



IMAGINARY WORLDS: REIMAGINING MOTION PICTURES

COURSE: DD 449 – Imaginary Worlds: Architecture in Motion Pictures (3 credits)
PROGRAM: Digital Design/School of Art + Design
LOCATION: second semester third or fourth year/spring term (undergraduate)
INSTRUCTOR: Glenn Goldman

DESCRIPTION: Like childhood photographs in scrapbooks and family albums (physical and/or digital), movies are part of our collective memories and become a unique way of establishing environments that never existed or could exist and make them “real” in our minds. Even more than architectural magazines or esoteric museum exhibits, film is part of our visual world and tends to frame many of the visual expectations of society. Because detailed study and precise copying with consummate skill allow architects and interior designers, art directors, digital designers, environment designers, set designers, authors of graphic novels, book illustrators, etc. to re-create existing environments, the creativity needed is different from that required of those who are creating new and interesting worlds or environments for virtual or real environments. In order to have the best possibilities to impact inventive creation, motion pictures are studied that postulate new or unique environments rather than those films that faithfully document reality. “Historical” films to be studied contain sets that are imaginary or interpretive environments for past locations. In this sense, the movies being studied will have a lineage more readily traceable to Georges Melies “who came to film from illusionism and the theater,” rather than the reality of the Lumiere brothers who came to film from photography which ultimately lead to “cinema-verite.” A diverse selection of motion pictures that include seminal films like *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, *Metropolis*, *Things to Come*, *Lost Horizon*, *Cabiria*, and *Blade Runner* are studied and/or reviewed. Historically, much of the significant work in this field comes from a small subset of directors and art directors who have had an impact on set design – and in some instances architectural design – that include luminaries like Fritz Lang, Frank Capra, Ridley Scott, William Cameron Menzies, Terry Gilliam, Tim Burton, and Syd Mead. While it is likely that individual films discussed will be selected to maximize diversity in representation of these contributors, assignments and projects will provide individual student opportunities for focused study across the breadth of an individual’s body of work.

PROJECT: Study a film with significant (either by originality or quality of architectural design) imaginary set. Analyze the set and create a three-dimensional model from the fragments seen in the motion picture. Propose either a sequel or remake for the film and design one or two significant new environments as three-dimensional digital constructs using either Autodesk’s *3DS Max* or *Maya*; or McNeel & Associates *Rhino*.

REQUIREMENTS: After studying a specific, assigned film, and depending on the nature and age of the film, propose a redesign of studied and relevant elements for an updated remake (e.g. *Things to Come*, *The Golem*, *Thief of Bagdad*, *Lost Horizon*) or a sequel (appropriate for newer motion pictures like *City of Lost Children*, *Nightmare Before Christmas*, or *Imaginarium of Dr. Parnassus*). The decision to create sets/costumes/props for a sequel or remake must be made in consultation with, and approved by, the instructor. The extent of the set redesign will invariably depend on the nature of the original motion picture. Provide a series of still rendered images and progress prints of the redesigned environment. Sets designed for a sequel should contain a narrative (may be very brief – a few sentences) explaining/outlining the story.

COURSE OBJECTIVES: (1) Study architectural design unfettered from many of the quotidian requirements of buildings and places while concentrating explicitly on the relationship between design and narrative. (2) Provide an opportunity to prepare and deliver oral presentations, present architectural analyses (of theoretical places), and write analytically. (3) By understanding the imaginary worlds for what they can communicate and the ideas they may contain, students have an opportunity to modify their own concept of architecture and set design. (4) Provide the opportunity for practice and improvement in the use of three-dimensional modeling systems and the archeologically significant ability to (re)construct complete environments from fragments, useful in a variety of applications from forensic reconstruction to environment extensions in entertainment applications. (5) Gain a visceral understanding of the relationship between environment design and narrative. (6) Explore needs and requirements of virtual set design for use in entertainment. (7) Improve understanding of the history of architecture and architectural styles through the representation of the built environment in motion pictures.

REFERENCES: (1) Albrecht, Donald. *Designing Dreams: Modern Architecture in the Movies*. (New York: Harper & Row, 1986). (2) Arnheim, Rudolf. *Film as Art*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1946). (3) Barsacq, Leon. *Caligari's Cabinet and Other Grand Illusions: A History of Film Design*. (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1976). (4) Eisner, Lotte H. *The Haunted Screen: Expressionism in the German Cinema and the Influence of Max Reinhardt*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973). (5) Neumann, Dietrich, editor. *Film Architecture: Set Designs from Metropolis to Blade Runner*. (Munich and New York: Prestel-Verlag, 1996). (6) Snowden, Elizabeth and Ingersoll, Richard, Editors. “*Cinemarchitecture*.” [Design Book Review](#). MIT Press Journals: Issue 24 - Spring 1992.