SPACE, one might say, is nature's way of preventing everything from happening in the same place. In this essay, I shall consider the relationship between geography (the 'science' of space) and the two 'spatial arts' – architecture and film. According to Vidler, the 'complex question of film's architectural role is once again on the agenda'.

In truth, it has never been off, but instead simply submerged under a periodic welter of competing ideas. One thinks, for instance, of the cyclical rediscovery of Eisenstein's film theory, or of how film decor was a regular topic in the 1920s/30s' architectural mainstream. Vidler goes on to assert that of all the arts, 'it is architecture that has had the most privileged and difficult relationship to film'.

While this may be true, there seems to me to be an unmistakable asymmetry in the ways the two disciplines approach each other; specifically, although architects frequently appeal to the filmic in their theory and practice, the converse is not always true of filmmakers and critics. I explore this asymmetry in more detail in what follows, considering the role of architecture in film and films in architecture. But I shall focus most attention on the possibilities of bridging the two spatial arts via concepts of time and space and the discipline of geography.

All architecture ... configures form and material in spatial constructs with ideological force. All architecture ... politicizes space.

**Andrea Kahn**

In architectural theory, practice and criticism, there is a long pedigree of reference to film. For example, Ingersoll claims that 'Architecture is the latent subject of almost every movie'; and Ramirez leaves no doubt that the architecture of film is 'absolutely central to an understanding of what ... is happening in contemporary design'.

Analogous enthusiasms are to be found in critical studies; for instance, Fischer places architects on a par with directors and actors in German Expressionist movies. And many practising architects have sought to work in both mediums. Perhaps, unsurprisingly, such interaction is especially prominent in the work of contemporary architects in Los Angeles, including inter alia Craig Hodgetts and Hsin-Ming Fung, Anton Furst and Frank Israel.

In a concise historical overview, Vidler reveals the parallel evolution of modernism in architecture and film. A distinct theoretical apparatus that emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century posited architecture as the 'fundamental site of film practice ... and, at the same time, posited film as the modernist art par excellence – a vision of the fusion of space and time'.

Abel Gance, writing in 1912, anticipated a new synthesis of the movement of space and time, but it was Elie Faure who first coined the term 'cineplastics', to bring together the two aesthetics. Ultimately, this would give rise to the totalising plasticity of German Expressionism, most notably in Robert Weine’s *Das Kabinett des Dr Caligari* (1919). From the mid-1920s, the more purely decorative and staged characteristics of Expressionist film were denounced, and a trend toward greater realism evolved. The subsequent emphasis on physical reality led Erwin Panofsky to announce the unique possibilities of film, ‘defined as dynamization of space and accordingly, spatialization of time’.

At present, architects (like many others) are casting about for new theoretical compasses, in what is likely to be an extended period of post-Enlightenment uncertainty. Though the genealogy of this rebirth is somewhat obscure, already slivers of a new synthesis are emerging, crystal-like, from the proliferation of critical studies. The thrust of this synthesis is, I believe, toward a more 'grounded' theory and practice of architecture. As critics begin to pore over the piles of conceptual corpses, hostilities and putative hegemonies become more overt.

The contemporary era has, for instance, witnessed an efflorescence of interest in the relationship between architecture and film, undoubtedly tied to the emergence of revitalised cultural studies and the rise of a video culture. There also seems to be much consensus that Post-Modernism's demise was heralded with an almost indecent haste, and deconstructivism (that ill-fated hybrid) never caught on. Jim Collins rues the disintegration of the Post-Modern project, which has been reduced to 'designer tea kettles or flattened into coffee table books of simulated theory about America'.

In the meantime, others reach back to earlier verities for inspiration. The 'new urbanism' – described by one of its advocates as 'focused to the point of evangelism' – seeks to re-install garden-city principles to the design of suburbs.

**OPPOSITE AND ABOVE: Figures 1 & 2. Conversion to Projection Facility, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, Architects: Daly, Genik. Completion August 1994.**

The conversion involves the creation of space that is simultaneously more generic and more singular than the existing condition. The project seeks to explore the inverse and complementary relationship between architectural space and film space. The project addresses the architectural qualities of optical phenomena, as they are made evident by the process of projection and subsequent reflection. The room, with its reflective ceiling, is developed as a spectral envelope that behaves as a three-dimensional screen. It is constantly modified by the circumstances of projection and adjusted by the material conditions of the room.
The lugubrious cries of these (Ebenezer) Howardists have been offset by those who seek a greater emphasis on context in architectural thinking. For instance, in his preface to an important collection of architectural texts, Bernard Tschumi makes clear that: ‘The history of architecture is as much in the history of its writings as its buildings.’ Critic Herbert Muschamp has consistently argued that social and spatial forms are more intimately linked than architects usually acknowledge (through what geographers term the ‘sociospatial dialectic’).

In his analysis of Queer Space, Muschamp highlights the transgressive nature of gay communities, warning that norms simultaneously define ‘abnorms’. He exorcises architects for spending too much time on symbolic forms at the expense of grappling with political and economic realities. A poigniant echo for a grounded theory is offered in Charles Jencks’ post-riot meditation on Los Angeles. Urging us to promote (not simply accommodate) the emerging diversity of cities, Jencks points to the futility of asking art or architecture to compensate for political, economic or social inequity. Andrea Kahn is equally blunt: ‘to attend to the work of architecture we must first seek out what we do not see – that the art of construction goes beyond appearances … our work is not simply a matter of drawing and following the line.’

The power of the film image to (mis)represent the material and social world lies … in its ability to blur the boundaries of space and time, reproduction and simulation, reality and fantasy, and to obscure the traces of its own ideologically based production.

Jeff Hopkins

The history of film, in its turn, is replete with references to architecture. Eisenstein’s classic work identified two paths of the ‘spatial eye’: the cinematic, where a spectator follows an imaginary line among a series of objects … ‘diverse impressions passing in front of an immobile spectator’ – and the architectural, where ‘the spectator moved through a series of carefully disposed phenomena which he absorbed in order with his visual sense.’ Despite this early conflation of the two spatial arts, it is doubtful whether or not a true exchange has occurred between architecture and film. Take, for instance, Kahn’s critique of Tati’s Playtime (1965). In this film, she claims, architecture has a starring role. Yet she is clear how Tati constructed his cinematic Paris: Tati builds his city, unmistakably the city of Paris, not through recognizable monuments but through unmistakable movements … The set (buildings) is without character, but the space of action is teeming with site specificity. Architecture, we learn, supports but cannot purport place.

Ingersoll adds to my burgeoning sense of the alienation between film and architecture: ‘Film demands that architecture only serve the plot, and thus there are no constraints on structure or space.’ It would be hard to imagine a more surgical separation between architecture and film – all except the most abstract of architectures is inevitably place-bound; but cinematic conventions are aggressively committed to the compression, expansion and even reversal of time-space contexts.

Contemporary film studies have gone far beyond architecture for their referents, drawing from structuralism, semiotics, psychoanalysis, post-modernism and deconstruction, as well as from popular culture (especially video and rap music). Yet, as in architecture, we encounter in film an analogous uncertainty, a loss of theoretical moorings. Denzin claims Post-Modernism as a ‘cinematic age’, but is critical of cinematic representations of Post-Modernism, which fail to offer ‘anything more than superficial solutions to the present conditions.’ (Think, for instance, of the ‘happy endings’ in Ridley Scott’s original Blade Runner, 1982, and his Thelma and Louise, 1991.) At the core of this discontent is the issue of representation.

Nothing in the world is fixed or immutable. The space of the film is, at the limit, the frame that passes the eye 24 times every second. The composition and content of each frame are nonrandom decisions, but (as with any text) the artist cannot control the effects that each framing produces. Thus, the quality of authenticity in representation is inherently unstable – which is, of course, precisely the characteristic that most filmmakers deliberately seek to exploit; and, by extension, of central significance is the power of the spectator to experience a film critically, to engage in what Derrida described as an ‘incessant movement of recontextualization’.

The most sustained effort to connect film (and architecture) with the ambiguities of Post-Modern culture has been made by Fredric Jameson. Three concepts are central in his project: the political unconscious which identifies the often opaque articulation between the economic base and cultural forms; Post-Modernism being the cultural dominant of the current phase of late capitalism; and cognitive mapping the intersection between the social and the political explaining how individuals learn about, and function in, social space. Jameson focuses on the intrinsic spatiality of filmic representation and the hegemony of cinematic images in our political unconscious. He stresses, along with Michel Foucault and others, how we have moved from a Modernist obsession with time/history to a Post-Modern epoch of space/geography.
Space is never empty; it always embodies a meaning.

Henri Lefebvre

Contemporary human geography is that part of social theory which focuses on the spatial patterns and processes that underlie the structures and appearances of everyday life. Human behaviour is both enabled and constrained by a complex set of sociocultural, political and economic processes acting across time and space; at issue is how we explain the variety of the resultant time-space ‘fabric’. Social process operates at different scales (from global to local), and is mediated through the interactions of deep-seated structures, their institutional forms and the actions of individual human agents. There is also a time dimension, since ‘place’ is a complex amalgam of past, present and emergent forms coexisting simultaneously in a single landscape. In this most fundamental sense, therefore, the central task of what I term the ‘geographical puzzle’ is to understand the simultaneity of time and space in structuring social process; human geography is the study of contemporaneity of social processes through time and space. By extension, one purpose of architecture (plus urban planning) and filmmaking is to forge new time-space relationships.

The time-space articulations proposed in geography may be useful in reconnecting architecture and film studies. I want to sketch the beginnings of such a connection in the remainder of this essay, starting with the characterisation of the Derridean perspective:

Once spacing is introduced, as a sine qua non of linguistic expression and of sense-making processes in general, then the philosopher of language necessarily becomes a philosopher of spatial articulation(s). The task becomes, in effect, an architectural one, mapping out the limits and testing the boundaries of communicational space, or that of a plastic artist, exploring the relations among line, form, and shades of meaning.

Derrida shows how language, in its material form of writing (and drawing), always entails a spacing (espacement) that works at one remove from its author. I believe that this spacing, or ‘distancing’ dynamic is a key to articulating the related spatialisations in architecture and film [Figs 1 and 2]. I can show this in a preliminary way through a series of examples. Rather than expressing an entire problematic, these examples suggest how the spaces between architecture and film can be profitably articulated through the middle ground of geography.

In film, the distance between observer and observed is primarily created by the camera. Kracauer suggested that ‘distance is necessary to lessen the shock that would result from the spectator’s direct confrontation with certain phenomena’. The case of pornography is illustrative of a broader paradox, however. Here, the camera:

plays off a certain fear of crudity, coarseness, and undisguised, unsublimated sexuality. Only through the image can the observer confront that which would otherwise frighten . . . In the case of pornographic cinema, the camera becomes a device for creating distance and the medium of a harmless voyeurism.

The paradoxical power of the filmic dialectic is clear: on one hand, the camera distances; on the other, it invites the observer in. In the anti-pornography documentary Not a Love Story (Bonnie Sherr Klein, 1981), the camera self-consciously, simultaneously seduces and repels the viewer as it confronts the nature of pornographic representation. It is easy to appreciate the potential of the video revolution which has made viewers out of those who were previously observed, and thus dramatically altered the power of prior distancing dynamics.

The inherent spatiality of the voyeuristic camera is evident in Natter’s discussion of Walter Ruttmann’s Berlin, Symphony of a Great City (1927). As well as in the framing of a scene, he argues that the difference between a shot (an uninterrupted sequence of film time) and a cut (an instantaneous change from one shot to another) thoroughly defines film as spatial. The importance of scale as an element of filmic spatiality is also revealed in the connection between close-up and medium- and long-shots. The essential translation from real-world place to cinematic space is, according to Natter, ‘marked not by repetition, but by alterity, whose visual element is the fragment’.

Architecture is also experienced as a fragmentary, mediated space. In our transportation-oriented culture, one important distance-related variable is speed. Los Angeles, the archetypal autopole, is a ‘punctual rather than linear urbanism’, meant to be read from a passing car [Fig 3]. At its extreme, however, speed has been fetishised into a kind of perceptual dominant, as in Boyer: ‘It is speed that has erased the fragmentation and hierarchies of space and time, homogenised everything to an absolute present.’ But the absence of speed is also an element of place-making. Michel de Certeau has drawn attention to the importance of walking as a spatial practice, constitutive of people’s life paths. And in Latino cultures, low-riders (carefully decorated cars) drive slowly through neighbourhoods so that they and their occupants may be seen. In shopping malls, too, people are constitutive of the scene. In Agrest’s terms: ‘Fashion transforms people into objects, linking street and theater through one aspect of their common ritual nature.’ In other words,
everyone and everything becomes part of the aesthetics of the commodity system.

The theoretical linkage between film and architectural space is captured in Maureen Turim's 'displacement' process: 'Not just abstractionism, but an act of visual de-centering and symbolic displacement; it is in these terms that we can describe the interaction between architecture and the cinematic apparatus in avant-garde films.' The displacement/distancing principle is part of a wider epistemological puzzle. Iain Chambers, discussing the possibilities of criticising the present, argued for immersing oneself in the local at the same time as observing from a distance. In his case, distance is provided through the lens of theory. Both local immersion and a more distant theoretical stance are needed for understanding. This explains why, in a polyvocal discourse, many avowed Post-Modernists have embraced the challenge of standpoint theories (most notably feminism) as a way of achieving distance.

In political terms, distance means difference. Los Angeles, where Jencks claims to have observed 'more sheer difference' than any other city he knows, is a city in crisis. To save our future, he turns to Charles Taylor, who modified the potentially divisive 'politics of difference' to a more positive 'politics of recognition'. Such a strategy, Jencks believes, will encourage the development of separate identities, and place-making based on diversity - something already manifest in Los Angeles' heteropolis [Figs 4-11]. A new language of difference would also be needed, allowing for a discursive heterogeneity in political, professional and intellectual life. The tasks of unpacking and reforming these complicated archaeologies of place take on a new urgency in an era of increasing socioeconomic inequality and political unrest [Figs 12 and 13].

Notes

1 I am grateful to the artists and architects who helped me in the preparation of this essay, especially those who provided examples of their work to illustrate my argument. Rob Wilton provided valuable research assistance. Thanks also to Dana Cuff, Kevin Daly, Ulises Diaz, Robbert Flick, Chris Genik, Ignacio Hernandez, Gustavo Leclerc, and Jennifer Wolch for good advice.


4 Vidler, op cit, note 2, p. 45.


6 Ingersoll, op cit, note 3, p. 5.


9 Vidler, op cit, note 2, p. 46.

10 Ibid, p. 50; emphases in original.


18 Quoted in Vidler, op cit, note 2, p. 56.


20 Andrea Kahn, op cit, note 16, p. 27, emphasis added.

21 Ingersoll, op cit, note 3, p. 5, emphasis added.


ABOVE: Figure 11, ADOBE LA (see p13); OPPOSITE ABOVE: Figure 12, preliminary sketch: Self-governing Outdoor Living Facility (SOLF) for Homeless People. Designed as an off-street living space for between 25 and 40 people, the SOLF anticipates relocating an existing street encampment to a secure site with individual shelter/sleeping spaces plus shared bathroom, cooking and storage facilities. Community members would be responsible for their own governance, including resident admissions and terminations, allocation of community maintenance chores and policing of behavioural or substance misuse problems.
29 Natter, op cit, note 23, p 211.
34 Jencks, op cit, note 15, p 172.

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Figure 13, Genesis I: village for homeless people, Golden Avenue, Los Angeles, California. Established on the site of a former parking lot near downtown Los Angeles in November 1993, Genesis I is a pilot project initiated by Ted Hayes to assist homeless people to transition out of a street-based existence. Up to 24 people can be housed in the 18 domes, three of which are devoted to communal facilities. The village incorporates many of the SOLF design principles (see ABOVE, Fig 12), including self-governance and a resident core selected from an already-existing street encampment. The novelty of the dome architecture has successfully broken down barriers between homeless and homed.