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Architecture Beyond the Frame
Filmmaking and the Adjacent Space

by

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Abstract

Filmmaking operates behind the closed doors of the studio system. Entire compounds of private space are devoted to the practice of film. Generic city streets, practical sets, a digital environments have had a long history of substituting for real locations. My thesis proposal examines the inversion of this concept. What if the city were to be the new studio backlot for student filmmaking? How would filmmakers and designers frame the urban context with cinematic motion?

Greater London has its own film history, playing home numerous period, fantasy, drama and action set pieces. Its privatized industry hosts six major film studios as well as a multitude of smaller studios. More importantly, the city has a large number of performing arts and film academies spread throughout.

The proposal approaches cinema through ascending scalar operations. A series of instruments explore design’s agency within the scope of student filmmaking. One, a helmet that incorporates a director’s toolkit. Two, a diffuser for grips to light a scene to desired effect. Three, a set of participatory devices that facilitate paradigmatic cinematography in public space.

The final component of the proposal is a pop-up infrastructural framework that facilitates camera choreography. The dispersion of this framework across London’s iconic fabric provides a platform for students do any number of camera set-ups with enormous amounts of production value. The intent of this new framework is to provide new opportunities for ephemeral contexts, stages and sets. The instigator of each of framework is site and a scenario that shares common visuals with action, fantasy, drama and romantic comedy genres.

Thesis Supervisor: William O’Brien Jr, MArch
Title: Associate Professor of Architecture
CINEMATIC BIOPOLITICS

The thesis proposal is a series of instruments that provide a student filmmaker in London with tools for shooting film in an urban environment. The first is a portable light for adjusting exposure for scenes. The second is a director's helmet complete with cinematic viewfinders, side mounted cameras and bullhorn speakers. The third is a system of frameworks intended to choreograph camera motion in strategic London sites the intent of which is to provide new opportunities for ephemeral contexts, stages and sets.
LIGHT PROBE

The light probe is a collection of inflateable pebbles that, depending on their inflation, can change the diffusion of the light. This effectively changes its effects from either point lighting or spot lighting. Its portability addresses the desire that students may have to shoots outside the arena framework, this give the opportunity to shoot in small, unsanctioned areas.
Fig. 3
DIFFUSER
INFLATE OR DEFLATE TO DESIRED LIGHTING EFFECT. LARGER VOLUME WILL CREATE MORE DIFFUSE LIGHT.

PISTOL GRIP
WHEN SLIGHTLY DEFLATED, THE PROBE CAN BE USED AS A SPOTLIGHT. AIM TOWARDS SUBJECT AND START YOUR SHOOT.

AIR VALVE
USE AIR TO GET THE MOST OUT OF THE OBJECT. IF YOU FEEL ADVENTUROUS, USE HELIUM AND FLOAT THE LIGHT IN EXTREME CASES.

STRUCTURE
FLEXIBLE FOAM PROVIDES CONTAINMENT FOR THE DIFFUSER BALLOONS. THIS MAKES TRANSPORTATION AND HANDLING EASY.
SELF SURVEILLER

The helmet aids in previsualization of shots, helping to frame actors and within the environment. It also works as a tool for orchestrating crowds and crew when doing large scale shots. When a crew is too small the mounted cameras allow the director to become the actor placing him in the frame.
POINT LIGHT
FOR EXTRA EXPOSURE INTENSITY WHEN
SCENE LIGHTING ISN'T SUFFICIENT.

LENS HOOD
TO BLOCK UNWANTED SOURCES OF LIGHT.
HELPS TO PREVENT LENS FLARE AND GLARE.

SUSPENSION
FOR COMFORT AND STABILITY UNDER THE
MOST EXTREME FILMMAKING CONDITIONS.

VIEWFINDER
FOR BLOCKING AND FRAMING SHOTS PRIOR
TO SHOOTING. COMPOSE SHOTS ON THE FLY.

SPEAKER HOUSING
CROWD CONTROL IS ABSOLUTELY
ESSENTIAL WHEN STAGING LARGE SCALE
SHOTS. USE THIS AS A BULLHORN.

CAMERA
FOR CLOSE UP AND POV SHOTS. ALSO,
WHEN CREW MEMBERS ARE LIMITED
AND SPACES ARE SMALL, USEFUL FOR
TURNING THE WEARER INTO THE SUBJECT.
THE CAMERA CRANE GRAVEYARD... RELICS OF A BYGONE ERA
TELL ME...
WHAT DO YOU SEE?

TO BE HONEST... I'M NOT SURE I SEE ANYTHING.

HOW ABOUT NOW?

AM I MISSING SOMETHING HERE?

NO NEED TO BUILD BULKY SETS.

GREEN SCREEN DOES NOT DISCRIMINATE!
A FEW TRACKING MARKERS AND YOUR AWAY!
Could an object affect the tone of the scene? How about a light probe, reflective and flexible?

As long as it's portable... keep it lightweight.
WHAT DOES THE SPACE THAT WE MOVE THROUGH LOOK LIKE?
DON'T FORGET IT NEEDS TO BE MOBILE AND EASY TO USE...SOMETHING THAT COULD EASILY BE BROKEN DOWN AND MOVED...

WE NEED TO BE ABLE TO RESPOND TO LIGHTING REQUIREMENTS IN THE FIELD...
SHOOTING IN SITU WILL ADD ENORMOUS PRODUCTION VALUE. REAL STREETS, REAL LOCATIONS, AUTHENTICITY IS KEY...

LET'S MAKE SURE WE GET THE COLUMN IN THE BACKGROUND...
LONDON THROUGH THE LENS

Greater London has its own film history, playing home to numerous period, fantasy, drama and action set pieces. Its privatized industry hosts six major film studios as well as a multitude of smaller studios. More importantly, the city has a large number of performing arts and film academies spread throughout. The location of these sites adjacent to iconic London film sites as well as new uncharted territory that represents unseen areas of the city and outlying burroughs.
Made famous by every James Bond film since Pierce Brosnan began his tenure as the superspy. The surround area has hosted films like The Dark Knight, Children of Men and Full Metal Jacket.
One of London's most iconic urban spaces has become a go to stage for the generic British locale. The abundance of telephone boxes and double decker buses provide filmmakers with production value.
The area near the historic London Bridge and Tower is architecturally diverse and has allowed films to exploit genre conventions. This area can stand in for Romantic Comedies, Fantasies and Actioners.
This transit hub has fulfilled the narrative needs of films like Rogue Nation and The Prisoner of Azkaban. Its surrounding locations are less known but have served a similarly diverse set of films.
Generic in architectural style and urban identity except for the subject matter a film chooses to seat within it. It does share proximity with the Millenium Dome, an icon of contemporary London.
London’s cinematic identity only extends as far as the iconic buildings and landmarks. The thesis proposes a series of filmmaking arenas that would add resolution to Greater London.
VIRTUAL MATERIALITY

Practical effects, sets and medium are slowly being phased out of the film industry's practices. For reasons of economy and efficiency, the virtual and the immaterial have taken precedent ahead of the real and the material. Green screen is the generic medium that turns a surface into any number of imagined contexts and edifices. On film, green is infinite. It is the only addition to the physical proposition of thesis, an infinite extension to the physical infrastructure.
The exploitation of green screen led to a great backlash and eventual reemergence of the use of practical constructs. But to deny its utility in specific cases of filmmaking would be a mistake.
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URBAN BACKLOT

The cinematography modules are lightweight temporary constructions that are propagated throughout the city. The proposal attempts to physicalize the space of cinematography, utilizing paradigmatic shots in film. Arc, orbit, pan, pedestal, dolly and truck are the movement vernacular that architecture concerns itself with. These stitched modules can be utilized on various sites and organized according to the scenario being played out, a footchase through its icon plaza.
Paradigms of cinematography have produced unending variety in film through their assemblage. The same shots in a different sequence could produce a dramatically different narrative.
Each module physical embodies a shot, its physical motion can be traced by the container and mechanics of each. Through montage the exterior context can be framed from multiple vantage points.
TRUCK
DOLLY
PEDESTAL
TILT
We can erase the infrastructure in post or dress it to fit the tone of the narrative.
BACK OF THE HOUSE IS UNSHEATHED... ANY AREA OF THE INFRASTRUCTURE THAT IS INCORPORATED INTO THE SCENE WILL NEED TO BE SKINNED.
NEW FILMMAKING ARENAS AWAIT... TO FRAME UNSEEN URBAN NARRATIVES!
APPENDIX

The thesis proposal stemmed from an idea about reinterpreting the filters used to lens the urban landscape. Rather than go through the motions of delaminating the city by way of its road, blocks, routes and architectural layers, it seemed that a new approach would yield unexpected maps. In this case, the filters expanded to encompass airspace and satellite orbits. By doing so, it became clear that urban coverage exists in striated patterns of time.
AIRSPACE IN THE UNITED KINGDOM
London’s reputation as a surveillance state results from the abundance of CCTV and counter-terrorism infrastructure in the city. The location of these cameras and non-invasive objects are virtual spatial boundaries. The same could be said of the air space and satellite trajectories. Their time sensitive nature suggests that boundaries can shift and change, creating unstable maps of the urban landscape.
January

scale - 1:270,000
September

scale - 1:270,000
October

scale - 1:270,000
CCTV METRICS

What if the camera became to be seen as a new architectural module? How would spaces be constructed with the known metrics of focal length and depth of field? It seemed that should the camera be a new building block, then space would certainly prioritize the blind spot. Imagine a series of spaces of contrast with both visual exposure and underexposure. It’s possible that mass occupation of these spaces would occur on the edge, just beyond the frame.
The continued use of cameras suggests that citizens unknowingly take on an absurd amount of digital clutter. This series of drawings attempt to visualize the virtual forms that a body may collect.
Each drawing speculates on how a virtual accumulation might change in form depending of camera vantage point. In this case, the axonometric view is utilized to be suggestive of the omniscient perspective.
Being susceptible to capture is unavoidable, then perhaps there should be a way to intercept, avoid or exploit it. Or it should be taken seriously that there is a undeniable link between capture and the body.