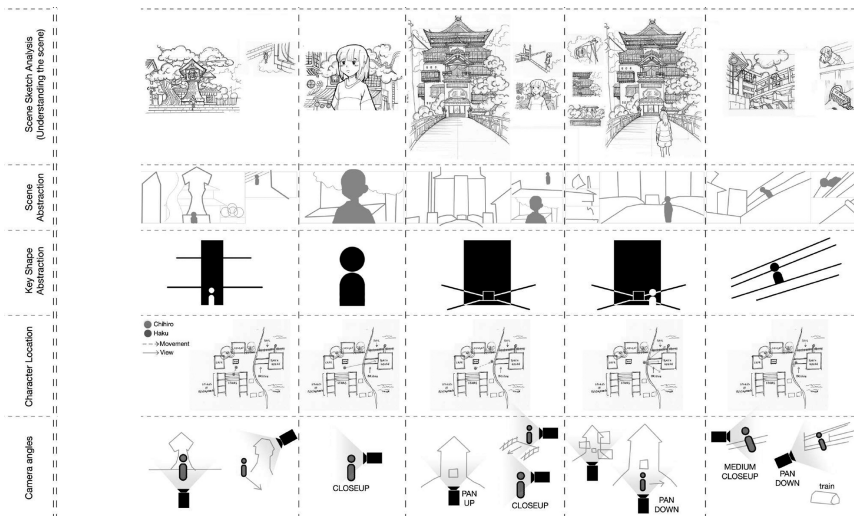


Figure 7.2 Example of storyboards from Archontia Manolakelli's preparatory work for a House for Hayao Miyazaki

— -1
— 0
— +1

black box of cinema's use of sound: audio recording is increasingly divorced from the filming of scenes. In fiction cinema, re-recorded dialogue and accentuated sound effects are effaced from the film when it is screened, but a great deal of artifice is used to produce this effect.

Francis Ford Coppola's film *The Conversation* (1974) is also helpful in exploring the potential of sound. The espionage narrative involves a team attempting to listen to a couple who meet in a crowded city square. The technology of sound recording is a feature of the narrative, with the film's protagonist developing technologies and strategies for isolating and capturing the sound from a great distance. The opening shot of the film explores the diegetic (or in-world) and extra-diegetic (sounds overlaid like a soundtrack, not belonging to the world of the story), eventually revealing through audible glitches that the sound approximates what one of the surveillance team has been recording. Other films such as Bong Joon-Ho's *Barking Dogs Never Bite* (2000) and Kleber Mendonça Filho's *Neighbouring Sounds* (2012) offer masterclasses in depicting the disturbing nature of sounds and their effects on the residents of dense apartment complexes. The idea of noise as unwanted sound has its own history and is here connected to the history and discourse on noise abatement societies and other controls over noise in the city.

A further theme of the workshop was embodiment; here, the works of Agnes Varda and Claire Denis proved particularly helpful. As with the theme of sound design, the forms of embodiment in cinema can be instructive to architecture, which has a long history of conceptualizing the body: from the well-known geometric rendering of Vitruvian Man, through Le Corbusier's idiosyncratic *Modulor* of 1948, the various standardized bodies in the *New Metric Handbook* (1979–2018 editions) and *Neufert Architects Data* (1936–2019 editions), to the more nuanced and inclusive work by Jos Boys (2014). Cinematic ideas of the body extend the possibilities of architectural thinking significantly: the idea that cinematic images have tactile and haptic qualities helps students to think about how bodies are made to conform to societal expectations, about the relationships between architecture and people and about various aspects of race and gender.

Film theory dealing with embodiment has some of its foundations in Dziga Vertov's notion of the *kino-eye*, which positions the camera as a mechanical eye. More recent works such as Jennifer Barker's *The Tactile Eye* (2009), Laura Marks's *The Skin of the Film* (2000) and Steven Shaviro's *Cinematic Body* (1993) further explore body-like uses of the camera in cinema, along with the ways active audiences identify with the characters of a film. Students in the workshop



were asked to engage with the parallel between ideas of the body, respectively in architecture and in cinema, in order to diagram or notate the various expressions of the body in the work of their chosen director. This might be the broad combination of slapstick and martial arts in Jackie Chan's films, the subtleties of relationships in Wong Kar Wai, or the gradual conformity of a character to the masculinities of Shane Meadows's social realism.

Architectural skills of diagramming and mapping were also used to develop ideas of temporality in the students' chosen films. Whilst we might presume that architecture has less flexibility than cinema when it comes to time, a number of lessons and discussions opened up here. Time-travel narratives offer the most direct route into the topic, but the structure of cinema also allows for various flashes forward and back, as well as for time-eliding scenes: making things present through their absence. Films such as Chris Marker's *La Jetée* (1962) employ sophisticated ways of breaking the presumed cinematic device of twenty-four frames per second down to a series of still frames which can still be read as movement whilst telling a story involving apocalyptic wars, time travel and an obsession with Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958). The exercise of diagramming was taken seriously. Picking up on Marco Frascari's *Eleven Exercises in the Art of Architectural Drawing* (2011), the notion of exercise itself was revealed to be of considerable pedagogic value. The exercise is a preparatory activity, one which increases one's capacity for action and affirms bodily knowledge and muscle memory. Architectural exercise, then, can be thought of in a similar manner to conventional physical exercise. Tasks of diagramming and notation exercise architects' skills of graphic communication, equipping them with approaches of potential application to subsequent design projects.

Unravelling a film such as Christopher Nolan's *Memento* (2000) or Shane Carruth's *Primer* (2004) helped students render complex structures explicable and clear. Other aspects of temporality were explored through the study of comedic timing in the films of contemporary filmmaker Edgar Wright, whose studied use of musical cues in *Baby Driver* (2017) provided one student with a great deal of material to work with. Temporality remains an important field for research in architecture, and it features strongly in studies of informal architecture as well as adaptive reuse. Others, such as architect Bernard Tschumi (1994), borrow freely from Sergei Eisenstein's understanding of the layered temporality of a film scene by reusing his orchestration diagram from an essay on 'Vertical Montage' (Eisenstein 2010). All of this contributes to presenting temporality as something that can be manipulated architecturally through the

— -1
— 0
— +1



design of thresholds between rooms, through the pacing of a space or through peeling away its layers of history and potential.

Further activities included the detailed examination of the filmmaker's production design, noting the manner in which characterization is achieved by selecting the environments inhabited by persons in the film. Examples from Hays Code⁶ Era Hollywood, at a time when what were deemed to be immoral acts were prohibited from being displayed on screen, are particularly interesting in this regard as they make use of specific devices in order to suggest events and characterizations which could not be shown directly (Albrecht 1986). Steven Jacobs (2013) takes this into a more explicit exploration of film and architecture, in his exploration of how Alfred Hitchcock used houses as representations of the psychological states of his characters.

Art direction is at its most obvious in costume dramas and fantasy cinema, but more subtle production design is present in contemporary settings where the dressing of a set belonging to a group of characters can represent their relationships without interrupting the flow of the narrative. Various strategies are used. Where the setting is unfamiliar, the production design gives us familiar elements to allow us to imagine life there, validating the story-world as one which can potentially be inhabited. If this believability is ruptured at any point, the result can be to disengage the audience from the film. Certain genres use the setting as a character in its own right, such as in shut-room detective stories or horror films where the house in which the story unfolds acts explicitly against the protagonists. Production design entails the deliberate construction of a material culture, and this can be explored by students in designing a simple room for their chosen director as an initial design exercise.

Other tasks were used to build the students' portfolios with graphic and modelled understandings of the filmmakers they had chosen to work on. The final steps would take students into familiar design processes where architectural precedents were now chosen to connect their understandings of cinema back to existing architecture, and thereby to form a model of how they might begin to design the house for their director. A brief would also be written, but instead of the usual schedule of accommodation with its requirements for living room, kitchen, bathroom, bedrooms and so on, the house might require rooms for different emotional states, rooms for having fights in or for other unorthodox purposes. Responses to the task included distributing the 'house' across a series of pavilions, specifying it as an urban site or landscape, or deciding that the house is a library or watchtower instead of a dwelling.



With the brief in mind, designs were produced using students' existing skills. These would be sketchy, lacking the detail of their main studio projects, and were made in a wide variety of ways. The models might be physical or digital, a series of drawings, or film clips and footage shot by the student. They were organized by returning to the storyboarding task from the beginning of the workshop, prior to producing a short film of 3 to 5 minutes.

Translations from Cinema to Architecture

It is not necessary here to dwell at length on the content of the workshop. It covered a range of topics from narrative structure through spectatorship, mise-en-scène, production design, genre and other aspects of film, and went on to apply these to architecture. At its core, the workshop asked students to select a film auteur – normally a director – for whom they wished to design a house. This was a deceptively simple task: using the oeuvre of the director as a means for generating the building's brief, workshop participants would analyse the director's films using a range of graphic means of description. The ultimate aim was to develop a full analysis of the films and their architectural implications, followed by the design for the house which was to be built as a model and produced as a short film.⁷

This task was variously interpreted. Most students worked with a physical model, translating the findings of their spatial analysis of the films, but a few interpreted the task in alternative or hybrid ways. Filming the model liberated it from some of the usual constraints: for example, where a model is normally designed to be relatively robust and transportable, a filmed model can be relatively ephemeral. The models also began to find their way out of the studio, in one instance being filmed in a park, borrowing the light, background and ambiance of the open-air setting through the model's windows. Another model was subjected to even more extreme circumstances: it was floated on a lake and then deliberately sunk.

Computer tools were frequently used as well. Quick and simple software such as *Sketchup* has certain advantages over the more complex packages, allowing various approaches to the model-making task which involved ubiquitous off-the-shelf elements, as in the case of a student who represented the Hong Kong of Wong Kar Wai through a complex arrangement of interpenetrating and permeable spaces, all given veracity through encrustation with sign boards, extraction fans and other banal elements. The digital model was the basis for



— -1
— 0
— +1



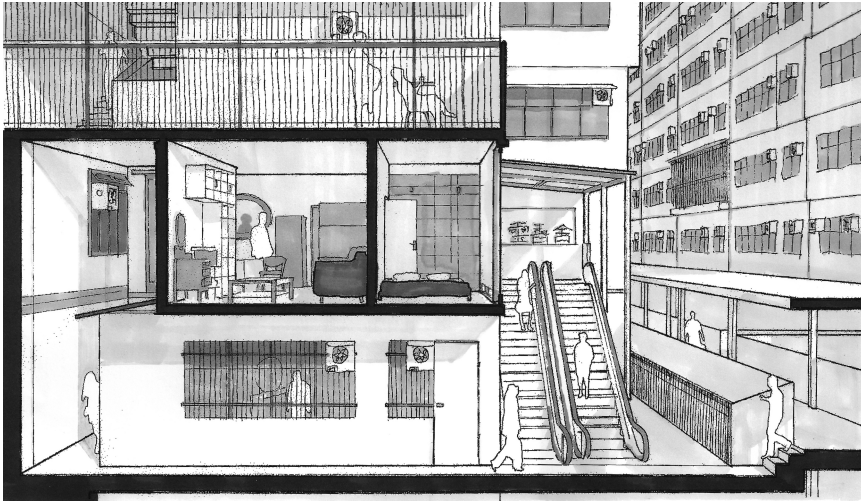


Figure 7.3 *Drawing of Wong Kar Wai's cinematic Hong Kong by Peter Sun Yin*

subsequent hand drawings and a physical model to reinstate an autographic quality to the material (Figure 7.3). Another approach was the hybrid model. A strong tradition persists of hybridizing models with drawings, but in this case the model would be spliced with footage, whether deliberately shot to further explore the idea of the project or extracted from the films in question. Sometimes the hybridization would only include a soundtrack, by borrowing aural cues from an environment or film to add atmosphere.

This project entailed a form of translation, a tried and tested creative prompt to work laterally and across disciplines. The architecture student would have to conduct a great many operations in processing and analysing the spatial qualities of a film, while also considering which thematic and formal elements can be extracted and built upon.⁸

The experience of translation is parallel to this. It shows that the sentence is not a mosaic, but an organism. To translate is to invent an identical constellation, in which each word is influenced by all the others and, bit by bit, profits from its relation to the whole language. (Ricoeur 2003: 91)

Translation is an important operation in model-making, performed repeatedly throughout the process. The most obvious translations, of course, are of scale and materials, but as we have already seen, models can have diagrammatic and schematic intentions, calling for the translation of concepts into three dimensions either by tight editing of the content of the model or by mapping

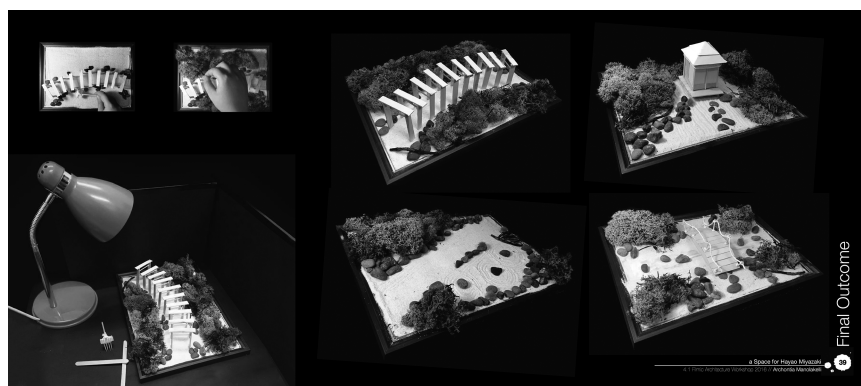


Figure 7.4 Model of Miyazaki's cinematic space interpreted as a Japanese gravel garden by Archontia Manolakelli. The model was manipulated in real time and filmed in order to represent different episodes in the film studied.

parameters onto the three dimensions of physical space. The model is thus more than a composite of individual parts. Rather, as Ricoeur says of the sentence, it is an *organism*, presenting an alternative assemblage showing the parts in their reciprocal relationships to one another (Figure 7.4).

Elsewhere, Ricoeur discusses interpretation and exegesis. Rooting our study in hermeneutic theory might be seen as a return to the notion of the model as an object to be read and interpreted, but in practice the model has as much potential to *be* that interpretation in the first place (Ricoeur 2000: 13). Ricoeur argues that interpretation is the work of uncovering meaning. The process of making the model and then of demonstrating it in the short film is thus an interpretative act. Communicating an understanding of the films by way of model-making constitutes what Ricoeur (2000: 3) calls an interpretative community, in which the conveyance of meaning is a social act. In contexts of communication, these filmed models are part of a continuum on which lie all other architectural models ever produced. Once a model is made, it can be compared to others, and can both be an interpretation and be interpreted itself according to historical context and contemporary conditions.

With this we can begin to see how model-making can play a role in the production of architectural knowledge, and conceptualized more broadly not just as a manual and material but also as a cognitive practice. A growing body of research looks to consider drawing and inscriptive practice more generally as legitimate forms of academic knowledge production, inaugurating a graphic anthropology backed up by scholarship on and with architectural drawing. What

— -1
— 0
— +1

we have shown is that if drawing can be a way of doing architectural research, then the same goes for model-making as well.

Temporality, Narrative and Architectural Film-Making

Over the course of the workshops, some variations have been introduced, and each year has had a slightly different focus. In 2017–18, students were asked to focus more on the film-making aspect of the process by distilling the narratives from their selected films and sharing these with colleagues. Students would then imagine ‘what if’ scenarios such as: What if Edgar Wright rather than Hitchcock had directed *Psycho*? What if Lars von Trier, and not Christopher Nolan, had directed *Dunkirk*? This resulted in some particularly innovative projects which made exceptional use of filmmaking as a way to explore architecture.

A sophisticated approach was taken by Liam Bright in his study of Edgar Wright, where the initial focus was on the director’s use of familiar English small towns with Hollywood-style narratives transplanted into them for comedic effect. The films *Shaun of the Dead*, *Hot Fuzz* and *The World’s End* form what is known to fans as the ‘Cornetto Trilogy’ after a repeated sight gag in all three films. This might seem like unpromising ground for a Masters thesis in architecture, but a seriousness was brought to the ways in which comedic timing is used in the films (Figure 7.5).

This study of comic timing is explored with reference to the film’s sound design, where a diagram shows the overlapping elements which come together to build an everyday scene. Here, much of the comic effect comes from the rising tension of an overly long scene, the repetition of that scene and the confounding of expectations: all of which are temporal qualities. Bright’s work reinterprets scenes from the Hitchcock original, but links them to a piece of popular music to reinterpret them as black comedy rather than psychological horror. The flippancy of the approach is key here, as it is taken seriously in the same way that

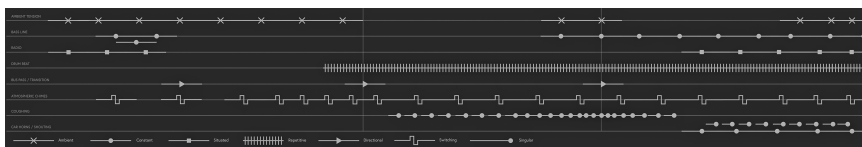


Figure 7.5 Sound and timing analysis of Edgar Wright’s *Shaun of the Dead* by Liam Bright

Huizinga does in his notion of play: by approaching the task in a straightlaced manner, much nuance can be extracted.

Kassandra Koutsoftas's project on Lars von Trier tackled one of the most challenging and controversial of contemporary filmmakers, focusing not on his Dogme '95 works, but on later films forming a 'Trilogy of Depression' with *Antichrist*, *Melancholia* and *Nymphomaniac*. Koutsoftas's approach was grounded in narrative archetypes, leading to the production of a physical deck of Tarot cards. The symbols were based on an understanding of the films' narrative tropes, allowing for the production of new narratives from alternative arrangements and readings of the cards. The Tarot project exploits several filmic ideas and theories as well as architectural sensibilities. The card readings are relational: relying on their juxtaposition with other symbols as well as positions in an overall spread of cards where order, orientation and position carry further meaning. By diving into the symbolism of von Trier's narratives, the project – rather than simply exploring a single story – developed a system for producing narratives (Figure 7.6). Working with a colleague's synopsis of Nolan's film *Dunkirk*, from which details of the period and of the conflict had been removed, Koutsoftas went on to edit a short film to depict contemporary feminist struggles, tying existing footage to her Tarot archetypes.

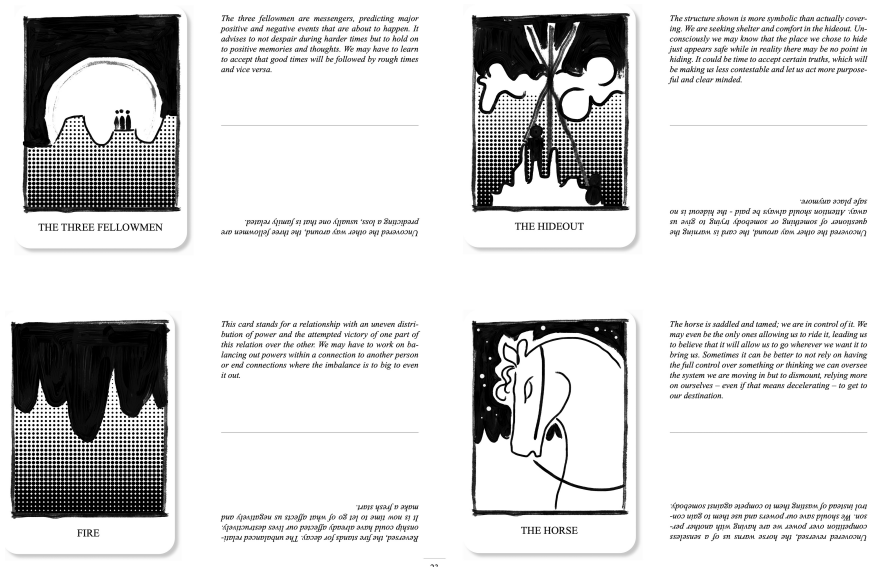


Figure 7.6 Major Arcana of a Tarot deck designed after Lars von Trier's Trilogy of Depression, by Kassandra Koutsoftas

— -1
— 0
— +1

The cinematic architectures produced by students on this iteration of the workshop suggest a focus on temporality through the vehicles of narrative structure and sound design. This opens further opportunities for architectural exploration, beyond heavy symbolism and ornamentation. If we could begin to understand architecture's inherent temporality in greater detail and approach this as an avenue for design, the results could have enormous potential. Crucially, in our time of climate crisis, when architects and developers are being asked to prioritize renovation over new building, the reconstitution and reassembly of existing parts into unrecognizably new forms could prove particularly instructive. The next step is to apply this logic elsewhere, taking understandings from cinema's temporal poetics and using them to reinterpret architecture.

Conclusion: Unlearning, De-socializing, Dis-culturing

In many ways, the workshop described here brings about the very opposite of what Banham means by socializing the architect: it involves subtly *unlearning* how to conform to the architectural studio and looking afresh at the potential of architectural education to challenge conformity. Whilst many architectural colleagues have been more explicitly political in the design of their syllabi, proposing solutions to real-world problems, engaging with communities, reinterpreting archival materials and challenging students in many other ways, this workshop occupies a space on the periphery of the discipline, looking out towards works, texts and approaches from outside both film theory and architecture.

Instead of the *slack* that Schneider (2015: 93–4) called for, the aim of the workshop might better be described by the idea of *smuggling*. How could we smuggle something back into the curriculum: some joy and reverie, something unexpected that does not need to be measured or immediately useful? The choice of film was a considered one; it might as well have been literature or fine art, but film's possibilities as both entertainment and art make for intriguing results. As many great projects have drawn on lighter comedic or romantic works, as on the works of weighty art-house directors, and these have called for different angles of analysis. Students develop skills of interpretation, translation and analysis which inform their later projects. By framing the assignment as the design of something that will never (or in some cases, could not possibly) be built, some pressure is taken off the outcome, allowing more attention to be paid to refinements of communication. By really looking and listening closely,



students hone their observational skills and make direct contact with theories and ideas which they can integrate into their subsequent design practices.

In the 'Filmic Architecture' workshop making is mobilized as a form of analysis. Openness is key to the success of the project, as it allows for the expression of the student's spectatorship, their translation and what the films mean to them. All of this is framed academically by engaging with the literature on each director, genre or national cinema tradition, with students borrowing approaches from one another in an open exchange. Critique remains an important part of this. By taking the task almost too seriously, visual languages are significantly refined over the course of the workshop, as arbitrary gestures are replaced by studied movements generated from a deep knowledge of one filmmaker's oeuvre. In a drawing, every line can contain meaning; each mark is an opportunity to say something. As with their drawings, the students' models and films are executed with equal care and deliberation. The ultimate aim of this de-socializing and de-culturing of architecture students is not to satisfy predetermined criteria, nor is it to encourage innovation – a term now assimilated to the managerial model of practice. It is rather to offer an opportunity for exploration.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to all the students of the 'Filmic Architecture' workshop from 2014 to the present, whose innovative work has always been a highlight of the academic year. Particular thanks to those who agreed to allow their work to be included here: Liam Bright, Kassandra Koutsoftas, Peter Sun Yin Lee and Archontia Manolakelli.

Notes

- 1 The workshops would later be coordinated by colleagues Isabelle Doucet and Léa-Catherine Szacka. I am now working on the next iteration of this curriculum as part of my role as Head of Humanities with overall responsibility for history and theory in both the BA and MArch programmes.
- 2 I hope the reader will indulge me a little here, as this biographical detail establishes a foundation for the workshop to follow.
- 3 Produced as a now obsolete CD-ROM and partly available via the SCRAN (Scottish Cultural Resources Access Network) website, <https://www.scran.ac.uk>.

— -1
— 0
— +1



- 4 This studentship would lead me towards anthropology and working with this volume's editor, Tim Ingold. As with all things, interests come full circle and my own version of graphic anthropology is bringing me back to filmmaking, alongside drawing, as a research practice, in my current project to examine the architectural qualities of Japanese festivals.
- 5 This character is borrowed from a series of detective stories in a contemporary setting. Here, however, he – and the actor playing him – are transplanted into a science fiction world of banned emotions, exiled weapons experts, police states and artificial intelligences.
- 6 The Hays Code operated between 1934 and 1958 as a form of self-censorship by Hollywood film studios. The code prevented filmmakers from showing violence or sexual activity and included a wide range of controversial clauses. The abandonment of the code is often ascribed to *Some Like It Hot*, as it challenged the code by featuring cross-dressing throughout the film.
- 7 A selection of student films is available at the author's blog 'Distracted Attention': <https://distractedattention.wordpress.com>. Work from the 2020–1 cohort can be seen at: <https://rmw2021.show/workshop/filmic-architecture-vi>. A showreel from 2020–1 is available at: https://mmutube.mmu.ac.uk/media/Filmic+Architecture+2020-21+showreel/1_o4amrpgb.
- 8 This idea of translation is developed more fully in Lucas (2006: 187–223), with reference to drawing and inscriptive practices.

References

- Albrecht, D. (1986), *Designing Dreams: Modern Architecture in the Movies*, Santa Monica, CA: Hennessey + Ingalls.
- Augoyard, J. F. and H. Torgue (eds) (2006), *Sonic Experience: A Guide to Everyday Sounds*, Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Banham, R. (1990), 'A Black Box: The Secret Profession of Architecture', in R. Banham, *A Critic Writes*, 292–9, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Barker, J. M. (2009), *The Tactile Eye: Touch and the Cinematic Experience*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Benjamin, W. (1999), 'The Work of Art in the Age of Its Mechanical Reproduction', *Illuminations*, 211–45, London: Pimlico.
- Boys, J. (2014), *Doing Disability Differently: An Alternative Handbook on Architecture, Dis/ability and Designing for Everyday Life*, London: Routledge.
- Chion, M. (1994), *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, New York: Columbia University Press.
- Cook, P. and C. Hawley (2004), 'In Conversation', in M. Chadwick (ed.), *Back to School* (Special Issue, *Architectural Design* 74 (5): 6–12), London: Wiley-Academy.



- Cuff, D. (1991), *Architecture: The Story of Practice*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Eisenstein, S. (2010), 'Vertical Montage', in S. Eisenstein, *Writings Volume 2: Towards a Theory of Montage*, 327–99, London: I.B. Tauris/Bloomsbury.
- Foucault, M. (1995), *Discipline and Punish*, New York: Vintage Books.
- Frascardi, M. (2011), *Eleven Exercises in the Art of Architectural Drawing*, London: Routledge.
- Huizinga, J. (2002), *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture*, London: Routledge.
- Ingold, T. (2000), *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill*, London: Routledge.
- Jacob, S. (2015), 'Opening the Black Box', in D. Froud and H. Harriss (eds), *Radical Pedagogies: Architectural Education and the British Tradition*, 173–8, London: RIBA.
- Jacobs, S. (2013), *The Wrong House: The Architecture of Alfred Hitchcock*, Rotterdam: NAI/010 Publishers.
- Lucas, R. (2002), 'Filmic Architecture: An Exploration of Film Language as a Method for Architectural Criticism and Design', unpublished MPhil thesis, Glasgow: University of Strathclyde.
- Lucas, R. (2006), 'Towards a Theory of Notation as a Thinking Tool', unpublished PhD thesis, Aberdeen: University of Aberdeen.
- Marks, L. (2000), *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment and the Senses*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Murch, W. (2001), *In the Blink of an Eye: A Perspective on Film Editing*, Los Angeles, CA: Silman-James Press.
- Pollak, M. (ed.) (1997), *The Education of the Architect: Historiography, Urbanism, and the Growth of Architectural Knowledge*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Ricoeur, P. (2000), *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics*, London: Athlone.
- Ricoeur, P. (2003), *The Rule of Metaphor*, London: Routledge.
- Schneider, T. (2015), 'More Slack Space, Please!', in D. Froud and H. Harriss (eds), *Radical Pedagogies: Architectural Education and the British Tradition*, 87–96, London: RIBA.
- Shaviro, S. (1993), *The Cinematic Body*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Thompson, J. (2019), *Narratives of Architectural Education: From Student to Architect*, London: Routledge.
- Tschumi, B. (1994), *The Manhattan Transcripts*, London: Academy Editions.
- Udovic-Selb, D. (1997), 'Between Formalism and Deconstruction: Hans Georg Gadamer's Hermeneutics and the Aesthetics of Reception', in M. Pollak (ed.), *The Education of the Architect: Historiography, Urbanism, and the Growth of Architectural Knowledge*, 239–66, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Xie, Y., A. Yaqoob, W. Mansell and S. Tai (2019), 'A Qualitative Investigation of Stress Related to Studying Architecture in the UK', *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education*, 20 (1): 3–20.



Selected Filmography

Alphaville (1965), Dir. J. L. Godard, France: Athos Films.

Baby Driver (2017), Dir. E. Wright, USA: TriStar Pictures.

Barking Dogs Never Bite (플란다스의 개) (2000), Dir. J. H. Bong, South Korea: Cinema Service.

Berberian Sound Studio (2012), Dir. P. Strickland, UK: UK Film Council & Film 4.

The Conversation (1974), Dir. F. F. Coppola, USA: The Directors Company.

La Jetée (1962), Dir. C. Marker, France: Argos Films.

Memento (2000), Dir. C. Nolan, USA: Newmarket Films.

Neighboring Sounds (O Som ao Redor) (2012), Dir. K. Mendonça Filho,
Brazil: CinemaScópio.

Primer (2004), Dir. S. Carruth, USA: StudioCanal.

Stalker (Сталкер) (1979), Dir. A. Tarkovsky, Russia: Mosfilm.

THX1138 (1971), Dir. G. Lucas, USA: American Zoetrope.

Vertigo (1958), Dir. A. Hitchcock, USA: Paramount Pictures.