The Poetic Image: An Exploration of Memory and Making in Architecture and Film

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ABSTRACT

Film allows a different way of looking at space than architecture. It gives easier access to the set-up world of the narrative. The narrative is the story of what happens in the spaces—what the idea of the space is—its ritual. Using the media of film presents a better understanding of a world through the projected images to the designer and viewers.

A short film—Poesis—was made to provoke poetic images. The film was used to construct architecture through film, developing a process of making and a more complete understanding of architecture. Each space was treated as a repository for a poetic image. The poetic image is art, a connection to memory, and viewed through materiality. The poetic image allows a relationship with reality, while giving a new awareness of the world at hand. Art is defined as something that sets up a world for someone to enter. Film and architecture both set up a world that is created through memory and material, thus art. Memory is a narrative that does not depend on time, but instead movement through space. Memory allows for empathy from the viewer, creating a connection with the world and characters in it. Materials create surfaces. Surfaces meet at corners and the meeting of these surfaces create a container for space. The space that these surfaces hold give new memories that are poetic images. Andrei Tarkovsky wrote, "Poetry is an awareness of the world, a particular way of relating to reality." The poetic image is understood as a better understanding, or awareness, of the world we dwell in. Poesis was created as art, setting up a world for someone to enter; not only the character, but the audience as well. The character's memory of space was taken away in order to purge the desensitization created from the bombardment of images of our culture, and to present the character with new memories of space. Giving these new, simpler notions of space allowed for a more innocent view and awareness of his surroundings. Using these things together created the poetic image of the film—a new awareness and understanding of the world we dwell within.

The process of constructing architecture through film allowed for a more complete image of the building being designed. Film is an art that sets up the world that the narrative of the story takes place in with clear and concise juxtaposed images. The process of constructing was a different way of treating the space so it contained the poetic image. The film became a tool of communication for the architecture and its poetics. A more complete understanding of what the space was emerged by looking through the eyes of a filmmaker. A new sense of space developed through this process of making.

INTRODUCTION

The poetic image is a better understanding, or awareness, of the world we dwell in using art, memory and material. Architects try to make spaces for specific uses that are significant to the person using it. An image of a person's time and place is created for them. Juhani Pallasmaa speaks about both architecture and film creating and preserving images of a culture. Dwelling in space (our world) is discussed by Heidegger in depth. The basic notion is that "Dwelling is the manner in which mortals are on the earth." Building is directly linked to human dwelling; in order to dwell, we need to build. The quality of dwelling is relative to the quality of building. The location exists previously, but lies in waiting for the place to be created.

The experience of a film is different than architecture. The architecture of the theater becomes a backdrop of shadows. Film sets up a world within the theater—it begins to transcend its materiality and the viewer begins to inhabit the world being presented with their imagination. The focused senses increase the awareness of the poetic images projected. Architecture, on the other hand, uses all the senses including an awareness of the walls behind and around us. Film allows a different way of looking at space and creating that world than architecture. This control could be used to give an understanding to the architecture. A process of making, or constructing, architecture through film provides the poetic image to become more pronounced.

Film and architecture each have their own media that allow the world to become inhabited. There are similarities; both create a world and are temporal. In order to experience space, there is movement—denoting the passing of time. Architecture's experience is linear—we move from one space to the next by elements and openings showing us the path. The narrative of architecture is the continuous experience of space; a series of related images of the building. Film is edited—it is a sequence of unrelated images. Film can juxtapose images together to move the story and the viewer through the space—a more productive way to present a poetic experience than the linearity of architectural experience.

Film and architecture both share characteristics and can inform each other. Though, it is not as simple as saying there is a frame in film, so in architecture a frame can be created by an

¹ Pallasmaa, Juhani. <u>The Architecture of Image</u>. Building Information Ltd: Rakennustieto Oy, 2001, p. 13.

² Heidegger, Martin. <u>Poetry, Language, Thought</u>. New York: Harper & Row, 1971. p.146

opening. For example, in film the use of frame is a necessity; it focuses on the action, as well as being the boundary of a lens. The frame allows for something unknown to happen beyond what is seen. The movie Citizen Kane blends the idea of the frame between architecture and film with a sequence in his childhood home. It begins with Citizen Kane as a boy, playing in the snow and the camera begins moving away from him, passing through an exterior window into the house, a room, a doorway and then the next room where his parents are sitting and talking with a guest. The window and then the doors that the camera passes through frame the space that the camera was previously in. The viewer is able transcend the screen and inhabit the space of the house by how the film maker presented the space. The window and doors become frames that contain the action and give a sense of the space of those rooms together in their imagination. It gives an understanding of the space.

METHODOLOGY

To better understand architecture, a short film—Poesis—was made to provoke poetic images. Ideas of memory as narrative and a better awareness of architecture through the presented poetic images were used. The film, Poesis, was used to construct architecture through film, developing a process of making and a more complete understanding of architecture.

Quick "guerilla films" were made throughout the semester to develop the spaces and narrative, each adding to the final film. These films were quick and dirty edits of the narrative of the film. They allowed for a critique of the poetic image and design of the building, becoming part of the process of constructing architecture though film. This approach allowed for a different way of thinking and designing for the building. A sketchbook was kept that held storyboards as the design drawings. Few pieces of trace were used for plans and sections (traditional methods), but instead the space was developed through the shots and sequences. The benefit of doing this was the ability to create the space in relation to the narrative of the room; what was happening there. This helped create a more complete space and explore the images of it with the element of time (movement) as well.

The film shows a person who is bombarded with images from the television. These show the desensitization that leads to his lack of experience of the world around him. Suddenly everything is taken away from him. All he knows is the simplest form of space, emptiness; he dwells in the world he comes to. He begins to be presented with certain elements of architecture that give him a better awareness and understanding of the space. Verticality in the trees on the white plane, composition of the structure on top of the hill, one and two point perspective, light, and material are all pieces that are placed together by the end that brings him to a new awareness and poetic image of the place he experiences. It is a rebuilding of his memory. His path is always frontal with one point perspective, the next piece is always ahead of him, until he exits the tunnel. As he steps out, he is presented with two point perspective, adding greater depth and space. The tunnel is dark—the subtraction of light or a realization of light and creating a frame of composition again. This time it presents the next space, horizon, and the material of the water. At the top of the stairs, he has to turn around to continue at the bridge. The bridge has the material of wood, but this time he touches it as if he has a memory of it, a connection. He enters the building and passes through controlled light. At the end he turns to see the space of his poetic image framed; the awareness of space, light, composition, memory and material together.

-Peter Zumthor, Thinking Architecture

the POETIC IMAGE

The definition of image from The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition is:³

- 1. To picture mentally; imagine.
- 2. To describe, especially so vividly as to evoke a mental picture of.

We are bombarded constantly by images everywhere. Commercials, MTV, Billboards, Suburbia, even the names of stadiums invoke images of the supporting company. An image is not special anymore. Renaissance paintings moved people, allowing them to transcend the material and enter the moment captured. This bombardment has desensitized us to missing the importance of what our surroundings hold—the poetic image—and meaning is lost. We should look at architecture as a physical and sensual thing to dwell in, rather than the always changing, commercial image that allows a de-sensualization and de-eroticization of the human relation to reality in our culture.⁴

Heidegger believes the basic human need is to have meaning in what we do and know. First and foremost, we create a place to dwell—a place to give us reference to the rest of the world. He continues saying to dwell is to be aware of our surroundings and we build in order to dwell. Within these places that we build, we can allow ourselves to move closer to a poetic image—an essence of being, rather than the commercial image. Juhani Pallasmaa explains how the image can become poetic by strengthening people's senses and sharpening the boundary between the world and us. Images liberate the imagination of people. In order for an image to become poetic, it needs to transcend its medium; film or architecture. A poetic image is different for every person. Andrei Tarkovsky explained, "Poetry is an awareness of the world, a particular way of relating to reality." It relies on the person having a connection and allowing it to be part of their memory. They allow the poetic image to be their world. The poetic image can be thought of as a better understanding, or awareness, of the world we dwell in. People transcend the material,

- 3 "Image." The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, 4th ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000.
- 4 Pallasmaa, Juhani, Holl, Steven, and Pérez-Gómez, Alberto. <u>Questions of Perception. Phenomenology of Architecture</u>.

 Architecture and Urbanism July 1994 Special Issue. p.29.
- 5 Heidegger, Martin. <u>Poetry, Language, Thought</u> New York: Harper & Row, 1971. p.145.
- 6 lbid., 1971. p.158.
- Pallasmaa, Juhani. <u>The Architecture of Image</u> Building Information Ltd: Rakennustieto Oy, 2001. p. 9.
- 8 Ibid., p. 68.

or medium with empathy for the constructed thing; architecture, painting, film, etc. Art becomes necessary for the poetic image.

"Art is an origin because it is the beginning of truth," writes Heidegger—the essence. The purpose of art is to set up a world for somebody to dwell in—to be. Art allows a person's consciousness to expand. It is important to the poetic image because it gives a greater understanding to our reality—we learn from it. Zumthor writes, "If a work of architecture...create(s) a strong fundamental mood that is powerful enough to affect us, it may possess the qualities of a work of art." Architecture is art because it is a materialized place setting up a world. The space sets up a a world to dwell in and through the material and boundaries of that space a greater awareness is given to reality. A space becomes a place to daydream (enter the set-up world)—to bring memories to reality just like other arts such as painting, drawing, and sculpture allow a new relationship with reality. Art is a representation of the culture; it is a record of the present and from that comes meaning. Film is also an art. As film is projected on a screen flatly, it holds a compositional arrangement of the space. Space is made by material and its boundaries; the surfaces and how they meet. Film provides a precise, structured representation of space-initiated poetic images.

⁹ Heidegger, Martin. <u>Poetry, Language, Thought</u> New York: Harper & Row, 1971. p. 77.

¹⁰ Zumthor, Peter. <u>Thinking Architecture</u> Basel: Birkhäuser, 1998, p.19.

the poetic image: MEMORY

Gaston Bachelard wrote "...the places in which we have experienced daydreaming reconstitute themselves in a new daydream, and it is because our memories of former dwelling-places are relived as daydreams that these dwelling-places of the past remain in us for all time." "

Our memory always exists. We always hold moments that have affected us through experience the poetic image. Memory isn't linear, however. It can be thought of in a filmic way—a juxtaposition of the images of spaces. Memory does not rely on temporal aspects. It is spatial. We remember what it was like to walk along the hallway in our childhood home, or what the attic was like above us. As Peter Zumthor talks about his Aunt's house from his childhood, or in Steven Holl's article "Archetypal Experiences of Architecture," their memories of places they have been begin to tell the stories of architecture—the narratives of Zumthor's and Holl's experiences. They are revisiting memories as poetic images that can be used with a process of design. Everyone in this world exists with unique memories that they have gathered since childhood. He creates a list, such as corners or intimate immensities (poetics about places like a forest that can have an intimate feeling, but on a grand scale) in order to portray his idea of the poetics. He takes the poetic image and treats it spatially within our imagination, not temporally. Memory is part of the poetic image. We hold memories as daydreams that are poetic as we think of them. What we have taken in these memories are the most beautiful aspects of the spaces we were in; they are what we found poetic, or what we found gave us a better awareness of that time and place. The length of time it takes to get down a hallway is not as important as the movement (movement denotes time). Instead, it is more important remembering it was long and narrow (which alludes movement), and the room beyond softly glowed with an amber light. This is similar to how time is treated in film. Time passes, but it is about the space that the movement is happening in, not that it takes five minutes to walk down a block. Film, like memory, uses time to show movement through space. Memories become a sort of ritual and can be thought of as narratives. The ritual is the idea of what the nature of the space is; what happens in that space, for example, the ritual of a kitchen space is to prepare and store food.

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the poetic image: MATERIAL

Image conveys meaning. Ideas from film and architecture can be brought together to bring a stronger meaning to each other. The materiality of architecture is part of the formed image that adds significance to the space. There is a connection between space and how a person inhabits it. Peter Zumthor, in *Thinking Architecture*, recollects his Aunt's home while he was a child:

There was a time when I experienced architecture without thinking about it. Sometimes I can almost feel a particular door handle in my hand, a piece of metal shaped like the back of a spoon.

I used to take hold of it when I went into my aunt's garden. That door handle seems to me like a special sign of entry into a world of different moods and smells. I remember the sound of the gravel under my feet, the soft gleam of the waxed oak staircase, I can hear the heavy front door closing behind me as I walk along the dark corridor and enter the kitchen, the only really brightly lit room in the house.

They are images that he calls "reservoirs of the architectural atmospheres and images that I explore in my work as an architect." His *idea* of what a kitchen should be is held within his memory of his Aunt's kitchen. Everyone has memories of what a kitchen should be. Bachelard uses the metaphor of the house—the attic, ground floor, and basement. They each are *ideas* of the spaces; how we relate to them and our awareness of them—what it means to walk up or down stairs to the spaces. Architects can take the "reservoirs" that are acquired and apply them to the spaces we construct. Rooms hold poetic images. The rooms begin to inflect each other in the sequence of the building.

The materiality under Zumthor's hands and feet gave him a poetic image of his youth that has influenced his architecture by relating to reality. It is a much more sensual, or poetic, way to look at the world. The innocence allows for a closer look at the reality and beauty of what creates the place; the poetic image. The simplicity, and return to the materials themselves—touching and experiencing Zumthor's doorknob, or the solid wood cutting block contained in the kitchen from childhood—contain the poetic image. Not just the tactility of materials creates the image, but the

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memory that is held within the matter. The way he writes about the kitchen is much like a narrative, or a script of a film.

In this poem, by Georg Trakl, the image begins to materialize through his written words. He presents a certain understanding of language to achieve the poetic image presented. Thoughts of elemental matter take on material properties such as sawn wood, glass, formed metal of the bell and cut stone. In order for the poetic image to materialize in architecture or film, we have to have an awareness, empathy, and control of the matter that we choose to shape into the space.

Trakl creates a space in the reader's imagination. It becomes evocative. You can feel the cold air and hear the snow hitting the window in the silence. You are allowed to dream of the history—the memory—of the threshold and its users by creating a connection with the material. The poem gives a new awareness of that particular world.

There is something simple contained in Zumthor's and Trakl's narratives. Both speak from their memory. These memories are child-like—they each have a wonderful awareness of the space. As children we look at things for what they are and have a better understanding of the simplicity of material. We do not know how they are refined or put together, but we touch them and see them. Experiences are not tainted by the rush and bombardment of the extra "stuff". We play in the dirt, sit on the wooden floor, and build a fort with whatever we can find, such as the kitchen table, or a couch and pillows. These become containers holding our sense of matter that we use to interpret the materials in our world. Children take the time to notice every thing around them.

Winter Evening Georg Trakl

When snow falls against the window,
Long sounds the evening bell...
For so many has the table
Been prepared, the house set in order.

From their wandering, many

Come on dark paths to this gateway.

The tree of grace is flowering in gold

Out of the cool sap of the earth.

In stillness, wanderer, step in:

Grief has worn the threshold into stone.

But see: in pure light, glowing

There on the table: bread and wine.

making the film: POETIC PROCESS

Bachelard speaks about material imagination in *Water and Dreams*. The material imagination is based on images and dreams of matter unique to each person's memory. A transformation of the elemental matter occurs within the imagination. The art, or place comes into being, transforming the reality that once was. A new meaning is given to the matter's original state. Memories of kitchens from childhood provide the *idea* of what a kitchen is. We begin to shape the space through imagination—the place is given its own story and history. This is where making begins. It is brought into the physical realm through models, building, paint, film, etc.

Both film and architecture begin as dreams—they are formed within the imagination. Film becomes a thing in the world when a script is written, storyboarded, and shot; allowing for others to enter the world of the film. The script is like the program for a building in architecture; it is the piece that gives a layout of the film. Architecture becomes tangible through drawings and models expressing the architect's idea of place. The image of architecture is continually re-imagined through its use. The program of the building was considered the narrative at first, but was later realized as being more scientific, rather than a story. The program lists square footages and what needs to be included. Instead, the architecture should be the story itself. The program underlies everything about the function of the building, but the narrative shapes the experience. The narratives allow for a better understanding of the idea of the space, which helps bring the poetic image forward.

The process of constructing architecture through film allowed for a more complete image of the building being designed. It forced a critique of the architecture by designing the spaces through the narrative. Film is an art that sets up the world it is using with clear and concise juxtaposed images. The process was a different way of looking at the space as it was involved with creating the poetic image. A new sense of space developed through this new process of making. The film became a tool of communication for the architecture and its poetics. Instead of designing through perspectives, which allows for a moment in time to be created, the benefit of the temporal aspect of film was included to show movement through spaces. The ability to move within spaces, experiencing them enables the transcendence of the traditional idea of making architecture. A more complete understanding of what the space was emerged by looking through the eyes of a filmmaker. A building becomes a juxtaposed spatial sequence of rooms acting like the images of film, but have the linear connection of architecture—each space is inflected by the previous one.

The rooms of buildings become repositories for the poetic image for a better awareness.

Juhani Pallasmaa believes both architecture and film create and preserve images of a culture. We will always build out of necessity to dwell. Architecture can become a place of memories creating a connection and as a place that holds new memories that give us a better understanding, a poetic image, of the world. It is much simpler to create a poetic image in film. We can transcend the image and inhabit the scene quicker and more willingly than architecture with carefully controlled images. Film can be used to enter a world and show the essence of the space by giving something to be empathetic with; a character or object that people can share a connection with. In architecture, these objects or characters are the rooms themselves.

In *Poesis*, art, memory, and material played significant roles. The film was a piece of art, because it set up a world. This was the most important piece that gives meaning to the viewer. It allows a more intimate awareness of the space. They are able to transcend the room and screen and be with the character as he was given elements of space leading up to the final poetic image.

The idea of memory was the main part of the narrative in *Poesis*. The character's memory was not important to him until he entered the world with nothing. He began to gain the memories as he walked through the spaces. Memory allows for empathy from the viewer, creating a connection with the world and characters in it. These memories are brought forward through the material aspects of the space.

The materials become more than elemental matter, they become surfaces that contain the space. Touching the material allowed for the relation to reality. The surface of the birdge was tactile and sensual, something that was so new to him, it became a memory; something he could daydream about. It allowed the viewers to be there with him, touching it. The rituals of the space, the materials, and how they come together in the details hold the memories and present them in a way to allow people to be empathetic with the space.

¹³ Pallasmaa, Juhani. The Architecture of Image. Building Information Ltd: Rakennustieto Oy, 2001, p. 13.

As Tarkovsky stated, "Poetry is an awareness of the world, a particular way of relating to reality." The process that developed through this thesis was a new way to look at making, a new awareness of space. Each shot is constructed through the imagination of both the filmmaker and architect. All these moving shots are strung together in a constructed juxtaposition of spaces, constantly requiring specific ideas of the space to read through clearly. A critique of the space developed through the making and producing, rather than at the end, giving quick access to what needed to happen to the architecture to present a clearer idea of what the space was; what happens in that space. When the character in Poesis arrives at the dark tunnel at the top of the stairs, he is presented with a very flat composition of the space past the darkness. This was about the space of the tunnel, the next space and the idea of the horizon. Using film to make these spaces produced a more poetic image of the spaces, how they connected and additionally, how they gave meaning to each other. It never focused on one piece of the space, but instead the entirety of the building.

This new process did not change the architecture dramatically, but instead allowed a new insight into the spaces and a more thoughtful process on making. It made the spaces richer and gave meaning to them by having the poetic image as the goal. The narrative of the film helped shape the circulation of the spaces and the reason of each space in the narrative. A new sense of space developed during the search of the poetic image.

CONCLUSION

Not only was this a learning experience on the process of constructing a film, but also a more personal way of making architecture through a non-traditional method. By the end. An understanding that poetic images begin within the details of the space. How materials meet and how they are used as surfaces are important for the significance of the poetic image; they are the pieces that allow for the connection, the empathy of the person in the space. They get to touch those pieces that remind them of their own memories, or make an impression that they can carry as a new memory. Spaces become more meaningful because of the focused sense that the poetic image demands. It wasn't about making a plan that reads well; it focused directly on the space. The importance was that the space enveloped the poetic image. Through the lens in film, space is captured. It's a way to show it. There are ways in conventional design to show the space, such as a three dimensional view, but is used sparingly through the design process and represents only a moment in time. Film is relentless in its way of presenting space—it makes you look at adjoining spaces and create a stronger connection between them. Film is charged with giving access to the world on the screen. By using film to construct architecture the meaning of the architecture was enriched. Designers dwell in a three dimensional world in their imagination only. Film brings it to a physical representation and adds the fourth dimension of time. This developed a change in the design process with the search for the poetic image of a room. It brings the process of making architecture closer to the process of making art.

Architects build in order to dwell poetically. This is becoming more difficult as we become increasingly desensitized from images in our technological culture. We forget to use the poetic images that are our memories. This has been an exploration using film to expose the art, memory and material that are necessary to the poetic image. Using it in the design process is a way of making architecture for people, that gives a sharper awareness of the world they live in. There is too much making with out thinking; no memory happening. Designers have the responsibility to design spaces that give an awareness of the world; a better understanding of the importance of the places we live. The quality of our dwelling in the world lies within the poetic images that we make and have for ourselves. A building is not an inanimate object, but a place that creates and holds life. It is not a backdrop, but it is the world we dwell in. Architecture is a place that shapes our perception of surroundings. This is where the poetic image begins to envelop us, shaping our lives, culture, and memory.

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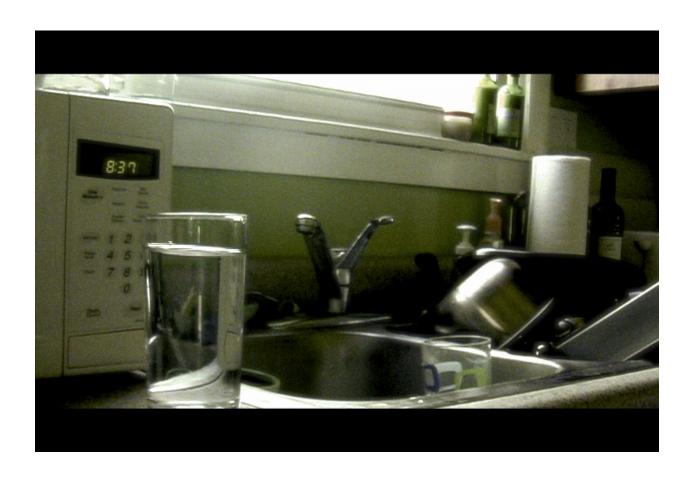
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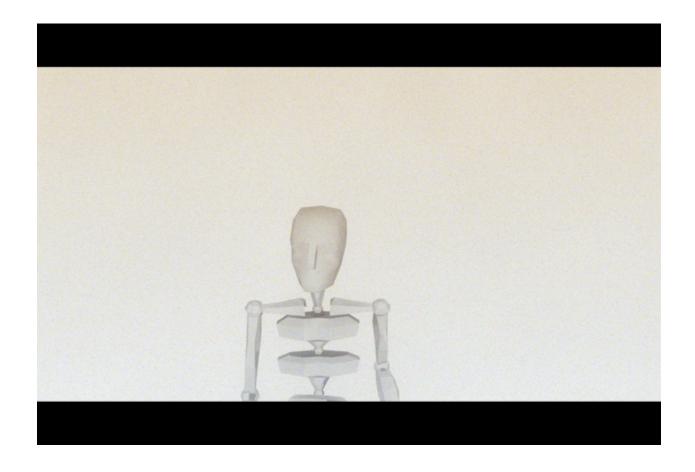


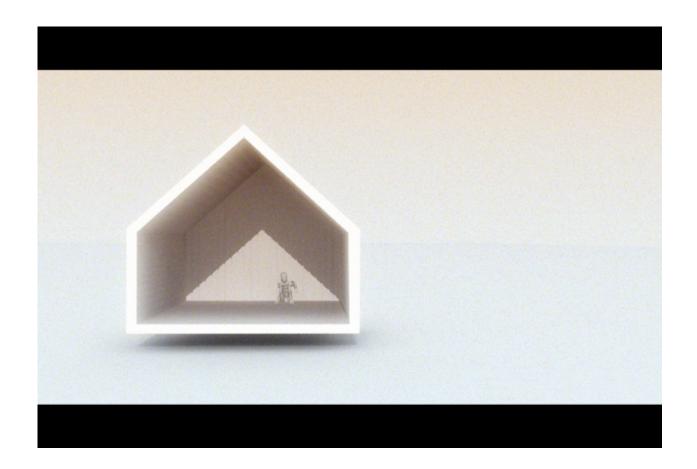




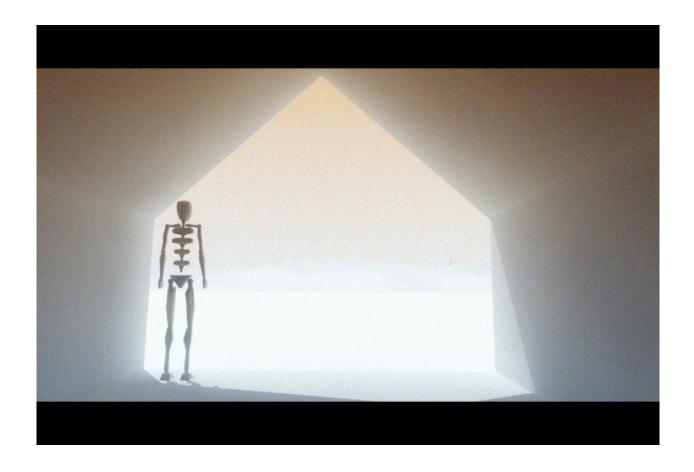




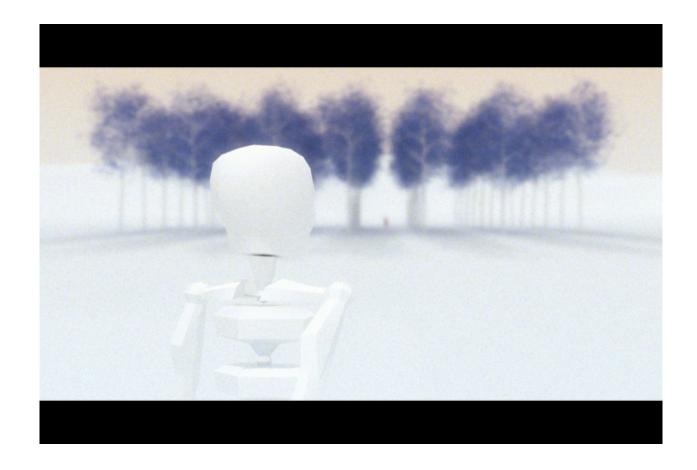






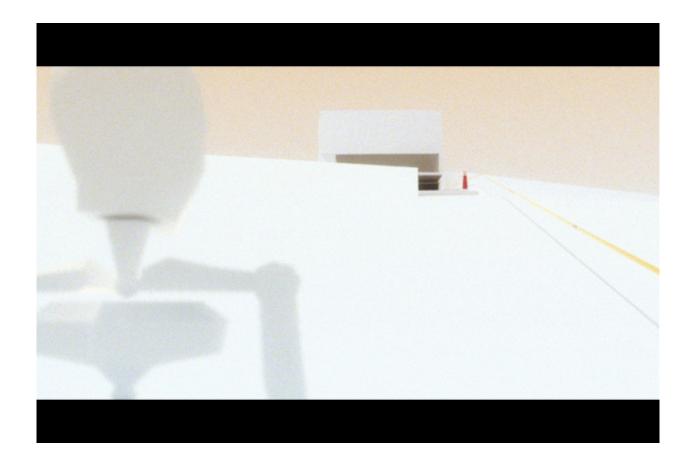




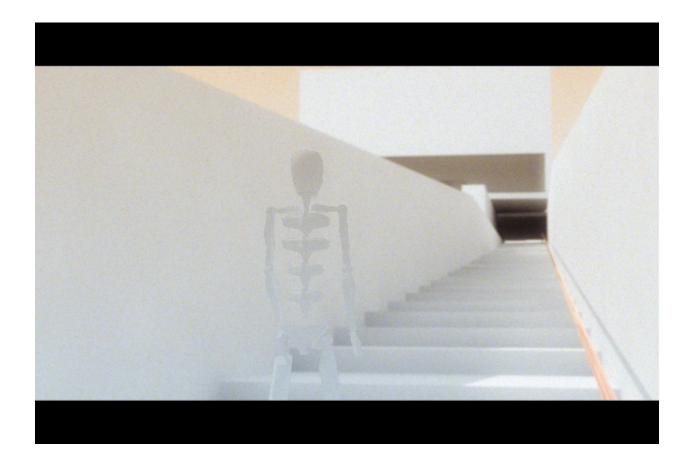




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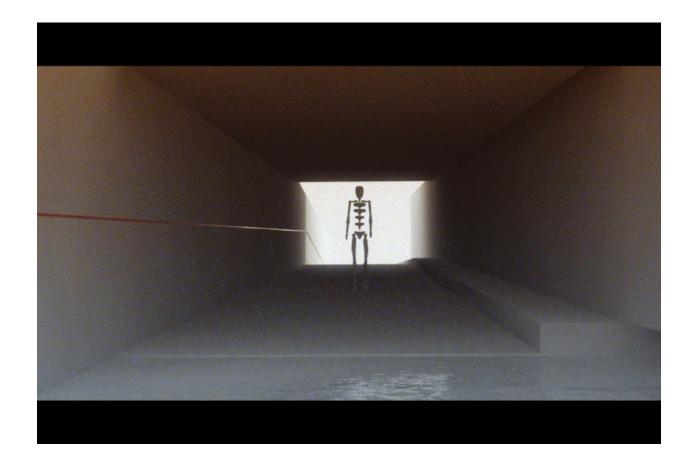


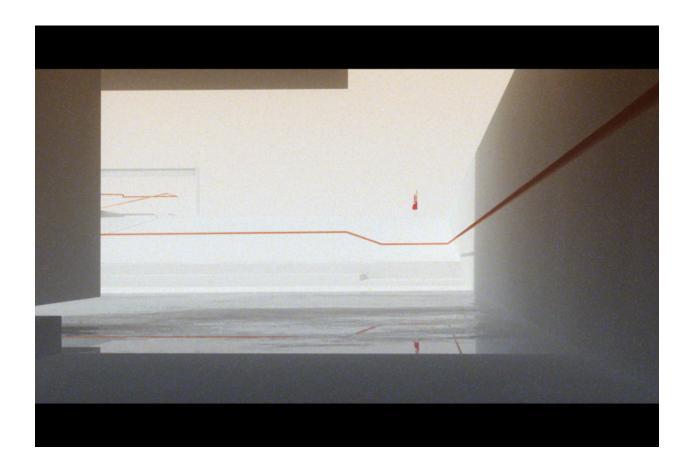
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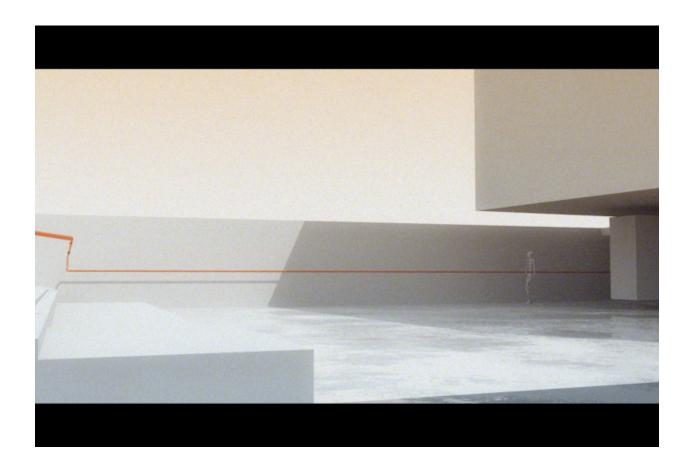


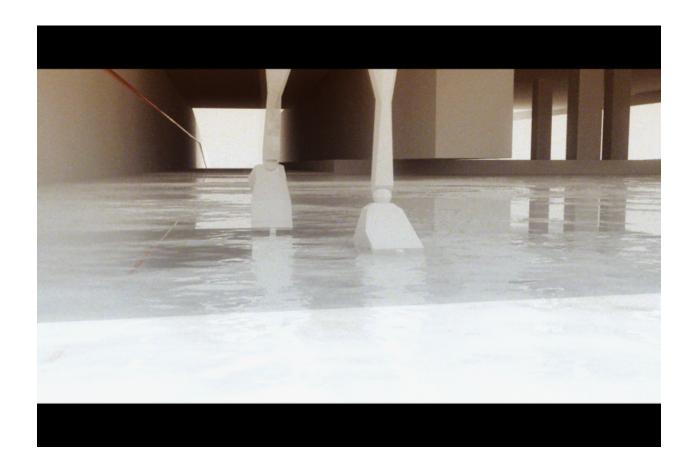


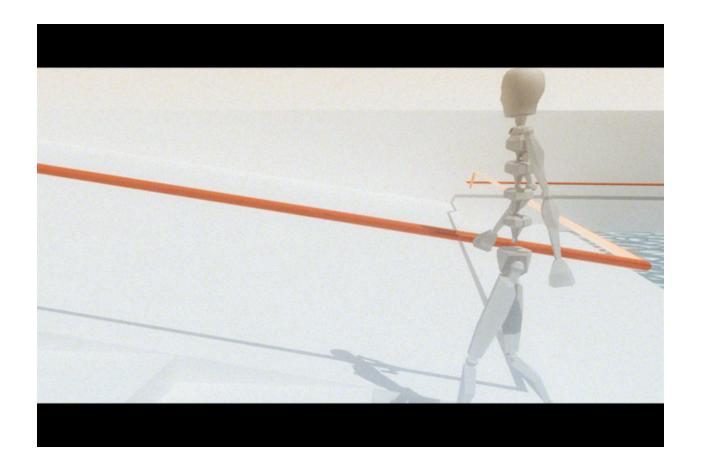
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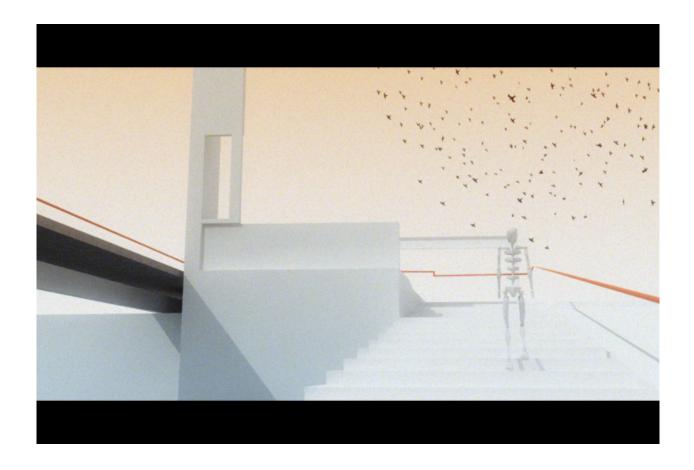


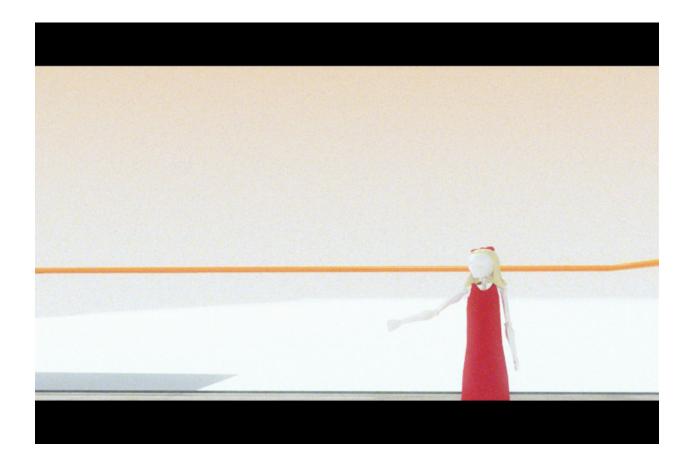




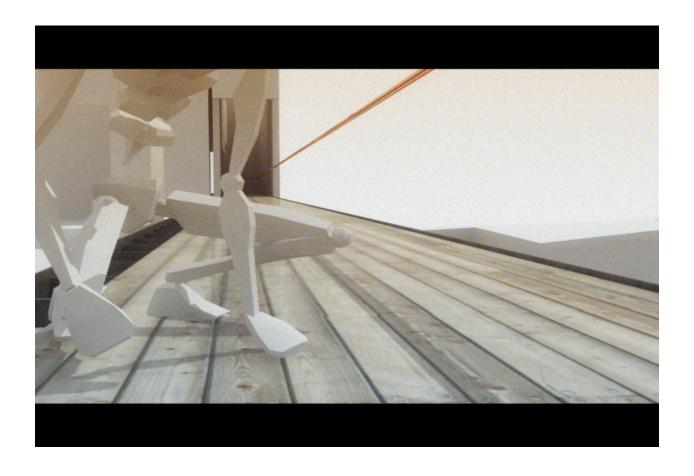




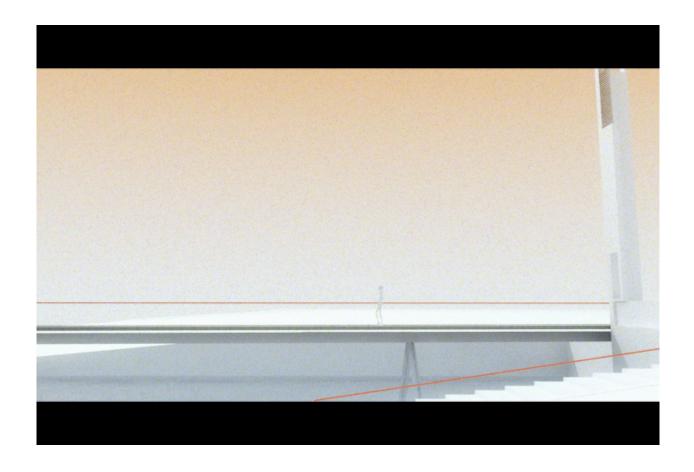


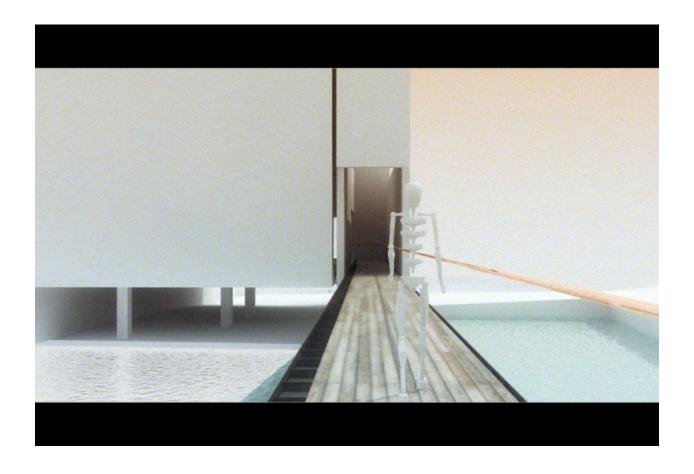






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