

Dissertation synopsis:

Investigating the Impact of Auteur Aesthetics on Production Design and the Phenomenological Experience of Cinema.

Tyler David

Area of Study

This dissertation revolves on architectural theories intersection with cinematic production design, focusing specifically on the evolution of environments within film primarily across the late 20th and early 21st century. Research will delve deep into the Auteur theory, the idea that the director is the primary creative force and how their specific visual aesthetic can dictate the architectural logic of their filmography. Geographically, this study strives to be supported predominantly by the film industry in South Wales, utilising my proximity to facilities such as Dragon Studios (Bridgend) to observe the erection & process' that go into these conceptual designs.

Problem Definition

The overall thesis will consistently address the tension between standard functional architectural principles and the narrative architecture required across media. While traditional architectural processes will focus on the utility and permanence of a space, the appeal of cinematic architecture is that its construction is specifically used to evoke feelings and or specific emotional states, dealing with 'the gravity of the soul' (Phallasmaa, J. 2001). Thus, an Investigation specifically into how a creator's aesthetic can override logic in favour of expressionism and atmosphere will be pursued. For example, how does the heavily distorted expressionism of a Tim Burton environment fundamentally alter the viewer's perception of a space such as a 'home'?

Historiography and Literature

Juhani Pallasmaa's 'The Architecture of Image' has explored how cinema can capture the essence of space. However, 'the set' is often treated as a finished image as if a painting on a canvas, rather than a technical architectural process. This thesis seeks to challenge that notion, that cinematic architecture is merely a 'backdrop' and is not a character in its own right, it allowed architects to experiment without real-world constraints (Albrecht, D. 1986). To bridge this gap between image and construction, the research will additionally incorporate Jane Barnwell's (2004) analysis of production design. Translating the aesthetic impulse to physical timber and plaster construction found on sets.

Sources and Methodology

The study adopts a comparative phenomenological method, analysing the works of prominent Auteurs whose styles are undoubtedly linked to their environments. Specifically looking into the works of directors such as Ridley Scott (detailing), Denis Villeneuve (scale), Tim Burton (psychology), and Martin Scorsese (context), these will be just a few of the handful of proclaimed visionaries the thesis will cover. With primary data being gathered through site observations of set building at Dragon Studios & comparing production blueprints to finished spaces.

Limitations and Ethics

Research will attempt to be limited to a selection of directors to maintain depth of analysis.

If access is granted at Dragon Studios, I will ensure the investigation is conducted under strict professional NDAs, ensuring all commercial and participant data is handled with consent and confidentiality.

Aims and Timeframe

The primary aim of this thesis is to define the 'translation' process from aesthetic impulse to a built set. Research and fieldwork, in consideration of permission to studio site, will conclude by November 2026, with the completion of case studies to conclude by September 2026.

Conclusion

By bridging the gap between the director's 'Auteur' vision and the reality of production design, this dissertation will attempt to clarify how a visionaries' aesthetic can serve as a primary force that dictates both the architecture on set & the human experience of space within media.

Word count: 549

Reference list:

Albrecht, D. (1986). *Designing Dreams: Modern Architecture in the Movies*. Harper Collins.

Available at:

https://scholar.google.co.uk/scholar?hl=en&as_sdt=0%2C5&q=Designing+Dreams%3A+Modern+Architecture+in+the+Movies&btnG= (Accessed at: 1 May 2026)

(Phallasmaa, J. 2001). *The Architecture of Image: Existential Space in Cinema*. PhilPapers.

Available at:

https://scholar.google.co.uk/scholar?hl=en&as_sdt=0%2C5&q=The+Architecture+of+Image%3A+Existential+Space+in+Cinema&btnG= (Accessed at: 1 May 2026)