

## THE EXISTENTIAL IMAGE: LIVED SPACE IN CINEMA AND ARCHITECTURE

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“In the fusion of place and soul, the soul is as much of a container of place as place is a container of soul, and both are susceptible to the same forces of destruction.”<sup>1</sup>

In its inherent abstractness, music has traditionally been regarded as the art form which is closest to architecture. Musical structures are often described in terms of architecture and vice versa. Philosopher Friedrich Schelling’s notion of architecture as frozen or petrified music, usually remembered as an idea of Goethe, well exemplifies this view.<sup>2</sup> Cinema is, however, even closer to architecture than music, not solely because of its temporal and spatial structure, but fundamentally because both architecture and cinema articulate experientially lived space and mediate comprehensive images of life. In the same way that material buildings and cities project and preserve images of culture and a particular way of life, cinema illuminates the cultural archeology of both the time of its making and the era that it depicts. Both forms of art define qualities and essences of existential space; they create experiential settings and frames for situations of life.

<sup>1</sup> Robert Pogue Harrison, “Sympathetic Miracles”, *Gardens: An Essay on the Human Condition*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 2008, p. 130.

<sup>2</sup> Goethe uses the adjective “verstummt”. See, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Maxims and Reflections*, Penguin, New York, 1998, 143. Schelling’s choice of adjective is “erstarrt”. See, Friedrich Schelling, *Philosophy of Art*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1989, p.177

## Geometric and lived space

The mental task of real buildings and cities is to structure our being-in-the-world and to articulate the encounter between the experiencing self and the world. In addition to their utilitarian purposes, they provide frames and horizons for perception and understanding. But doesn't the film director do exactly the same with his projected images? Cinema projects cities, buildings and rooms where human situations and interactions take place. More importantly cinema constructs spaces in the mind of the viewer and projects an architecture of mental imagery and memory that reflects the inherent archetypal architecture of the human mind, thought and emotion.

Our mental constitution and memory create a continuum from the world to our mental structures and the external and internal experiences form a paradoxical Moebius strip, which has two sides but only one surface. Maurice Merleau-Ponty describes this intertwining by a twisted image: "The world is wholly inside me and I am wholly outside myself"<sup>3</sup>.

Architectural constructions are built in the world of matter and Euclidean geometry, but lived space always transcends the rules of physics and geometry. Architecture structures and domesticates meaningless physical space for human habitation by projecting existential meanings onto it. Lived space resembles the ephemeral structures of dream and the unconscious, organized independently of the boundaries of physical space and time. Lived space is always a dialectical combination of external space and inner mental space, past and present, actuality and mental projection. When experiencing lived space, memory and dream, fear and desire, value and meaning, fuse with the actual percepts. Lived space is space that is inseparably integrated with the subject's concurrent life situation.

We do not live separately in material and mental worlds; these experiential dimensions are inseparably intertwined. Neither do we live in an objective world. We live in mental worlds in which the experienced, remembered and imagined, as well as the past, present and future are intermixed. "Who are we, who is each one of us, if not a combinatoria of experiences, information, books we have read, things imagined?" Italo Calvino asks: "Each life is an encyclopedia, a library, an inventory of objects, a series of styles, and everything can be constantly shuffled and reordered in every way conceivable."<sup>4</sup>

The modes of experiencing architecture and cinema become practically

<sup>3</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1962, p. 407.

<sup>4</sup> Italo Calvino, *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*, Vintage International, New York, 1993, p. 124.

identical in this mental space that meanders without fixed boundaries. Even in the art of architecture, a mental image is transferred from the experiential realm of the architect to the mental world of the observer, and the material building is a mere mediating object, an image object.<sup>5</sup> The obvious difference that images of architecture are eternalized in matter, whereas cinematic images are only a fleeting illusion projected on the screen, has no decisive experiential significance. Both art forms create experientially true frames of life, situations of human interaction and horizons of understanding human events and the world.

In his seminal essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"<sup>6</sup> Walter Benjamin deliberates on the connection between architecture and film. Somewhat surprisingly he suggests that, regardless of their apparent visuality, the two art forms are, in fact, tactile arts.<sup>7</sup> In Benjamin's view, architecture and film are communicated primarily through the tactile realm in opposition to the pure visuality of painting.<sup>8</sup> This idea suggests that, although the normal situation of viewing a film turns the viewer into a bodiless observer, the illusory cinematic space gives the viewer back his/her

<sup>5</sup> "... when the poet joins several of these microcosms together the case is like that of painters when they assemble their colours on the canvas. One might think that he is composing a sentence, but this is only what it appears to be. *He is creating an object ...* It is no longer a signification, but a substance ... *Emotion has become thing*" (Italics JP). (Jean-Paul Sartre, *What is Literature?*, Peter Smith, Gloucester, Mass., 1978, pp. 10, 12 and 13.)

<sup>6</sup> Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," *Illuminations* (Hannah Arendt, ed.), Schocken Books, New York, 1968, pp. 217-251.

<sup>7</sup> Giles Deleuze makes a similar remark as Benjamin concerning the tactility concealed in vision: "Sight discovers in itself a function of touching that belongs to it and to it alone and which is independent of its optical function." Giles Deleuze, *Logique de la Sensation*, Editions de la Différence, 1981, p. 79. Quoted in David B. Clarke, "Introduction: Previewing the Cinematic City", in David B. Clarke (ed.), *The Cinematic City*, Routledge, London and New York, 1997, p. 9.

<sup>8</sup> Contrary to Benjamin's view, also the quality of painting is based on the evocation of tactile experience.

Bernard Berenson suggests that when looking at a painting or sculpture, we are, in fact, experiencing genuine physical feelings. He calls these feelings "ideated sensations": "... whenever a visual representation is recognized as a work of art and not as a mere artifact, no matter how elaborate, smart, and startling, it has tactile values." (B. Berenson, *Aesthetics and History*. Pantheon, New York, 1948, pp. 66-70.)

According to Merleau-Ponty: "We see the depth, the smoothness, the softness, the hardness of objects; Cézanne even claimed that we see their odor. If a painter is to express the world, the arrangement of his colour must carry with it this indivisible whole, or else his picture will only hint at things and will not give them in the imperious unity, the presence, the unsurpassable plenitude which is for us the definition of the real." (Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Cézanne's Doubt", *Sense and Non-Sense*. Northwestern University Press, Evanston, Illinois, 1964, p. 15.)

body, as the experiential haptic and motor space evokes powerful kinesthetic experiences. A film is viewed with the muscles and skin as much as by the eyes. Both architecture and cinema imply a kinesthetic way of experiencing space. The first takes place through actual embodied movement, the second through ideated action. In opposition to the visual understanding of memory. Edward S. Casey, the philosopher, makes this explicit in his argument: "To sharpen the issue [of the essence of the act of remembering] ... Let me state baldly that *there is no memory without body memory*. In claiming this, I do not mean to say that whenever we remember, we are in fact directly engaging in body memory ... Rather, I am saying that we could not remember ... without having the capacity for body memory."<sup>9</sup>

I suggest that the images stored in our memory are embodied and haptic images rather than retinal pictures. We remember the world as lived spaces and situations, not as mere pictures, and a recollection activates our unconscious memory.

Analyzing the difference between painting and film, Benjamin gives a provocative metaphor; he compares the painter to the magician, and the cameraman to the surgeon. The magician operates at a distinct distance from the patient whereas the surgeon penetrates into the patient's very interior. The magician/painter creates a complete integrated entity whereas the surgeon/cameraman's work is engaged in fragments. Benjamin's metaphor can be reversed to illustrate the difference between the film director and the architect. The film director is the magician who evokes a lived situation from a distance through the illusory reality of projected images, whereas the architect operates with the physical reality itself in the very intestines of the building that we are inhabiting.

Sigmund Freud and C.G. Jung saw a strong metaphoric association between the human body and our mental constitution, on the one hand, and our unconscious imagery of landscape and the house, on the other. In fact, the house, the body and the cosmos are all metaphorically related. This identity gives further justification to see the architect in the role of the surgeon.<sup>10</sup> The

<sup>9</sup> Edward S. Casey, *Remembering: A Phenomenological Study*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, Indiana, 2000, p. 172.

<sup>10</sup> Freud argues that in dreams "the one typical ... representation of the human figure as a whole is a house ... windows, doors and gates stood for openings in the body, and that facades of houses were either smooth or provided with balconies and projections to hold on to." Freud interpreted houses with smooth walls as male and those with balconies and projections as female. (Sigmund Freud, *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, translated and edited by James Strachey, Norton, New York, 1966, pp. 196, 188.)

C.G. Jung extended the association to the analogy of the house and the human psyche. In his interpretation of his personal dream, Jung regards the various floors of a multi-storey house,

director operates through the distance of mental suggestion, whereas the architect takes hold and touches our very bodily constitution, and he conditions our actual being in the world.

### **The architecture of cinema**

There are hardly any films that do not contain images of architecture. This statement holds true regardless of whether buildings are actually shown in the film or not, because already the framing of an image, or the definition of scale or illumination, implies the establishment of a distinct place and establishing a place is the most fundamental of architectural acts; the first task of architecture is to mark man's place in the world. In Martin Heidegger's words, we are thrown into the world. Through our physical and mental constructions we transform our experiences of outsidership and estrangement into the positive feelings of insidership and domicile. The structuring of place, space, situation, scale, illumination, etc, characteristic to architecture – the framing of human existence – enters unavoidably every cinematic expression.

In the same way that architecture articulates space, it also manipulates time. "Architecture is not only about domesticating space," writes philosopher Karsten Harries, "it is also a deep defense against the terror of time. The language of beauty is essentially the language of timeless reality."<sup>11</sup> Re-structuring and articulating time – re-ordering, speeding up, slowing down, halting and reversing – is equally essential in cinematic and architectural expressions.

Lived space is not uniform, neutral and valueless space. One and the same event – a kiss or a murder, for instance, – is an entirely different story depending on whether it takes place in a bedroom, bathroom, library, elevator or gazebo. An event obtains its particular meaning through the time of the day, illumination, weather and soundscape. In addition, every place has its history and symbolic connotations which merge into the incident. Presentation of a cinematic event is, thus, totally inseparable from the architecture of space, place and time, and a film director is bound to create architectural imagery and experiences, although often unknowingly. It is exactly this innocence and

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connected by stairs, as symbols of the layers of his consciousness. (See C.G. Jung's dream in Clare Cooper, "The House as a Symbol of Self". As quoted in J.Lang, C.Burnette, W.Moleski & D.Vachon, editors, *Designing for Human Behaviour*: Dowden, Hutchinson & Ross, Stroudsburg, 1974, pp. 40-41.)

<sup>11</sup> Karsten Harries, "Building and the terror of time," *Perspecta*, The Yale Architectural Journal 19, New Haven, 1982, 59-69

independence from the professional discipline of architecture that makes the architecture of cinema so innocent, subtle and revealing.

### Artists as phenomenologists

"All poets and painters are born phenomenologists," argues J.H. van der Berg.<sup>12</sup> The phenomenological approach of the artist implies a pure looking at the essence of things, unburdened by convention or intellectualized explanation. All artists, including film directors, are phenomenologists in the sense that they present things with an emotive curiosity and innocence as if they were objects of human observation for the first time. Poetry returns the reader back to an oral reality, in which words are still seeking their meanings. Paintings fuse the world, objects and the viewers mind in specific ways, and architecture re-mythologizes space and gives back its pantheistic and animistic essence. Altogether, art articulates the boundary surface between the human mind and the world. "How would the painter or poet express anything other than his encounter with the world,"<sup>13</sup> as Maurice Merleau-Ponty writes. How could the architect or the film director do otherwise, we can ask.

We have to acknowledge that all artists – writers, painters, photographers, dancers – step unknowingly into the territory of architecture as they create the contexts of the events that they are depicting and define their setting. In her excellent book *Dwelling in Text*, Marilyn R. Chandler surveys the ways American writers evoke architectural images and utilize them as metaphors for human character in their writings.<sup>14</sup> These urban scenes, buildings and rooms projected by artists are experientially real. "He [the painter] makes them [houses], that is, he creates an imaginary house on the canvas and not a sign of a house. And the house which thus appears preserves all the ambiguity

<sup>12</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*. Beacon Press, Boston 1969, XXIV. The sentence is originally from J.H. Van den Berg, *The Phenomenological Approach in Psychology*. Charles C. Thomas, Springfield Illinois 1955, p. 61.

<sup>13</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, quoted in Richard Kearney, "Maurice Merleau-Ponty," *Modern Movements in European Philosophy*, Manchester University Press, Manchester and New York, 1994, p. 82.

<sup>14</sup> Marilyn R. Chandler explores "the ways in which...writers have appropriated houses as structural, psychological, metaphysical, and literary metaphors, constructing complex analogies between house and psyche, house and family structure, house and social environment, house and text...American writers have generally portrayed the structures an individual inhabits as bearing a direct relationship or resemblance to the structure of his or her psyche and inner life and as constituting a concrete manifestation of specific values." (Marilyn R. Chandler, *Dwelling in the Text: Houses in American Fiction*, University of California Press, Berkeley-Los Angeles-Oxford, 1991, pp. 3-10.)

of real houses,"<sup>15</sup> as Jean-Paul Sartre perceptively states. This experiential realism is true in cinematic houses and spaces as well.

A great writer turns his/her reader into an architect, who keeps erecting rooms, buildings and entire cities in his/her imagination as the story progresses. Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment* makes the reader construct the gloomy room of Roskolnikov's terrifying double murder and, eventually, the endless expanses of St.Petersburg. The reader constructs the spaces and structures of Dostoyevsky's literary masterpiece in the cavities of his/her own mind. These images of places, created by the reader, are not detached pictorial images, they are experiences of existential and lived spaces. They are mental and embodied images, lived metaphors, not retinal pictures. These rooms have their specific temperature and odor, we can sense the texture and echo of these floors and walls. These spaces have their unique illumination and shadows. I recall the room of Raskolnikov's murder as a distinct sensation of spatial suffocation, acoustic vacuum, darkness and a stale smell. The same multisensory quality applies to cinematic spaces.

The city is a phenomenon that exceeds all our capacity of description, representation and recording and, consequently, it is always experientially infinite. A street in a film does not end at the edge of the screen; it expands all around the viewer as a network of streets, buildings and life situations. This activation of the imagination is the invaluable function of literature and all art, in opposition to the images produced by today's consciousness industry that are experienced passively and externally as fixed images. Poetic images project an open and emancipatory force that strengthens our sense of self. In the very end of Michelangelo Antonioni's last film *Beyond the Clouds* (1994) the protagonist, a photographer, comments on the endless richness of poetic images: "But we know that behind every image revealed, there is another image more faithful to reality, and in back of that image there is another, and yet another behind the last one, and so on, up to the true image of the absolute mysterious reality that no-one will ever see."

### **The realities of image and imagination**

The essence of architectural space as determined by an artist, is free of the functional requirements, technical restrictions and limitations of the professional conventions of architects. The architecture conceived by artists is a direct reflection of mental images, memories and dreams; the artist

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<sup>15</sup> Sartre, op.cit., p. 4.

creates an architecture of the mind. Yet, even the works of architects, built in matter, obtain their psychic content and echo from the very same existential experiences and images accumulated in the human mental constitution. Even real architecture can affect our soul only if it succeeds in touching the datum of forgotten memories and feelings. Michelangelo's stairway of the Laurentian Library in Florence, for instance, moves us to tears through the imagery of melancholy and grief that it releases, not through its functional and structural utility. It appears as a colossal human body mourning with its every muscle and tendon (architectural structure and profile) expressing a deep metaphysical melancholy.

Imagination is usually attached to the specific creative capacity of the artist, but the faculty of imagination is, in fact, the foundation of our very mental existence, as well as of our way of dealing with stimuli and information. Recent research by brain physiologists and psychologists at Harvard University shows that images take place in the same zones of the brain as visual perceptions, and that the first are equally real as the latter.<sup>16</sup> No doubt, actual sensory stimuli and sensory imaginations are similarly close to each other also in the other sensory realms and, thus, experientially of equal value. An actual touch and an ideated touch are experientially equal. This affinity or sameness of the external and internal experience is, of course, self-evident for any genuine artist without the scientific proof of psychological research. The artist has always known that the physically encountered, remembered and imagined are equal experiences in our consciousness; we may be equally moved by something evoked by the imagined as by the actually encountered. Art creates images and emotions that are equally true as the actual situations of life. Many of us, in fact, can never mourn our personal loss or tragedy with the intensity we suffer the fate of the fictitious figures of literature, theater and film, distilled through the existential experience of a great artist. I can hardly look at Titian's painting *The Punishment of Marsyas*, or *The flaying of Marsyas* without experiencing the horrifying pain of my own skin being

<sup>16</sup> Ilpo Kojo, "Mielikuvat ovat aivoille todellisia" (Images are real for the brain), *Helsingin Sanomat*, 16.3.1996. A research group at Harvard University under Professor Stephen Rosslyn, has established that the regions of the brain which participate in the formation of images are the same in which the neural signals from the eyes, giving rise to visual perceptions, are initially processed. The activity in the area of the visual cortex related with images is similar to the activity when looking at real pictures.

When acknowledging the experiential similarity of perceived and imagined images also their ontological difference has to be identified. In Bachelard's view: "Imagination allows us to leave the ordinary course of things. Perceiving and imagining are as antithetical as presence and absence." Gaston Bachelard, *Air and Dreams: An Essay On the Imagination of Movement* (1993), The Dallas Institute, Dallas, Texas, 1983, p. 3.

stripped off. The viewer lends the tormented satyr, falyed by the vengeful Apollo, his own skin.

In a work of art, we encounter ourselves and our own being-in-the-world in an intensified manner. Art offers us alternative identities and life situations, and this is the great gift of art. Great art gives us the possibility of experiencing our very existence through the existential experience of some of the most refined individuals of the humankind.

### The mental reality of place

The place and the event, space and mind, are not outside of each other. Mutually defining each other, they fuse unavoidably into a singular experience; the mind is in the world, and the world exists through the perceiving mind. Experiencing a space is a dialogue, a kind of exchange – I place myself in the space and the space settles in me. "Today more than ever I feel that cell no. 461 ... has remained inside me, becoming the secret of my soul. Today more than ever I feel like a bird that has swallowed his cage. I take my cell with me, inside me, as a pregnant woman carries her baby in her womb," writes Curzio Malaparte – the client and co-architect of the metaphysical Casa Malaparte (1938-40) on Capri – of the harsh memory of his prison experience.<sup>17</sup>

The architecture of cinema does not possess a utilitarian or inherent value – the characters, events and architecture interact and designate each other. Architecture gives the cinematic episode its ambience, and the meanings of the event are projected on architecture, and vice versa. The cinematic narrative defines the boundaries of lived reality: for anyone who has seen Andrei Tarkovsky's *Nostalghia*, Michelangelo's *Campidoglio*, centering on the equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius, can hardly be experienced without thinking of the shuddering self-immolation of Domenico, the mad mathematician, standing on the back of the bronze horse. Similarly, the stone quay below the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco inevitably evokes the drowning scene of Madelaine Elster in Hitchcock's *Vertigo*. The realities of material and remembered image are fused.

### Stages for fear

The task of architecture, as a resonator or amplifier of mental impact, is clearly reflected in the cinematic architectures of two directors with opposite

<sup>17</sup> Curzio Malaparte, *Fughe in prigione* (Escape in prison), foreword to the 2nd edition, 1943.

emotional aspirations. As the architecture of Alfred Hitchcock creates spaces of thrill and terror, Andrei Tarkovsky's rooms convey feelings of longing and nostalgia. These two directors survey the architectural metaphysics of fear and melancholy respectively, and reveal the powerful interaction of the setting and the narrative.

The situationality of architectural meaning is particularly clear in Hitchcock's art. In his films – *North by Northwest*, *Rear Window*, *Vertigo*, *Psycho* and *The Birds*, for instance – buildings have a central role. Hitchcock is indeed very conscious of the mental workings and meanings of architecture. His interest in architecture is expressed in his response to François Truffaut's question concerning the house in *Sabotage*: "... [I]n a way the whole film is a story of that house. The house was one of the three key figures of the film".<sup>18</sup> Hitchcock also confesses that the two buildings in *Psycho*, the Gothic house and the horizontal motel, form a deliberate architectural composition: "I felt that kind of architecture would help the atmosphere of the yarn .... Definitely, that's a composition, a vertical block and a horizontal block."<sup>19</sup> Hitchcock's juxtaposition of the two architectures amplifies the acceleration of terror in both settings.

Milieus and architecture have always the same role in Hitchcock's films; they function as psychic amplifiers of the story. Characteristically, his films start off in an idyllic and relaxed atmosphere. Scenes and buildings reflect a somewhat naive and amusing balance of bourgeois life. As the story begins, however, a sense of foreboding begins to convey a negative content to the buildings. The very same architecture turns gradually into a generator and container of fear, and in the end, terror seems to have poisoned space itself. The comfortable flat in *Rope* slowly makes its hidden dreadful side visible. Bodega Bay, the charming North-Californian resort village in *The Birds* turns into a bewitched scene of fear and disaster that does not grant anyone a means of exit. The Manhattan rental apartment block in *Rear Window*, the scene of harmless episodes of quotidian life, turns into a labyrinth of fear. In Hitchcock's films, suspense takes over the viewer to the degree that even the evident staged unreality of his cinematic buildings or their architectural incredibility – as the painted urban silhouette in *Rear Window*, the miniaturized Manhattan in *Rope*, and the naïvely painted harbour set in *Marnie* – can no longer discharge or alleviate the reality of fear. Architectural images have lost their normal human meaning as they have surrendered themselves to the service of fear.

There is an hallucinatory effect in a cinematic experience, as in any

<sup>18</sup> François Truffaut, *Hitchcock*, Paladin Grafton Books, London, 1986, p. 180.

<sup>19</sup> Truffaut, *op.cit.*, p. 416.

artistic impact: "I can no longer think what I want to think. My thoughts have been replaced by moving images."<sup>20</sup> Also real architecture directs human intentions, emotions and thoughts by means of the hallucinatory air which it awakens. "A man who concentrates before a work of art is absorbed by it," as Walter Benjamin writes.<sup>21</sup>

The "oneiric house" described by Gaston Bachelard in his seminal book *The Poetics of Space*<sup>22</sup>, has three or four floors; the middle ones are the stages of everyday life, the attic is the storage place of pleasant memories, whereas the basement is the place for negative remembrances, pushed outside consciousness. This image of the multi-storied house is, of course, a metaphor of the layered structure of the human mind, not a practical design instruction for architect. In the final sequences of Hitchcock's *Psycho* the different floors of the Bates House obtain their meaning in accordance with Bachelard's symbolic house. Beginning her survey of the enigma of the house in the attic, Lila is forced to a panicked escape through the floors of dwelling down into the basement where she finds the terrifyingly mummified wigged corpse of Norman's mother.

Hitchcock had the Bates House built on the basis of the ghostly house in Edward Hopper's painting *House by the Railway* (1925). Somewhat earlier, Hitchcock had actually collaborated with another artist, Salvador Dali, who designed the sets for the dream sequence in *Spellbound* (1945). The director himself describes the architectural style of the Bates House as "California gingerbread".<sup>23</sup> The threat posed by the house is concealed precisely in its bourgeois romanticism and, as Hitchcock acknowledges, in the contrast between the vulgar horizontal modernist motel and the vertical Gothic house; "It is a definite composition", Hitchcock acknowledges. The apparent rationality of the motel reinforces the dreadfulness of the house. The strategy of contrasts is also applied elsewhere in the film. The scene of the frightening murder, the gleamingly white bathroom of the motel, evokes the controlled sterility of an operating room. The white bathroom obtains its special image power through its contrast to the fathomless darkness of the adjacent bog, Norman's graveyard.

<sup>20</sup> Georgette Duhamel, *Scènes de la vie future*, Paris, 1930, 52. As quoted in Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," *Illuminations* (ed. Hannah Arendt), Schocken Books, New York, 1968, p. 238.

<sup>21</sup> Benjamin, op.cit., p. 239.

<sup>22</sup> Gaston Bachelard, "The house, from cellar to garret: the significance of the hut," *The Poetics of Space*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1964, pp. 3-37.

<sup>23</sup> Truffaut, op.cit., p. 416.

### The architecture of erosion

As the narrative progresses, Hitchcock gradually empties the buildings of their normal emotional content – or, more precisely, prevents the viewer from projecting his/her positive emotions onto them – and then fills them with terror. Andrey Tarkovsky creates another kind of architectural metamorphosis. As he allows erosion and mold to corrode the walls, rain penetrate the roof and water flood the floor, he takes away the building's mask of utility which addresses our reason and common sense. He removes the inaccessible and rejecting perfection of the building, and reveals the vulnerability of its structures, conceived for eternity. The director makes the viewer invest his/her feelings and empathy in the naked structure. A useful building addresses our reason, whereas a ruined building awakens our imagination and unconscious fantasies. This is also the strategy of Peter Brooks in his violent interventions in theatre spaces: "A good space can't be neutral, for an impersonal sterility gives no food for the imagination. The Bouffes (the abandoned and vandalized theater that Brooks turned into his performance space) has a magic and poetry of a ruin, and anyone who has allowed himself to be involved by the atmosphere of a ruin knows strongly how the imagination is let loose".<sup>24</sup>

Whereas abandoned attics, barns and boat houses, as well as houses which have been lived in for generations awaken our imagination and erotic fantasies, the rational matrixes of concrete and steel in contemporary buildings tend to repulse them. In Herbert Marcuse's view, the vulgar sexuality and sexual violence of our time is partly due to the fact that our buildings have lost their capacity to stimulate and support positive erotic reverie.<sup>25</sup>

The commonplace architecture of our time has standardized emotions by eliminating the extremes of the spectrum of human feelings: melancholy and joy, bliss and grief, nostalgia and ecstasy. In our time, architecture has similarly become equated with comfort, but physical comfort and convenience are not the sole purposes of architecture; buildings are called to make our relationship with the world sensuous and meaningful, and this often requires distinct friction.

Tarkovsky's films revitalize our sense of the poetic. He directs the viewer to imagine the faith of the occupants who deserted their house, and of the house abandoned by its residents. The terrifying seven year imprisonment of the mathematician Domenico's family in *Nostalghia* is engraved on the

<sup>24</sup> Andrew Todd. Jean-Guy Lecat, *The Open Circle: Peter Brook's Theatre Environments*, Palgrave MacMillan, New York, 2004, p. 25.

<sup>25</sup> Herbert Marcuse, *Yksiulotteinen ihminen (One-Dimensional Man)*, Weilin+Göös, Tapiola, 1969, pp. 91-95.

tormented walls of their eroded house. The eroding walls of Tarkovsky's films remember the faith of the occupants in the same way as the stains and signs left on the wall of the dismantled neighboring house in Rainer Maria Rilke's *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge* tell of the life lived in the rooms of the demolished house:

There stood the middays and the sicknesses and the exhaled breath and the smoke of years, and the sweat that breaks out under armpits and makes clothes heavy, and the stale breath of mouths, and the fusel odor of sweltering feet. There stood the tang of urine and the burn of soot and the grey reek of potatoes, and the heavy, smooth stench of aging grease. The sweet, lingering smell of neglected infants was there, and the fearsmell of children who go to school, and the sultriness out of the beds of nubile youths.<sup>26</sup>

### Images of light and matter

In the scenes of rural Russian life in *Mirror*, Gorchakov's hotel room in *Nostalgia*, the enigmatic "Room" of the "Zone" in *Stalker*, and the rural Swedish settings in *The Sacrifice*, Tarkovsky's architecture is an unforeseen chamber music of space, light and slowed time. He opens up views to a new, empathetic and nostalgic architecture which has also emerged in the artworks of James Turrell, Gordon Matta-Clark and Jannis Kounellis. The spaces of Tarkovsky humble the viewer and make him remember the director's words: "The task of art is to prepare one for death, soften and mold his soul and turn it towards good."<sup>27</sup> Tarkovsky's characters do not appear as persons on an architectural stage; the space and the characters have been cast of the very same matter which erodes towards its final destiny, a "horizontal death", to use a notion of Bachelard.<sup>28</sup> The characters are etched into their spatial settings and the external spaces flow into the inner mental spaces of the characters. Man and space are one. "I am the space where I am," as Noël Arnaud claims.<sup>29</sup>

Whereas the spatial language of Hitchcock's films is close to the architectural metaphysics of Hopper's paintings, so Tarkovsky's visual compositions derive from the frontal confrontation of space in Renaissance paintings. Space does not move, it is. Space is not an object, it is a condition

<sup>26</sup> Rainer Maria Rilke, *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, (tr. MD Herter Norton), WW Norton & Co., New York and London, 1992, pp. 47-48.

<sup>27</sup> Andrei Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time: Reflections on the Cinema*, Fr. K. Hunter-Blair, Bodley Head, London, 1986, p. 73.

<sup>28</sup> Bachelard, *Water and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Matter*. Tr. E. Farrell, Dallas Institute, Texas, 1983, p. 6.

<sup>29</sup> Noël Arnaud, L'état d'ébauche, as quoted in Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, p. 137.

and materialization of the verb *to be*. The architecture of Tarkovsky's films evokes the paintings of Giotto, Fra Angelico, Leonardo, van Dyck, Brueghel and Holbein. The intimate monumentality and monumental intimacy of Giorgio Morandi's still-lives can likewise be sensed in his imagery.

Hitchcock's urban views and spaces are characterized by the threatening shadows and frustrated waiting of surrealist paintings. Tarkovsky's buildings evoke a melancholic dimension of time and a tender memory of homecoming. Tarkovsky's time has lost its absoluteness and linearity, time is present as an unfocused longing and patina of remembrance. The central theme of his films is the simultaneous longing for home and the impossibility of homecoming. As Tarkovsky himself acknowledges, his films reflect a characteristic and complex Russian longing for home; "The more one travels, the more complex one's sense of nostalgia becomes", as Joseph Brodsky, a fellow Russian, writes.<sup>30</sup> Tarkovsky's films also express the agony of a citizen of the communist state as the home turned into a solitary confinement. According to Bachelard, home is a place where one can dream in peace,<sup>31</sup> but as fear penetrates the space of home, the experience of home becomes a mental impossibility. But Tarkovsky describes the loss of home also on a more general level; modern man has abandoned his spiritual and mental home and is forever on a journey towards an unattainable utopia. Our homelessness has a metaphysical dimension; a godless man is fundamentally a traveller without a destination, without an ultimate spiritual home. Buildings are monuments and road signs on this journey of distancing, alienation and outsidersness.

### The logic of emotions

We place our feelings, desires and fears in buildings. A person who is afraid of the dark may not have any factual reason to fear darkness itself; he is afraid of his own imagination, or more precisely, of the contents that his repressed fantasy may project into the darkness. The great mystery of artistic impact is that a fragment is capable of representing the whole. A mere hint or foreboding claims the authority and experiential power of reality, and detached fragments make up a story possessing a sense of logical progression. The reader constructs a building or a city from the suggestions of the writer, and the viewer of a film creates an entire epoch from the fragmented images provided by the director. A work of art, however, cannot give the viewer any

<sup>30</sup> Joseph Brodsky, *On Grief and Reason*, Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, New York, 1997, p. 35.

<sup>31</sup> "I should say: the house shelters daydreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace." Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, p. 6.

emotions. The work receives the emotions of the viewer and reflects them back. A work of art does not reflect the affections of the artist; the viewer/reader lends his own emotions to the work. When experiencing a work of art, we project ourselves onto the object of our experience. As we read *Crime and Punishment*, we lend Roskolnikov our own waiting and when viewing *Stalker*, we lend the searchers of the mystical "Room" their patience. We lend the protagonist of *Vertigo* his dizziness, and we place our own fear in the Bates House in *Psycho*. The work of art, in return, gives the reader/viewer/listener its authority, its aura, that enchants his/her mind. Detaching the experience from the confines of everyday space, the work of art grants us the permission to expose our hidden emotions. "I was directing the viewers. You might say I was playing them like an organ," Hitchcock confesses of his directorial grip in *Psycho*.<sup>32</sup>

Even real buildings designed by us architects are devoid of emotion; a work of architecture obliges us – in the same way as literature and cinema – to lend our emotions and place them in it. The buildings of Michelangelo do not mediate feelings of melancholy, they are buildings fallen into melancholy, or more precisely, we confront our own hidden melancholy in them. Cinema and architecture, as all art, function as authoritative and alluring projection screens for our emotions.

### The exchange of emotions

The architecture of cinema is structured on the basis of experientially true themes, not through elements of composition detached from the experiential entity, or by any visual formalism of design. Filmmakers, consequently, often recognize the mental ground of architectural impact more subtly than architects. The Dutch film maker Jan Vrijman makes a thought provoking remark on the lack of empathy among architects: "... [W]hy is it that architecture and architects, unlike film and filmmakers, are so little interested in people during the design process? Why are they so theoretical, so distant from life in general?"<sup>33</sup> Even such an insignificant element of architecture as a cupboard, drawer or a key, can obtain an architectural and epic scope in cinema. A key or a cigarette lighter can stand for a decisive turn in the narrative, as in Hitchcock's *Dial M for Murder* (1954) or *Strangers on a Train* (1951). The intimate contents of cupboards and drawers are familiar to us from numerous films. Some film directors confess that they provide the

<sup>32</sup> Truffaut, op.cit., p. 417.

<sup>33</sup> Jan Vrijman, "Filmmakers Spacemakers", *The Berlage Papers* 11 (January 1994).

drawers of the rooms and kitchens in their films with all the normal objects of such storage places – regardless of the fact that the contents of these drawers will never be shown to the camera – for the reason that these invisible objects increase the sense of authenticity for the makers of the film themselves and thus strengthens their sense of reality. Even a designed set demands a certain authenticity. While filming *The Damned*, Luchino Visconti insisted that the main set of the Altona mansion should be parqueted in real wood. He believed that only by standing on a solid floor would the actors be able to assume appropriate and convincing postures.<sup>34</sup>

Even real architecture is an exchange of feelings and meanings between the space constructed of matter and the mental space of the subject. It is evident that the art of cinema can sensitize the architectural profession itself for the subtleties of this interaction. The architecture of cinema utilizes the entire range of emotions, and the touching architecture of Tarkovsky's films, for instance, can encourage architects to expand the emotional contents of their spaces designed to be actually dwelled and lived in. Construction in our time has normalized emotions into the service of the social situations of life and architecture has censored the extremes of the scale of human emotions: darkness and fear, dream and reverie, elation and ecstasy. Suppressed emotions, however, seek their object and exposure. Anxiety, alienation, and the death of compassion, hardly hidden by surface rationalization, are often the true emotional contents of today's everyday settings. Surface rationality and aestheticization frequently conceal an outright sense of necrophilia. The dimension of the *heimlich* hides its opposite, the *unheimlich*, always ready, however, to enter the scene of life as masterpieces of cinema teach us.

### The meaning of the invisible

A masterful artist makes the viewer/reader think, see and experience other things than what he/she is actually being exposed to. The lines of Piet Mondrian's diagonal paintings, that meet beyond the edges of the canvas, make the viewer aware of the space outside the painting. The arbitrary framing of subjects in Impressionist paintings strengthens the sense of the real and brings the world and life, continuing beyond the boundaries of framing, into the consciousness of the observer. In the penultimate scene of Antonioni's *The Passenger*, the protagonist is murdered behind the viewer's back as he/she is watching through a window arbitrary and insignificant incidents of everyday

<sup>34</sup> Kenneth Frampton, "Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance". Hal Foster (editor), *Postmodern Culture*, Pluto Press, London and Sydney, 1985, 28.

life taking place on the village square outside.

The value of a great film is not in the images projected in front of our eyes, but in the images and feelings that the film entices in our soul. Fritz Lang comments on the invisible content of his film *M for Murder* (1931): "There is no violence in my film *M*, or when there is, it occurs behind the scenes, as it were. Let's take an example. You will remember the sequence where a little girl is murdered. All you see is a ball rolling and then stopping. Then a balloon flying off and getting caught in some telephone wires. The violence is in your mind."<sup>35</sup> Catherine Breillat makes a similar comment on the power of invisible imagery: "The work of a director is a way of hypnotizing: the viewer has to be made to believe to see even that which he is not seeing. A woman complained of the excessively exaggerated bloodiness of the final scene of my film *Parfait amour*, ending in a murder of passion. But that blood was only in her own head. It is not shown on the screen at all," Breillat recalls.<sup>36</sup>

A powerful experience of architecture likewise turns our attention outside itself. The artistic value of great architectural works is not in their material existence or aesthetic essence but the images and emotions that they evoke in the observer. A great building makes us experience gravity, time and – ultimately – ourselves, in a strengthened and meaningful way. A positive architectural experience is basically a strengthened experience of self, which places one convincingly and comfortingly in the continuum of culture, and enables one to understand the past and believe in the future.

<sup>35</sup> Quoted in Peter von Bagh, "The death of emotion," *Synnyt: Sources of Contemporary Art*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Helsinki, 1989, p. 202.

<sup>36</sup> Tarmo Poussu, "Elokuvajuhlien ohjaajavieras Catherine Breillat: "Teen elokuvia seksistä, mutta inhoan erotiikkaa" (The Guest Director of the Film Festival – Catherine Breillat: I make films of sex, but I detest erotics), *Ilta-Sanomat*, 23.9.1996, A 22.

## ABSTRACT

Walter Benjamin pointed out the affinity of cinema and architecture, and argued unexpectedly that these art forms are both essentially tactile arts. The tactility of the material art of building is not difficult to grasp, but the idea that a cinematic projection could result in fundamentally tactile experience certainly meets objections. However, the philosophical as well as neurological studies of the past few decades in perception, emotion, and thought, as well as in artistic expressions, suggest that these two arts, or poetic images at large, address all our senses, including our synthesizing existential sense, all at once. The arts communicate through the “flesh of the world”, to use a notion of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. The acts of perception, feeling, thinking, and memorizing call for the reality and sense of embodiment. We identify ourselves unknowingly with constructed architectural spaces as well as projected cinematic situations with our empathetic capacity. So, Benjamin’s argument could be re-formulated: cinema and architecture are embodied arts in which the external and the internal are fully intertwined and fused. “The world is wholly inside, and I am wholly outside myself”, as Merleau-Ponty enigmatically argues.

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