

## Scripting Space / Int. Study in Secluded New England Mansion – Night

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Games such as Clue appropriate language and impose narratives that trigger a participant's imagination and arouse existing biases. The possibility that "Professor Plum did it in the Study with a Candlestick" yields a signified response pulled from the subconscious of the player that is instantly reinforced by the physical image of a staunch old academic. A playing card is then positioned on a board where signifier and signified coexist. Such wonderfully rich narratives reinforce the important role that language plays in the construction of spatial identities. So whereas, similar to the process of collage, the combination of images register new possibilities, the combination of words achieves a similar goal but with a greater degree of confidence by designers that have spent the greater portion of their formative years using words and numbers rather than images. *To what degree can such narratives challenge conventional systems of orthographic projection, systems that often times do little to evoke direct linguistic relationships?*

"I think a picture stands on its own more readily, whereas a word tends to seek the context of a story. For me, images don't automatically lend themselves to be part of a story. If they are to function in the way that words and sentences do, they have to be 'forced' – that is, I have to manipulate them."<sup>1</sup>

—Wim Wenders

### THE SCRIPT

In *The Architecture of Image: Existential Space in Cinema* the architect and theorist Juhani Pallasmaa describes the prevailing practice within contemporary pedagogy where "an unforeseen exploration into the theoretical foundations of architecture has taken place."<sup>2</sup> Such broad interdisciplinary searches in the academy for meaning have yielded a scenario where, in the words of Pallasmaa, "architecture has become uncertain of its essence and future course."<sup>3</sup> He continues with, "In all fields of art, the breakdown of the unified modernist world view has, in fact, created a distinct panic of representation."<sup>4</sup> His thoughts serve to set the stage for an in-depth look at the role of film within an architectural discourse. "In many schools of architecture around the world, the most recent interest is cinema. Films are studied for the purpose of discovering a more subtle responsive architecture."<sup>5</sup> Pallasmaa's reflections are highly seductive to say the least but, ultimately, he focuses his examination on the product of cinema over the process of making a film. One could

easily argue that the primary focus of any discussion that concerns cinema's relevance to design pedagogy and thinking should reside in its process, one that begins with writing in the form of the script:

Writers write and make novels.

Filmmakers write and make films.

Architects write and make buildings.

Architects *draw and* make buildings.

### FRAMING THE ARGUMENT

The territory of this investigation is positioned firmly within a filmic discourse and is inherently consumed with an interest in the fragment – the frame. First in terms of how ideas are assembled into one's *artistic conscience* and then ultimately within the medium of film and a study into the relationships between time-based media, writing, and architecture. An examination of intermediate representational forms such as the screenplay or script serves to destabilize more traditional methods through acts of "spatial play" and provide a roadmap for reclaiming the primacy of language as a form generator as powerful as contemporary methods of computational "scripting," a term that in contemporary circles refers to a direct form of communication between a programmer and a piece of hardware. Kubrick's cautionary tale of a computer named HAL (three letters separated by a mere digit from their parent corporation IBM) no longer need worry about dreams in a context that reduces language to a string of commands whose value is determined by whether or not it need be compiled.

### SUPERSTUDIO///OMA///TSCHUMI

Architecture's fascination with film as laid out by Pallasmaa is by no means novel. Theoretical projects such as Superstudio and Piero Frassinelli's "Twelve Cautionary Tales for Christmas: Twelve Ideal Cities," Rem Koolhaas's Architectural Association thesis "Exodus, or the Voluntary Prisoners of Architecture," and Bernard Tschumi's "The Manhattan Transcripts" exploit the breadth of an interest in representational systems that portray architecture as anything but static. Designers of the past half-decade have with tremendous effect expanded upon perceptual realities and moved outside of traditional orthographic means. Drawing heavily upon filmic techniques, these precedents use an active narrative and incorporate

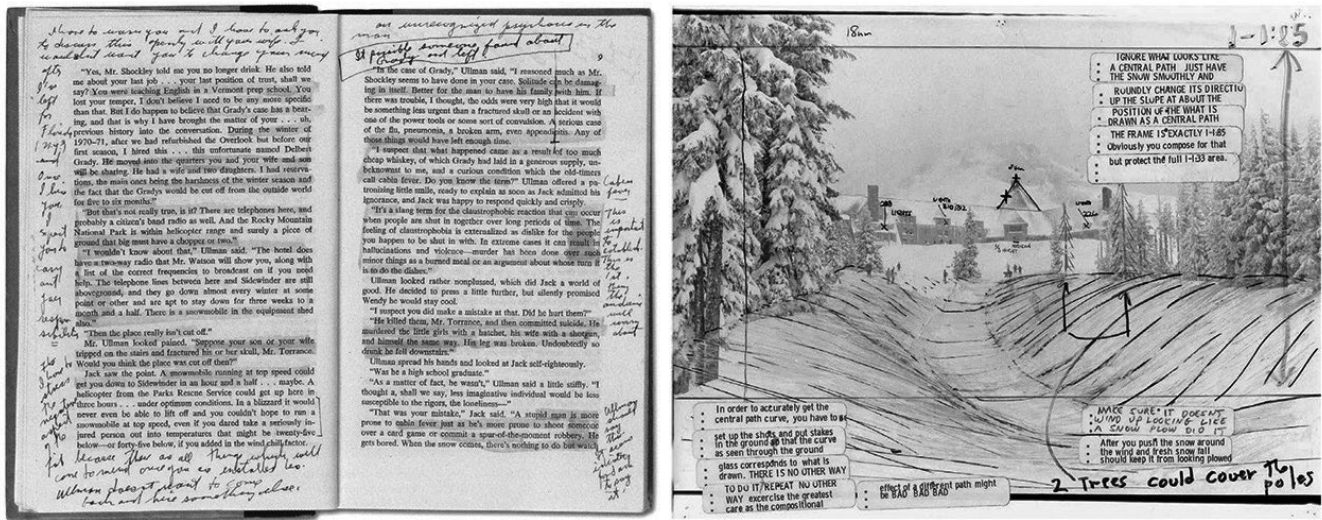


Figure 1: *The Shining*. Stanley Kubrick. 1980

writing in a strategic way so as to advance a discourse that has traditionally privileged the image almost exclusively. Frassinelli's essay that first appeared in AD #12 biases writing in its original state, one ideally suited to the multimedia slide show it evolved into a year later. Koolhaas's thesis uses language in a deliberate manner so as to increase the subversive possibilities of each collage. Koolhaas's unique nomenclature animates a series of solitary frames and positions them within an overarching script and allows us to consider ourselves as "prisoners" rather than mere participants. Koolhaas himself from an early age wrote and directed as part of the 1,2,3 Group before attending the Architectural Association. The anarchist style that he and his fellow artists adopted aligned itself with the counterculture movement that was so prevalent in the early sixties and used writing as a primary means to better understand a final visual product. Bernard Tschumi's "The Manhattan Transcripts" is probably the most often cited precedent when it comes to filmic tradition within systems of architectural representation, but in this case it is used as a counterpoint as it excludes language, intensifies the dominance of the image, and situates itself more closely to the technique of storyboarding.

**LANGUAGE**

Seldom in our discipline of design is writing used as a counterpoint to the image or the constructed reality. Seldom do we use writing as an equal and opposing force in our own work let alone as a pedagogical component of our teaching. Such trends seem especially strange in the context of research conducted by Gestalt psychologists such as Rudolf Arnheim in the early sixties. His research was groundbreaking in its understanding of developmental stages of visualization and representation. His emphasis on visual thinking was in large

part reactionary. His research observed that a significant shift had taken hold during the Enlightenment, away from a visual language to a system of higher intellect defined primarily by the written text. This method of conceptualizing resulted in a disembodied system based in words and symbols and yielded a visually illiterate society. Arnheim wrote, "We are the victims of an inveterate tradition according to which thinking takes place remote from perceptual experience. Since the senses are believed to be concerned with individual, concrete events, they are limited to collecting raw material of experience. It takes "higher" powers of the mind to process the sensory data."<sup>6</sup> His belief that "many educators and psychologists are still reluctant to admit that perceptual thought processes are as exacting and inventive and require as much intelligence as the handling of intellectual concepts"<sup>7</sup> led him to challenge the state of education in this country. He writes,

"Consequently, Western education has been concerned foremost with words and numbers. In our schools, reading, writing and arithmetic are practiced as skills that detach the child from sensory experience, and this estrangement intensifies during the high school and college years as the demands of words and numbers grow and childish things must be put aside. Only in kindergarten and first grade is education based on the cooperation of all the essential powers of the human mind; thereafter this natural and sensible procedure is dismissed as an obstacle to training in the proper kind of abstraction."<sup>8</sup>

These thoughts describe an inability by society to effectively comprehend graphic material, a kind of visual illiteracy. The paralleling of scientific methods in architecture has had a profound effect on methods of architectural analysis and one's

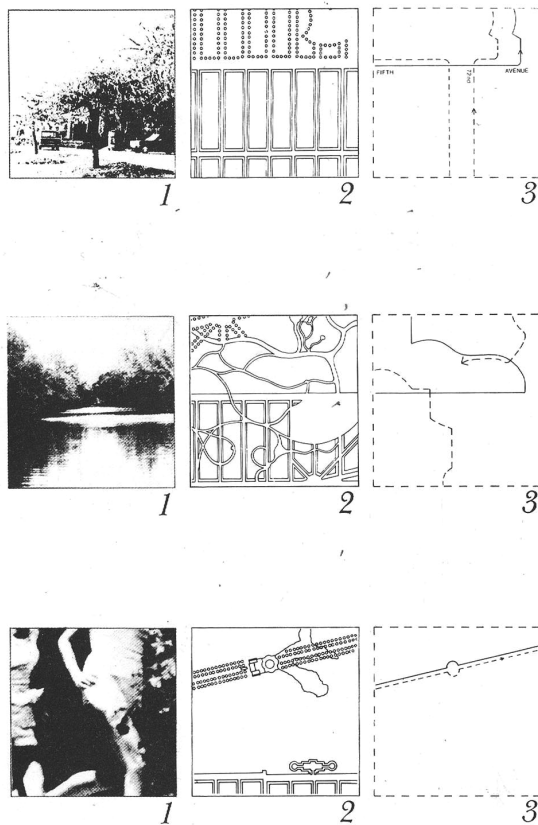


Figure 2: Manhattan Transcripts. Bernard Tschumi. 1976-1981

ability to see an image, abstract it, and eventually recall and combine it as part the creative process. So one might ask: *Why should an architectural education dispense so full hardily with a student's ability to write when such a system might parallel a visual process and provide a sense of validation and confidence to young designers?* The observed tendency when discussing writing as a valuable part of the design process is for fellow academics to lament the inability of students to write. Arnheim's research suggests that young scholars actually have far greater acuity as it relates to language in its written form rather than its visual equivalent.

## WRITING

Filmic process provides numerous techniques that mediate between writing and drawing such as the script and the storyboard and provide an ideal territory for considering new pedagogical approaches. Few directors maintain the creative energy and seductive visual firepower as Quentin Tarantino. Tarantino relies on a range of filmic precedents that range from classic Kung Fu to the spaghetti western. Tarantino's compelling form of filmmaking evolves out of his writing. In numerous interviews he has suggested that after his tenth feature film he will leave the practice of making films



altogether and return to a purer form of writing possessed by the stage. In a 2016 interview entitled *The Narrative Art*, Tarantino comments about the role of writing with regard to his work.

"Well you know it's just writing, I mean I consider novelists real writers well and I actually consider screenwriters real writers too. There is a whole aspect about the fact that screenwriting conceivably could be harder because of how you have to deliver within a certain page count in a way that a novelist doesn't have to some degree or another as more freedom as far as that is concerned... I've never understood the concept of a screenplay just being a blueprint for the movie. I do write them like novels. It's not crazy prose that goes on forever but there is a commitment to the prose and there is a literary narrator talking to the audience who is reading it. And these scripts are meant to be read."<sup>9</sup>

Tarantino exists as a useful precedent in considering the creative act as he is an artist that is hypercritical of his own process. Later in the interview he comments on how writing for him is an active process. "So literally after a certain point it's the characters that are going through the story and they are telling me what's going on. Even in the case of say *The Hateful Eight*, without giving to much away, there is a case of a poisoned pot of coffee. I didn't know who poisoned the coffee for a long long time. I didn't want to know. I didn't do the mystery thing where you solve it all and then write backwards. I didn't want to know any more than a viewer or one of the other characters would know."<sup>10</sup> Such revelations about the creative process seem highly relevant to the design process. Tarantino uses writing as a fluid process that reveals its true identity through an active compilation of words.

## STANLEY KUBRICK

A similar precedent that expands upon the evolution of language into a visual construct exists in the work of Stanley Kubrick. In one of the earliest drafts for his cinematic masterpiece *The Shining*, one can appreciate a unique form of writing that stresses primary actions and psychological states while remaining devoid as to specificity of camera angles. The early script reads: "The scene that follows will be terrifying, suspenseful, deadly hide and seek. Danny desperately tries to elude the murderous Halloran by now an appalling figure of savagery, smashing at the walls, snarling, shrieking, foaming, and choking, snarling, grunting, frenzied, animal like, panting, foaming and choking with frenzied rage, shrieking bellowing roaring, maniacally. At the same time, Wendy armed with the knife, frantically searches through the hotel for Danny."

m'hauer poi col tempo à disdire. E per questo medesimo rispetto non mi risolverei à porre intorno à Saturno altro che quello, che già offeruai, e scopersi, cioè due piccole stelle, che lo toccano, vna verso Leuante, e l'altra verso Ponente, nelle quali non s'è mai per ancora veduta mutazione alcuna, nè resolutamente è per vederfi per l'auuenire, se non forse qualche straauagantissimo accidente lontano non pur da gli altri mouimenti cogniti à noi, mà da ogni nostra immaginazione. Ma quella che pone Apelle del mostrarfi Saturno hora oblongo, & hor' accompagnato con due stelle à i fianchi, creda pur V. S. ch'è stata imperfezione dello strumento, ò dell'occhio del riguardante, perche sendo la figura di Saturno così , come mostrano alle perfette viste i perfetti strumenti, doue manca tal perfezione apparisce così  non si distinguendo perfettamente la separazione, e figura delle tre stelle; ma io che mille volte in diuersi tempi con eccellente strumento l'hò riguardato, posso assicurarla, che in esso non si è scorta mutazione alcuna, e la ragione stessa fondata sopra l'esperienze, che hauiamo di tutti gl'altri mouimenti delle stelle ci può render certi, che parimente non vi sia per essere. perche quando in tali stelle fosse mouimento alcuno simile à i mouiment idelle Medicee, ò di altre stelle, già doueriano essersi separate, ò totalmente   
D                      congiunte

*Stelle laterali di Saturno scoperte dall'Auttore, e loro condizioni.*

*Diuerfità nel veder Saturno cagionata da difetto*

Figure 3: *Istoria e dimostrazioni intorno alle macchie solari...* Galileo. 1613

The previous passage certainly resides closely to what one might categorize under the surrealist technique of *automatic writing*. It exists as a stream of consciousness technique that evolves out of language and the written word. The evolution of such a scene becomes even more interesting as Kubrick developed the script into a screenplay and included instructions with regard to the set and the camera, a mechanical consciousness. In Kubrick's final scene from *The Shining*, where Jack Nicholson's character Jack Torrance chases the young boy Danny into the frozen labyrinth, the frenetic pace and emotional capacity of the moment is established initially through writing contained in the final script where the camera and character instructions read:

EXT. HOTEL – MAZE – M.S.

Danny sitting leaning against side of Maze. CAMERA TRACKS  
R-L revealing Jack, holding axe, cam. R.b.g. He limps R-L and moves away along Maze.

CUT TO:

M.S. DANNY's footprints in the snow – CAMERA TRACKS FORWARD  
and stops when footprints end. CAMERA TILTS UP to snow without footprints.

CUT TO:

M.C.S. JACK – he looks about then back and forwards – and finally cam.R.

JACK  
Danny!  
He looks cam.L.

CUT TO:

M.C.S DANNY crouched against the side of Maze.

JACK (OFF)  
Danny!

Kubrick provides us with an intensified sense of where the eye needs to be located to gain the greatest emotional effect. The script in this case pulses from [M]edium [C]lose [S]hot to [M]edium [S]hot and deconstructs stereoscopic space to an oscillating view from [R]ight to [L]eft. Such writing is never devoid of its visual reality but serves to consider the possibility of actual experience through a written form. Kubrick's words describe physical conditions such as the silence of winter that, while ultimately being realized in his films as time-based sequences, are initially more easily constructed through a written language than their visual counterpart.

## CONCLUSION

Returning to Pallasmaa's manuscript on film he writes, "A great writer turns his/her reader into an architect, who keeps erecting rooms, buildings and entire cities in his 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 own mind. These images of places, created by the reader, are not detached pictorial images; they are experiences of embodied and lived space. They are mental and embodied images, not visual pictures." Such commentary suggests that there might be room for representational systems that reside outside traditional graphic means. Perhaps the design process might embrace writing as a technique that does not solely supplement the production of a visual realm but coexists with it in forms such as the script.

Edward Tufte concludes his manuscript *Envisioning Information* with an image of Galileo Galilei's *Istoria e dimostrazioni intorno alle macchie solari* completed in Rome in 1613. Written in Latin we see a field of text with simple circular images dispersed throughout. Tufte adds the following commentary: "In 1613, when Galileo published the first telescopic observations of Saturn, word and drawing were as one. The stunning images, never seen before, were just another sentence element. Saturn, a drawing, a word, a noun. The wonderful becomes familiar and the familiar wonderful."<sup>11</sup> It is possibilities such as this that inspire ruminations on the role of the script and its capacity to exist in the middle ground between signifier and signified. Such an examination of intermediate representational forms specific to film such as the screenplay hopefully serves to generate conversation and stimulate discussion that destabilizes more traditional representational methods.

## ENDNOTES

1. Wim Wenders, *The Logic of Images: Essays and Conversations* (London: Faber and Faber, 1991), 53.
2. Juhanni Pallasmaa, *The Architecture of Image: Existential Space in Cinema* (Helsinki: Rakennustieto Publishing, 2007), 13.
3. Pallasmaa, 13.
4. Pallasmaa, 13.
5. Pallasmaa, 14.
6. Rudolf Arnheim, *Visual Thinking, in Vision + Value Series: Education of Vision*, ed. Gyorgy Kepes (New York: George Braziller, 1965), 2.
7. Arnheim, 2.
8. Arnheim, 2.
9. Quentin Tarantino, *The Narrative Art Interview* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LtfCkUm5zM8>)
10. Juhanni Pallasmaa, *The Architecture of Image: Existential Space in Cinema* (Helsinki: Rakennustieto Publishing, 2007), 13.
11. Edward Tufte, *Envisioning Information* (Connecticut: Graphics Press, 1990), 121.