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Filmscape: socially integrating film production within the Johannesburg city context

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Abstract

Cinema has been considered the primary art form of the 20th Century. However, due the falling number of cinema goers the art form is under threat of losing its significance in modern day society. The decline in cinema goers has led to the decreased profitability of the independent film industry. This has led to the reduction of the complex narrative in films and an increased focus on special effects. As a result films, and the way in which they are perceived, are losing their artistic integrity as an art form.

Through the formation of a cinematic architecture a more spatialized experience can be projected upon the audience. This creates a space of pure experience and hedonistic escape for the cinema goer. It can then be said that through architecture, the reinvention of the cinema typology and an increased approachability within the independent film industry, an experience can be created that could not be replicated in one's home.

The rise of the home theatre and internet based media has come to justify the need for the cinema to act as a social space. The non-exclusivity that was once a strong driver of the 1930's 'Golden Age' of cinema has become increasingly fictional in the present day context. The decline in cinema goers stems far beyond cinema and lies in the relevance of film to the common man. This thesis aims to break down the barriers that surround the film and cinematic universe and allow it to flood the surrounding city context embedding itself in the local culture.

The physical design should programmatically encompass elements of pre-production and post-production with Johannesburg acting as the physical film set for production. The average man should have the ability to enter this building, gain the skills and knowledge to develop a film, rent the relevant equipment, edit the film and use the building as a platform to showcase work and earn an income. This ultimately transforms the building and its urban framework into a cultural knowledge database where depictions of local culture and time can be archived for future generations. Flexible professional workspace and the timesharing of highly specialised equipment allows for the rapid expansion and contraction common to the highly volatile industry. Park Station as a site choice acts as a cultural interchange. This provides vast interconnectivity that is needed to host large scale events such as the Jozi Film Festival and the South African Film and Television Awards (SAFTAs).

A study of the history of cinema and its impact throughout has inspired and informed this work. The temporal progression of cinematic style has resulted in the loss of both luxury and 'The Spectacle' of cinema. This being said, this progression has improved the availability, variety and increased the immersion of the audience within the film. Cinema architecture, through a more inclusive approach, can be reinvented to once again act as the primary platform of display for the independent film industry. Film will thus start to form an integral part of the surrounding streetscape and pedestrians' daily lives.

The building design will cater for the escapist and the socially integrated; the in-between and the excluded.