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Three key words for my independent enquiry proposal:

Reality, Fantasy & Texture

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Introduction

In order to choose my independent inquiry topic, I have focused my research on three key areas that relate to my studio practice in set design; Reality, Fantasy and Textures. These keywords all link together, for example in my practice I will take fantasy writing and transform it into a reality through the combination of real scenery or artificial sets exploring textures to give an illusion of reality. I find it is important to add texture to the perception of reality in fantasy sets. To gain a deeper understanding I will first examine the meaning of these words and explore how they relate to each other in set design.

Section One: Reality

The first keyword is Reality, due to its importance as a foundation of my research it connects and under lines my other main keywords.



Fig.1 *Hobbiton Film Set* (twistedstifter.com, 2015)

“Reality is the state of things as they actually exist, as opposed to an idealistic or notional idea of them” In my practice I want to make the fantasy world taken from a novel and through the craft of set design I want to build into a reality. (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.) Reality within the construct of film and tv is different from how we perceive our every day to day life, in film and tv they use the worlds landscapes for their productions as shown in Fig.1. In Fig.1 it would appear that in the scene everything you see is all real and part of the world you are watching, Here *The Lord of the Rings* ‘The Hobbit hole’ entrance is only an exterior of the structure and does not connect to the interior set shown in the film (*The Lord of the Rings Fellowship of the Ring*, 2001; twistedstifter.com, 2015).

The clever ways the set design team used the scale of the structure in relation to the plot of land add to the viewers perception of reality, the hobbit holes it looks and feels as though they are real life dwellings. When real scenery is combined with artificial scenery you cannot always tell the difference between what is real and what is created, here it has resulted in the hobbit holes feeling as an authentic part of the fantasy world of *The Lord of the Rings* (*The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*, 2001).

Although there are many philosophers and thinkers who explore the theme of reality, here I have researched into the philosophers *Democritus and Leucippus*. These philosophers were born in the fifth century and had discovered that reality is made from countless atoms to the point that it cannot be broken down any more, these atoms make up everything that we see, what we touch, taste, hear and smell using our senses (Purdue University, n.d.). As these are only philosophers who have investigated the sensual side of reality in my independent inquiry, I will explore different philosophers on the topic of reality. A good example of this can be seen in the film series *The Matrix* which delves down into 'the rabbit hole' where they discuss the theory of being in a computer simulation creating the illusion of a reality for us as humans (*The Matrix*, 1999).

As a Set Designer the experience of what's going on on the screen is going to be different from how the audience views the set by only receiving a fixed view of how it is framed and the audience can only see what's going on in the frame due to what the director has chosen. We do not view the images as a 'popping out' experience like we do when we watch a 3-D film, we also do not engage when it comes to viewing the images that we see on the screen

we don't engage with them as a sort of perceptual illusion when looking at the actors and props as their ordinary sizes, it is because of this that we can change the view of the actors and props by using certain camera angles and distances from each other to gain a sense of depth (Fiorelli, 2016; Boni, 2017). If we were to look at these actors and props when we see them in our own environment, then we could be able to tell the depth difference compared to frame perceptive, as the audience, we look within it rather than having an outer perceptive (Fiorelli, 2016).

Film sets are not always made from the materials that you see; it could be made from cheaper more disposable materials or could use CGI to make it look like more authentic. Sets are either made inside a studio or used outside in the real world where they can be combined with greenscreen if necessary or to create illusions with the scale of the characters or props. In the films *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, the actors are smaller or larger than the set in order for it to seem the right height and space, to do this they use studio sets and camera angles to get a perspective of the height of the actors to make them seem a different height to what they are in reality (The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring, 2001; The Hobbit; An Unexpected Journey, 2012; Fiorelli, 2016).

The way I can apply these ideas in my work I can use different ways of creating a scene by using drawings or paper models in combination of using computer models to help me achieve a greater sense of scale in reality within the outcome.

Charlie Brookers *Black Mirror* is also a good example of how they show us what our reality could be, by using their settings, locations and props, but this is used more for the future

terms of what our reality could look and be like. (Black Mirror, 2011) having been interested in exploring how set design and film can influence a person's wellbeing I feel it would be beneficial to research and explore how Black mirror uses set design as a tool to create a change in reality of the viewer and society for the better.

Section Two: Fantasy

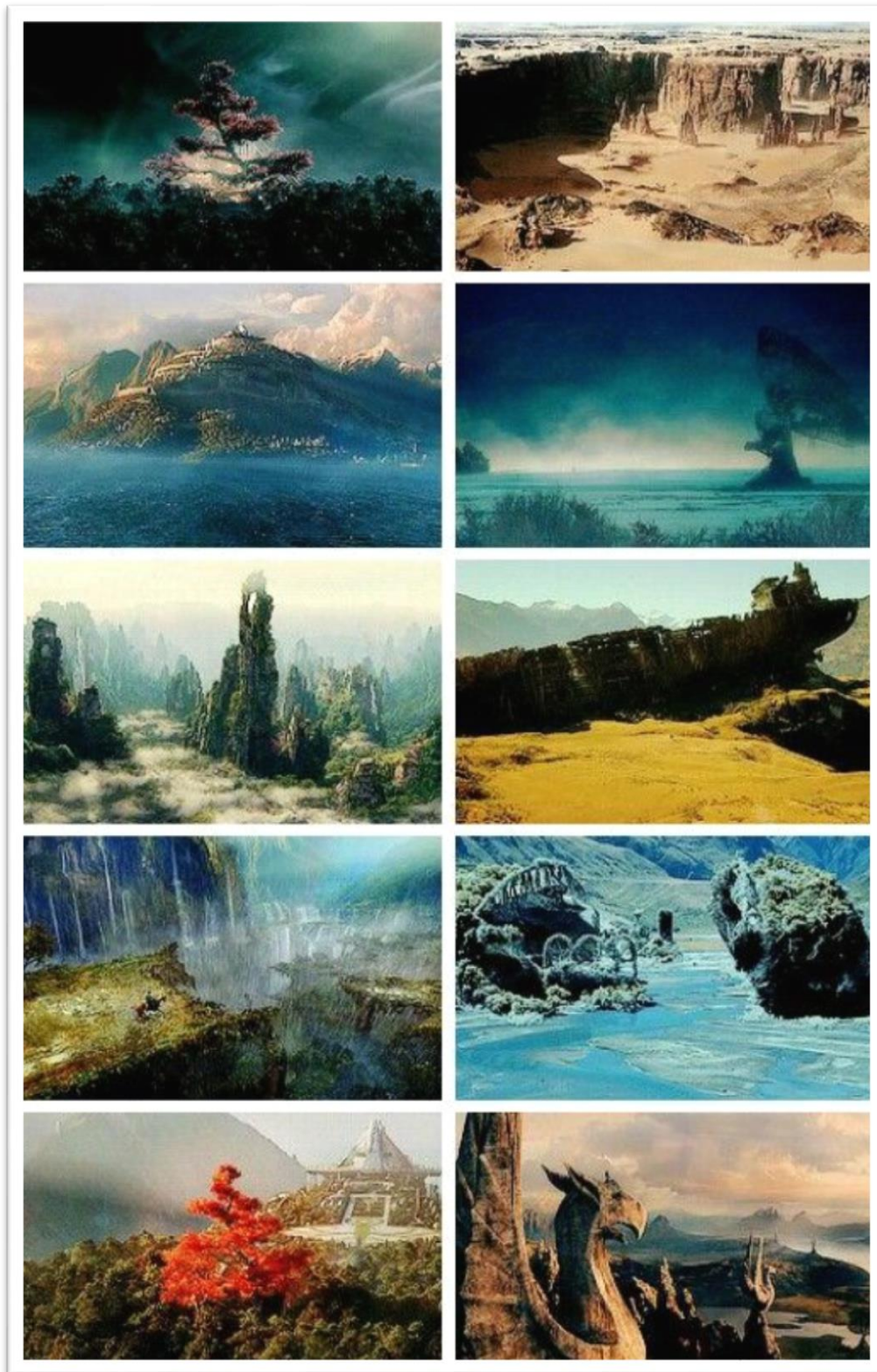


Fig.2 *The Shannara Chronicles* Scenery. Gough, A. and Miller, M. (2016).

In order to gain a better understanding of reality it seems appropriate to explore its counterpart fantasy. One definition of fantasy is "... the faculty or activity of imagining impossible or improbable things." I have always loved and had a passion for fantasy and have always been interested in the behind the scenes of how they created their sets. (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.) Fantasy is a genre for writers to use to create a world with no limitations, although it is like science fiction it belongs in its own genre. This allows for the exploration of the desired or unknown parts of the unconscious mind where creatures and the landscape take on human qualities (McLeod, 2018). Fantasy is based on the world of imagination; its contents and the creative activity animates the imagination into reality. Although the fantasy genre is rooted in mythical creatures and magic, set designers rely on the sorcery of creative combinations of material craftsmanship and CGI to create impossible landscapes and physics defying structures.

As well as fantasy being a big genre in the film and TV industries, it is a fundamental state of mind that we experience in some ways, although some more than others. Sigmund Freud was a neurologist who founded psychoanalysis, his work investigated the psyche, mind and consciousness in relation to fantasy, and fears. (McLeod, 2018) The word fantasy can have different meanings depending on the context; it could be related to a sexual fantasy; it could also relate to our imagination where we daydream and relates to escapism from reality. Fantasy can also be used as a tool, we can use to deal with our anxieties from past trauma, childhood experiences, and therefore fantasy can be beneficial for our lives. (McLeod, 2018)

Fantasy is often depicted as being a state of mind for desire and also fears within our world that we cannot have or see, but when we use fantasy in film and TV shows, the characters and the structures built around them become fantastical metaphors for unseen and intangible experiences (McLeod, 2018). although there are almost no limits on the forms taken by societies, the environment and human structures within the Fantasy genre, there seems to be an almost ridged colour palette throughout. High contrasts are between light and dark and the use of larger than life colours highlights the genres principle theme of humanities duel nature of good and evil.

Scenery within Fantasy is often colourful, more so than in the real world, although in film and tv they change the colour scheme used in their shows it is often used to directly change the mood of the audience based off of how it is shown through colour, for example in *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey* there is a scene where he climbs a tree and its colours is a bright orange and light brown colour being shown brightly, this brings a sense of life and hope within the scene (The Hobbit; An Unexpected Journey, 2012). Later, when he goes back down, it turns darker, with tree branches stretching everywhere with webs and spiders crawling around adding a sense of fear and uncertainty. This is a clever way of using colour scheme and texture within the scene to evoke these feelings within the audience. This I find is a good way of showing hope and fear within the scene because in the story they are lost and cannot find their way out, they then come out on top to see the vibrant colours and brightness, this brings a sense of hope and calmness to the audience within the scene.

On the other hand, in the new fantasy TV series *The Witcher* on Netflix, the colours used are predominately is dark and gloomy with a smaller proportion of brighter colours within pallet. (The Witcher, (2019) It is a land filled with evil, the way they show this is by using the structures in a way to show that they are not in a nice place. Buildings, when they are not in a state of ruin, have a depressed and spooky atmosphere. This is cleverly done by using colours that are darker, natural and tonal to create an atmosphere of terror and uncertainty.

The Shannarah Chronicles is another fantasy tv series which uses a typical colour pallet of the genre, but in very different ways to *The Witcher*. (The Shannara Chronicles, 2016; The Witcher, (2019) this series is based in a world that is very similar to our reality but is ahead of our time based in a post-apocalyptic civilization. This is different because it shows another side of the Fantasy genre that breaks away from the atypical medieval scenery and instead sets a story in a much more familiar environment which makes the fantasy more believable. In contrast to the use of dark tonal colours in *The Witcher* [at which it adds a sense of realism to the extraordinary world it set within], *The Shannara Chronicles* used much brighter higher saturated and contrasting colours which adds to the sense of fantasy within the familiar set. (The Shannara Chronicles, 2016; The Witcher, (2019).

Section Three: Texture



Fig.3 *Brick Chair* (Unkown, n.d.)

A simple definition for texture is “... the quality of something that can be decided by touch; the degree to which something is rough or smooth, or soft or hard” (Cambridge dictionary, n.d.). Texture is important tool for set designers which allows them to manipulate the audience’s perception of the boundary between reality and fantasy.

Makers and craft people can use their understanding of materiality to create ambiguous and illusionary textures and forms. This is not only economical but also allows the designer to be creative and resourceful enabling them to use cheaper, alternative materials to create higher value structures and props that looks and feels different from what it appears.

Texture can bring a lot to the table when it comes to adding a feeling or a sense of realism and fantasy. When viewing the surfaces of objects in films you can tell how it would feel just from looking at it. When using sound in film, it is important to know the textures and surfaces of the objects and the surroundings to ensure that the sound is right when it is interacted with. For instance, if an actor were to push another actor into a prop door, but it was made from foam, you would still want it to sound like real wood snapping as well as making it look like real wood.

But often it is important for set designers to consider their material choices in this way for health and safety needs as well as budget requirements. Usually the surfaces you see within films are not often made from the material it appears to be. It seems clear that set designers

and makers need to have a deep material understanding of reality and fantasy through texture regardless of the genre they are working on.

Another reason I feel texture relates and unites reality and fantasy is because appropriate use of texture is vital when trying to visually indicate where and when a prop or a set is from, when done effectively this adds to atmosphere and authenticity of the prop or the set. With technology that we have available today we can create objects and items with digital texture which can enhance its appearance and make it look as realistic or fantastic as possible. This can be achieved through the use of texture mapping which digitally renders realistic renders and surface details to digitally enhance props and sets. This is why they use across the film industry, but it is more heavily used in the Sci-Fi and fantasy genres in combination with real material props and sets to create a more engaging and believable fantasy films for the viewer than can be achieved through solely digital or material.

Conclusion

During my research into the three key areas of reality, fantasy and texture, I have explored each of their meanings separately and in relation into each other as well as set design and specifically the fantasy genre from film and TV. Through the process of writing and reflecting on my research, I have identified an underlying theme of scale which reflects all three of my key words.

While examining the idea of reality in relation to set design it became clear that the scale of space [and the objects and people within it is vitally important to consider and use when trying to create a realistic feeling set within a fantasy genre]. Then when looking at the concept of fantasy, the scale of colour within a defined pallet seem to be used in different ways to make the fantasy feel closer or further away from our everyday reality. Finally, when considering texture as a way of making realist fantasy sets, it became clear that set designers, more and more in modern times, must navigate the scale between the material texture and digital texture.

For my independent enquiry, I aim to develop and build further my research into reality, fantasy and texture by examining the affects that the scale of space within a set, the scale of colour used within a set pallet and scale between material and digital textures can have on making a more authentic style of Fantasy within set design.

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