

POLITECNICO DI TORINO
FIRST SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE
Master of Science in Architecture
Honors theses

The Curse of the Trapping Building

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The Curse of the Trapping Building focuses on analyzing the perception of the building, as an architectural manifestation, through the cinematographic lens. As a matter of fact the need of the cinema to use actual locations where to set its plots and its capacity to spread images to a vast amount of public, makes this mass medium a powerful tool for the visual diffusion of Architecture, especially when we consider the american cinematography.

So this research develops through the analysis of a filmography composed of american blockbusters which cover a temporal arch of twenty-five years starting from 1985 to 2010. In the vast cinematographic production of this period nine films, of various genres, were selected. The narrative structure of each movie focuses on the relationship between the building and its users, so that the building is depicted in a starring role itself.



The façade of Fielding Mansion in The Money Pit movie

The recurring negative interpretation of the building, as a place that traps, hurts and kills its inhabitants, brought this study on architectural perception to approach the concept of *Unheimliche*, a term developed for the first time by Sigmund Freud in his homonymous essay written in 1919. This complex feeling composed of fear, that bursts from an homely environment that suddenly shifts in an *unhomely* one, seems to inevitably stain the cinematographic architecture.



Die Hard movie poster

So Architecture, opened by definition to a global fruition, finds in the cinema a sort of visual resonator that spreads an anxious aberrant perception in the worldwide collective imagination. In order to demonstrate this theory and trying to find an explanation to it, this research develops a multidisciplinary approach playing the same intuition that *cultural studies* applied to other disciplines. Therefore history and theory of architecture are supported by the contribution of psychology, sociology and *film studies*.



A frame of a cubic room in the Cube movie

Having analyzed all the most recurrent themes that cinematography shows as the main relationship between the building and its users, this work examines the causes that bring to a recurring univocal attribution of the *unheimlich character* to architecture. In the end this work suggests as solution to the previous question the thesis according to which the lack of a well defined *character* to architectures is the main cause to this *Unheimliche* vulnerability. Therefore the suggested remedy to this suffering in the architectural collective imagination is a reopening of the debate on the *character of the buildings*, which will return a precious tool to the designer, in order to normalize the architectural perception and fruition for their users.

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