



FILM & ARCHITECTURE

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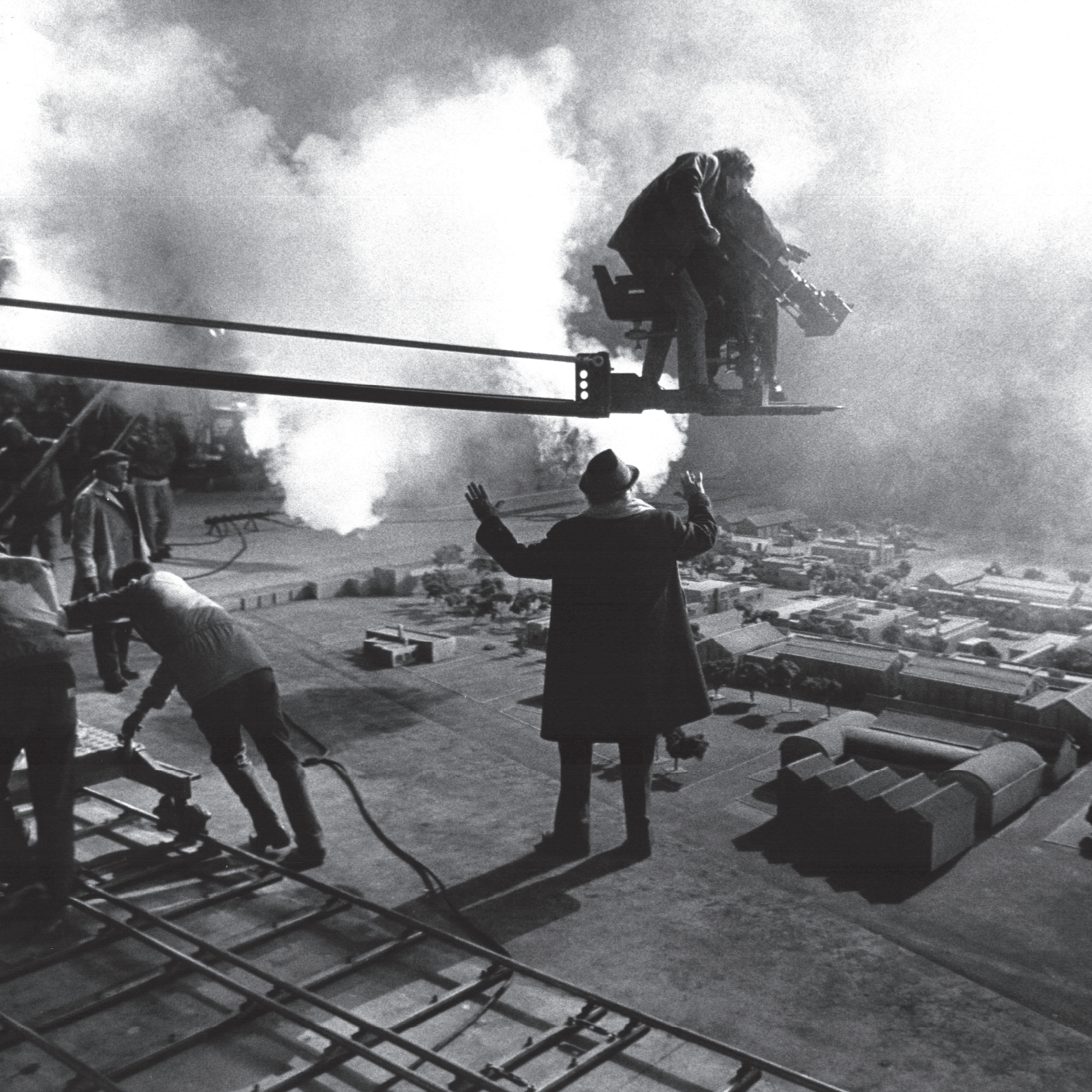
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PROLOGUE



Le Fresnoy. Bernard Tschumi. Photo

INTRODUCTION

The experience of the stroll through the city, and architecture, is often attributed as being cinematic. This usually relates to the (e)motion through a sequence of scenes or images; a spatial montage. As claimed by the early 20th century film director Sergei Eisenstein: “Film’s undoubted ancestor ... is-architecture.”¹ One of the most extreme examples of this is the Le Fresnoy art center designed by Bernard Tschumi. As an advocate of cinematics in architecture, this project can be seen as a culmination of his former writings and ideas. The building is a juxtaposition of old and new, and is conceived through a montage of space, movement and event. Film can be a driver for architecture, but simultaneously, architecture is a fundamental component of almost any film. In many films, architecture can act as an additional character. And as Juhani Pallasmaa² describes: “Architecture gives the cinematic episode its ambiance, and the meanings of the event are projected on architecture”. In *Synecdoche New York*³ the architecture of the theater décor takes on an essential role in the narrative. It reflects the emotional journey of the protagonist by evolving in form and undergoing ‘character development’ itself.

1. Eisenstein, S. (1940). *Montage and architecture*.
2. Pallasmaa, J. (2001). *Architecture of image*.
3. Kaufman, C. (2008). *Synecdoche, New York*

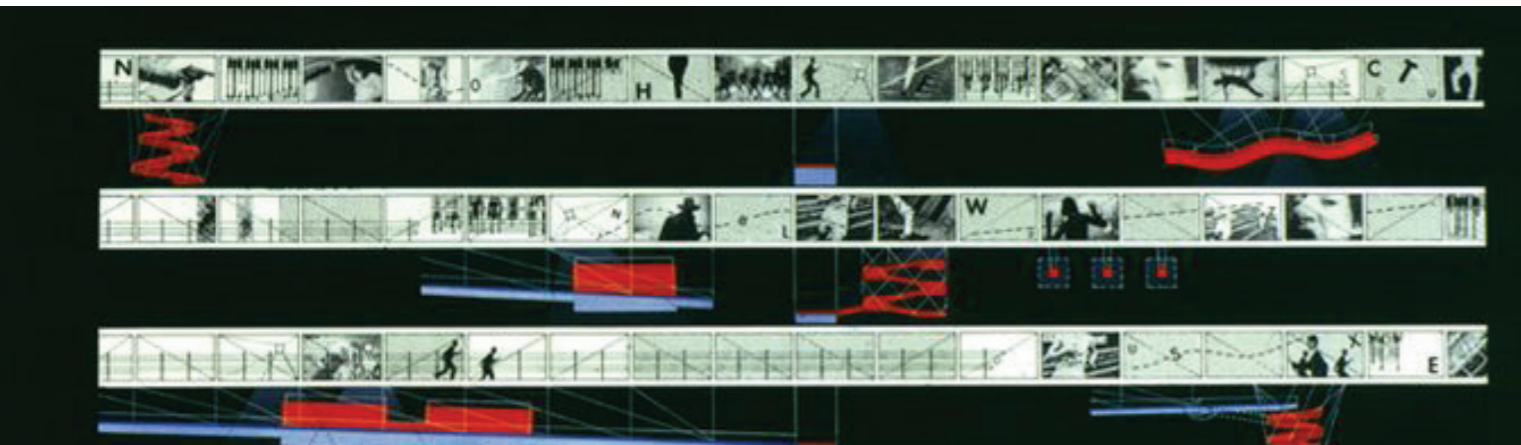
These two examples show the first distinction to be made in the discourse around film and architecture. Firstly, how film can be implemented in architecture. Secondly, architecture as an essential part of film. And lastly, what is the shared space or reality they both operate in? Next, as can already be seen in the first paragraph, there is a multiplicity of terminology surrounding these two topics. That is why in further development of this research a complete glossary will describe all the named terms in relation to this discourse.



Photo. Akropolis Greece

Film and architecture are the only two ‘media’ based in both space and time. Time presenting itself in the form of movement, duration, rhythm, the ephemeral, etc. In addition, film and architecture share similar aesthetics. Here aesthetics is not used as beauty or appreciation of art. But rather in the original Greek sense as ‘Aisthetikos’, perception or sensation, as a theory of all senses. Important here is the emphasis on the totality of senses and not just the visual. For Walter Benjamin⁴, film was the first artform to be able to operate all senses. This is something that is impossible for most conventional modes of representing architecture. Although Tschumi in his *Manhattan Transcripts*⁵ comes closer, still a kinesthetic notion of space, emotion, tactility, etc. are missing. The experience of space, and thus architecture, is inherently subjective. Both architecture and film operate within ‘lived’ space as described by Pallasmaa³. Buildings are constructed within the objective ‘real’ world. Lived space always transcends the rules of Euclidian geometry. Architecture structures this objective world with objects and meaning⁴.

4. Benjamin, W. (1935). *Art in the age of mechanical reproduction*.
5. Tschumi, B. (1981). *Manhattan Transcripts*
6. Pallasmaa, J. (2001). *Architecture of Image*
7. Pallasmaa, J. (2001). *Architecture of Image*



Le Fresnoy. B.Tschumi. drawing.

“When you are in a room, a lived space, this experience is always a combination of external space and inner mental space, actuality and mental projection. Lived space is space that is inseparably integrated with the subject’s concurrent life situation”

You are always at any time in an objective and material world, but also within your own mental world. These two are always intertwined. As Italo Calvino said: “Who are we, who is each any of us, if not a combinatoria of experiences, information, books we have read, things imagined?”. Pallasmaa adds to this: “In this mental space the modes of experiencing cinema and architecture become identical, which meanders without fixed boundaries.”⁸

Now that the foundation of this symbiosis has been established, knowing where it ends is just as important. For Deleuze, cinema turns you away your own thoughts⁹, it inhabits your consciousness. While architecture is ‘merely’ a container for daily life. Facilitating and constricting actions. In the end, film is artistic and architecture is functional.

8. Pallasmaa, J. (2001). *Architecture of image*.

9. Deleuze, G. (1983). *Movement Image*



Chungking Express. Wong Kar Wai.



Synecdoche, New York. Charlie Kaufman. Still



Photo by author

MOTIVATION

Next to my architectural studies film and photography have been a growing interest of mine. In hindsight spatial montage, and later more concretely the topic of film and architecture, have been a recurring theme throughout my academic career. Many topics discussed throughout this proposal have been part of former successful and unsuccessful projects. The main obstacles were what has been briefly addressed in the last chapter. That is the multiplicity of terminology surrounding the subject. And the question: in which of the three named discourses do I find myself? For this research I will focus on the shared realm in which both film and architecture operate. And consequently what architecture can learn from film. Thus the topic of architecture within film will mostly be left aside.

In earlier projects I never really understood how to grasp this topic in its totality, without losing what might be called 'academical' significance and correctness. I am now aware that many of the topics mentioned will not be of much new interest to specialists in either fields. Nevertheless, I now know in the first place that this endeavor will be of great interest and significance for myself as an architect. But secondly, I also believe that undertaking this journey in its totality, attempting to tackle the topic in a practical, hands-on and extensive way, could be of significance to others as well. I hope to think that in the lateral assemblage of techniques, applied to a yearlong research and design, it will create a whole greater than its parts. The process could be compared to an 'artistic research'. This forms the preliminary question:



Goodfellas. Martin Scorsese. Still

How can accumulated terminology from film theory be applied to the field of architectural research and design in a practical, extensive and lateral way?



The Shining. Stanley Kubrick. Still

Partially derived from the layout of the graduation track, and partially based on fundamental parts of the architectural design process, I have divided the research into a four-act structure. City, site, building and material. This narrative is told through a form that is similar to what is called 'hyperlink cinema'. This narrative structure features multiple plotlines which may interweave, intersect or diverge. Each act will have its own emphasis and theme, but together they create a whole in which some themes overlap or might be repeated. The acts are named:

1. **City / event**
2. **Site / memory**
3. **Building / framing & montage**
4. **Material / light**

Just as a film, the research aims to work on many simultaneous levels. It is in the totality of its constituents that it works, and these are not meant to be seen independently. The couplings of title and theme are made so each act has its own emphasis. But, this does not exclude themes to come into play in different acts. What now follows are the four acts, in which for now briefly will be revealed what will be touched upon during the full research



ACT I

CITY /
event

Bicycle thieves. Vittorio de Sica. Still



Bicycle thieves. Vittorio de Sica. Still

CITY / event

The first act will focus on the city as a stage for public and social life. With the notion of 'social space' by Henri Lefebvre (19..) as a backbone, outings will be made to psychogeography, movement, image and the flaneur. This act will show the city inspired by the writings and films of Patrick Keiller, but also cinema in general and especially Italian neorealism.



London. Patrick Keiller. Still



Blow-up. Michelangelo Antonioni. Still



Taxi Driver. Martin Scorsese. Still



ACT II

SITE /
memory

SITE / memory

In this act the more immediate (im)material surroundings of the project will be further explored. How can the past and present context be understood? What is the sense of place? The work of Lefebvre will stay of importance, but in this act the focus will shift more towards a perhaps more symbolic representation of space. The question arises how this could inform an architectural project. What are possible themes and motives found in the area? But also how would a project fit into a sequence of urban images?



Blade Runner, Ridley Scott. Still



Licorice Pizza, Paul Thomas Anderson. Still



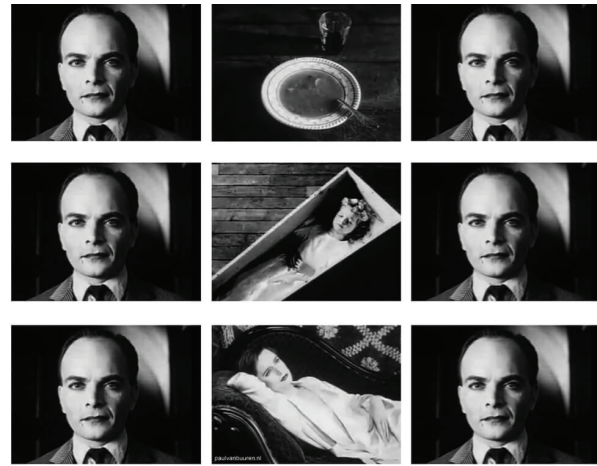
Grand Budapest Hotel, Wes Anderson. Still



ACT II

BUILDING /
framing & montage

Blow-up. Michelangelo Antonioni. Still



Example of Kuleshov-effect

BUILDING / framing & montage

Now we move from the urban- into the architectural interior. Findings from previous acts will be implemented through the use of framing and montage. Questions of tectonics will arise with notions like the set and décor. Movement will remain of importance and will be rehearsed with the use of characters or architectural persona's.



8 1/2. Federico Fellini. Still

Rear Window. Alfred Hitchcock. Still



Touch of Evil. Orson Welles. Still





ACT IV

MATERIAL /
light

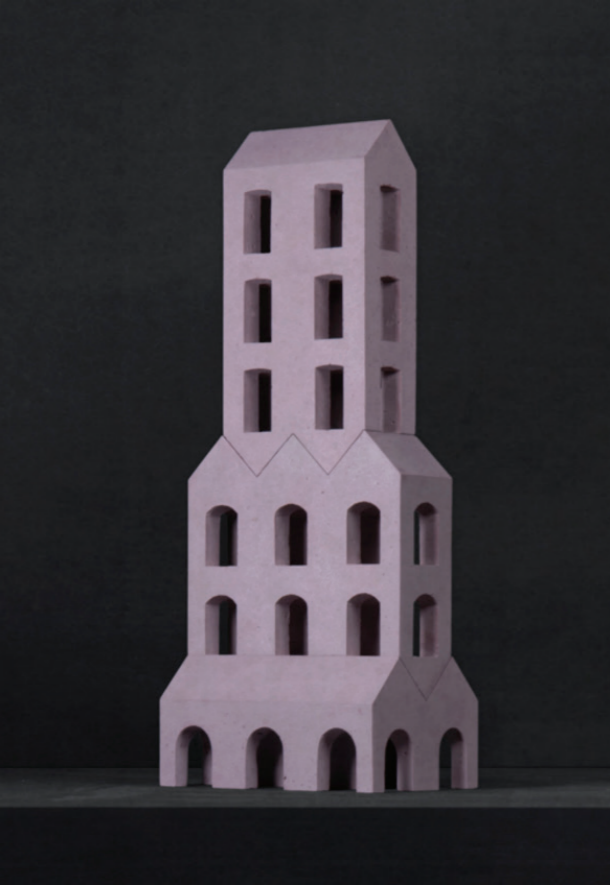


Photo. Happel Cornelissen Verhoeven Architecten.

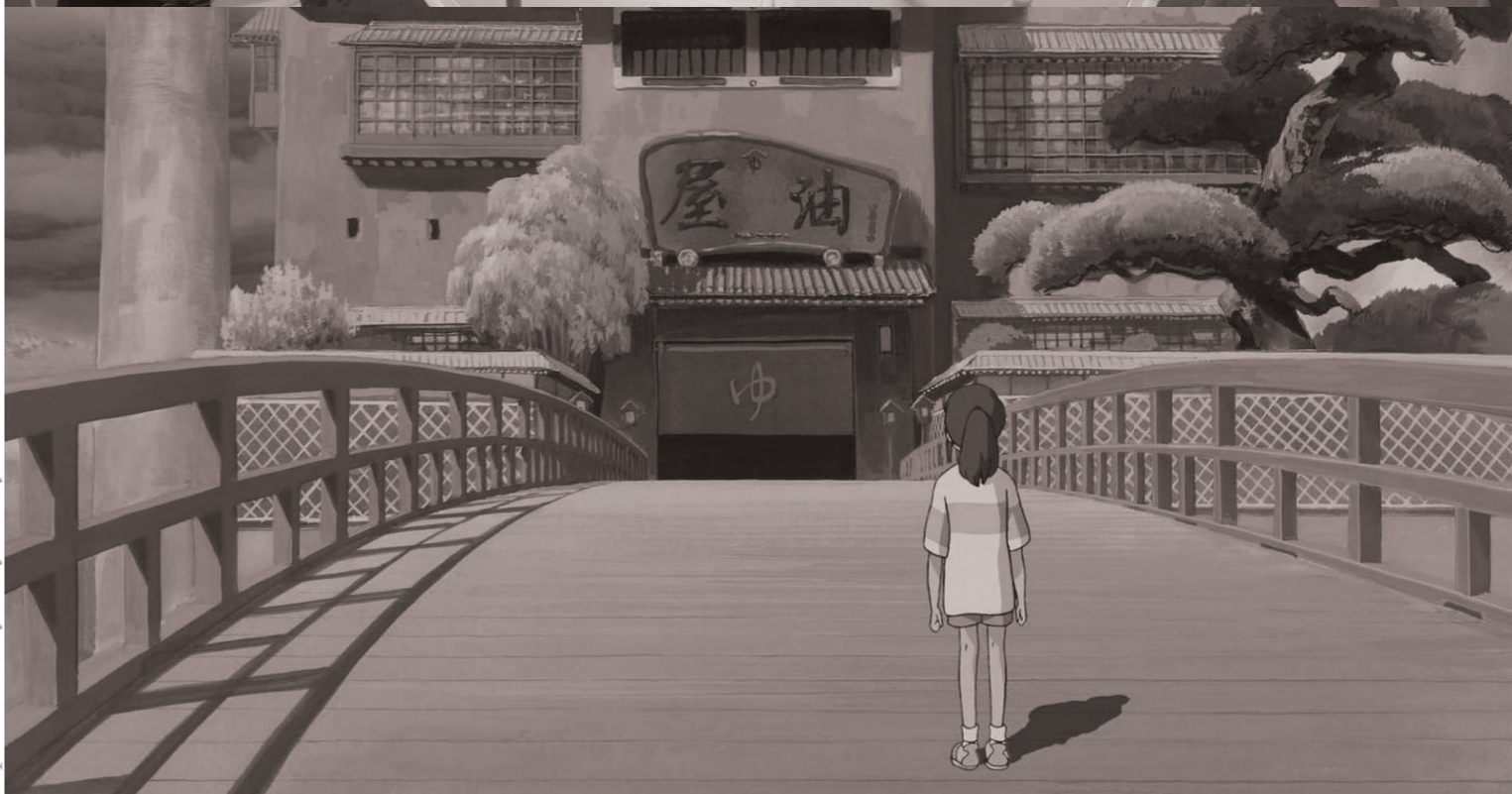
MATERIAL / light

In the last act we dive into the world of material, textures and light. Different colors, hardness and affects of light. Light is seen as an essential building component of both film and architecture. Yet, we will not forget the other haptic aspects that inform the aesthetics of architecture.



Photo. Interiors Buildings Cities Chair

Spirited Away. Hayao Miyazaki. Still



Barbie. Greta Gerwig. Still





EPILOGUE

The Passenger. Michelangelo Antonioni. Still

Architecture is in the first place a constituent of the city and not an isolated entity. This does not assume formal imitation or repetition, but it does see architectural space as an extension of the urban streetscape. Nonetheless, the project will be split in half, where the first two acts will be wrapped up through a freestanding architectural film. This is meant as an exploration of the Friche Josaphat and the city of Brussels, but also aims to work as a self-standing film. The outcome of the second semester has yet to be determined. This research does not consist of hypothesizing and proving. Rather the framework has been outlined in this paper, and what is left is ‘merely’ its execution through demonstration. In which I hope that the rest of the year keeps on giving new insights and surprises.

Footage shot by author



Footage shot by author



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