

Olga SKOCZYLAS¹

FILM ARCHITECTURE AS A MEDIUM OF COLLECTIVE MEMORY: THE POSSIBILITIES OF USING ARCHETYPES TO CREATE NARRATIVE ARCHITECTURE

The article reveals the role of film architecture in shaping collective memory, using archetypes. It shows how architecture can appeal to cultural archetypes, acting as a vehicle to convey deeper meanings and symbolism. The film spaces analyzed show how architecture and urban planning support the narrative, evoking emotional responses in the viewer.

The article briefly refers to the theory of Christopher Alexander, whose patterns can be used to create spaces in films, with the aim of influencing the viewer's emotional involvement, while building reflection on the social and cultural role of space. The potential of patterns as a tool for designing film spaces that appeal to universal values and experiences was pointed out.

Spatial patterns in films are tools that shape narratives and collective memory by appealing to universal archetypes present in the human psyche. The repetition of these patterns in many films, serving to portray similar emotions or relationships, points to the possibility of creating a catalog of film architecture archetype patterns or using, at least in part, an already existing one, such as Alexander's "Language of Patterns". In addition, the article emphasizes that film space, by referring to archetypes, can influence the construction of a common cultural identity and the reproduction of the memory of the past in modern visual narratives.

Keywords: psychology of architecture, archetypes, collective memory, cinematography, architecture in film

1. INTRODUCTION

Film architecture not only reflects the aesthetic choices of filmmakers, but also ingrained symbols and shared do-experiences.

The purpose of this article is to discuss the role of film space (architecture, urbanized space) as a carrier of collective memory and to explain how spatial patterns can refer to cultural archetypes. In this article I would like to find answers to the questions: Is it possible to analyze the relationship between film architecture and

¹ Lublin University of Technology, Faculty of Civil Engineering and Architecture. ORCID: 0000-0001-6586-9207.

collective unconsciousness? Do references to architectural archetypes in films have a deeper meaning than just the visual aspect? How are symbolic and cultural archetypes represented in film architecture?

The study of the spatial patterns contained in films will allow for a clearer message to the viewer. Consciously applied architectural treatments can become an additional character of the film.

The wide audience of film images affects the strength of the rooting of a given architectural archetype and its message in the collective memory.

2. COLLECTIVE MEMORY IN ARCHITECTURE AND FILM

Collective memory is the shared social ideas and beliefs about the past that are shared by members of a social group. Unlike individual memory, collective memory is not just a collection of memories of individuals, but is shaped by social groups, such as family, nation, professional or religious group. The purpose of this memory may include the creation of social ties, the construction of group identity, or the legitimization of power.

Collective memory refers to the collective memory heritage of a society, which shapes its cultural and historical identity. It is a process of not only recording, but also interpreting events, which varies depending on the perspective of the participants and the passage of time [Gliwka 2020].

The first studies of collective memory were pioneered by sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, who emphasized that individual memory becomes comprehensible only within a broader social context. His concept assumes that it is social groups that shape memories and give them a certain meaning, by which the past acquires social significance. Halbwachs noted that ideas about the past are not static – they change according to the needs and contexts of social groups. Thus, collective memory is not just a collection of historical facts, but also the emotions and social functions it performs at a given time [Centrum Badań Historycznych Polskiej Akademii Nauk w Berlinie 2024a, 2024b].

Collective memory, although based on ideas about the past, is crucial in shaping group identity and society, as a tool for legitimizing power and perceptions of history. Research on it includes various aspects, such as relations with power (e.g., historical politics), mechanisms of intergenerational transmission of memory, the influence of media on remembering the past, and consideration of how collective memory affects perceptions of contemporary conflicts.

From a contemporary perspective, collective memory is analyzed in the context of dynamic social changes, cultural and political turns, which lead to reflections on the role of the past in the formation of the present and national or group identities. Thus, collective memory is a changing process, dependent on the social, political and cultural context [Wójcicka 2024].

One of the important interdisciplinary themes in contemporary culture is the change in the social perception of time, expressed in the reshaping of the relationship between the past, present and future, and the compression of time and space. Studies of this phenomenon show contemporary culture as focused on the “culture of the present”, while recognizing the phenomenon of the “memory explosion”, that is, the growing interest in the past. Looking at the structure of collective memory and the ways in which the past is defined in today’s culture, we see that both the “culture of the present”, the intensification of memory and the increased awareness of the past, are the result of similar factors, such as new media, communication technologies, consumption and popular culture [Tarkowska 2016].

Collective memory is a process in which social groups, through various forms of communication, cultivate shared ideas about the past that shape identity, integrate society and serve various social and political functions. In this process, historical experiences and narratives are reinterpreted according to the changing needs of social groups, making collective memory constantly negotiated and transformed.

Architecture and film, act as vehicles of collective memory, conveying and shaping social and cultural identities. Films are a valuable source of knowledge about urban culture, and their representation of urban space becomes part of socio-cultural processes in which the city and its architecture play a key role in creating collective memory – such as films from the late 1950s and early 1960s showing Gdansk [Copik 2022]. In the reconstruction of Polish cities after World War II, architecture recorded on other memory media (images, photographs, films) was an important element in reconstructing not only physical space, but also collective memory, referring to the past through the reconstruction of monuments and the use of historical methods in reconstruction. Urban space in the form of restored buildings and architectural elements in modern cities acts as “memory implants”, introducing a new context for social interpretations of the past, which, especially in large cities, can be subject to political and ideological disputes. Such sites are not only a testimony to the past, but also a tool in the creation of contemporary identity and social memory [Kulig 2008; Skoczylas 2014].

3. CULTURAL ARCHETYPES IN ARCHITECTURE AND FILM

Archetype is the tendency to create such representations of a motif – repetitions that can vary greatly in detail, but without losing their basic structure... They are devoid of a known origin and reproduce themselves at any time and in any part of the world [Jung 2012].

Carl Jung refers to Freud’s concept of “archaic remnants” i.e., certain mental traces that are not the result of an individual’s do-experience. However, Jung introduced his own term – “archetypes” – to describe these universal mental forms present in the human psyche. According to him, archetypes are even the foundation of

the collective unconscious, which encompasses knowledge and ideas shared by all of humanity (or a select group). This knowledge is usually not available at the level of consciousness, but emerges in the form of dreams, myths or symbols. Archetypes form the structure on which mythologies (or stories) are based, and these become the space for symbol expression [Jung 2012].

Symbols – archetypes in architecture are universal patterns that reflect deeply rooted ideas and meanings in the human psyche, finding expression in spatial forms, structures and details of buildings and landscapes, regardless of cultural or historical context.

Archetypes in urban space (such as those present in the design of Canary Wharf [Nuttall 2002]) have the power to create collective memory and cultural identity. Contemporary cities, too, can become a place for the expression of symbolic ideas and social processes that are expressed in architecture. The process of creating architectural spaces, can be linked to deeper, psychological mechanisms – including archetypes – that shape our collective consciousness.

Alexander's pattern theory is an attempt to create universal pro-design principles that appeal to archetypal human needs. These patterns, which are peculiar architectural archetypes, build emotional relations between man and space, creating environments that not only respond to the functional requirements of users, but also enhance a sense of belonging, identity and security.

Christopher Alexander has created a body of work that can be considered a collection of archetypes in architecture, linking universal spatial patterns to deep-seated human needs. His book *The Timeless Way of Building* [Alexander 1979] and the monumental *A Pattern Language* [Alexander et al. 1977] represent a systematic attempt to capture the recurring design motifs that emerge from diverse cultures and eras. His theory is based on the idea that certain universal architectural forms and structures, referred to as “patterns”, appeal to fundamental needs and experiences shared by all people. Alexander sees these patterns as peculiar spatial archetypes that build deep, emotional relationships between users and the space around them. They can be viewed as architectural archetypes, appealing to the collective unconscious and responding to fundamental aspects of the human experience of space. Alexander shows that there are forms and layouts that have a universal character, transcending geographical and temporal boundaries. With this, he fits in with the Jungian concept of archetypes as symbolic and enduring structures present in different cultural contexts.

4. ARCHITECTURE IN FILM AS A CARRIER OF COLLECTIVE MEMORY

Film, being one of the carriers of collective memory, is also a reflection of reality or an expression of dreams, desires, fears. There are many examples in cinematography of films in which the architecture is very carefully chosen to emphasize what

the characters are experiencing, outline the historical background or place the action in a particular social, ethnic, economic group etc.

It is still worth distinguishing films where the architecture is created specifically for the film using advanced techniques and digital effects. Where the scenery is thoughtfully designed from the beginning. Often also realized mainly only virtually. In an era of very rapid technological development, such architecture will be created more and more often, and its impact on collective memory will grow.

Examples of films in which we can find references to archetypes are:

- Inception [Nolan 2010] – is a film that makes unique use of architecture as both a plot and symbolic medium. Some scenes in the film will show the audience Paris. The Pont de Bir-Hakeim, a bridge over the Seine River that is an iconic element of Parisian architecture, appears and alludes to the city's multi-layered history as a symbol of Europe's cultural heritage. We also see Paris, in a scene where the city in one of the dreams "folds" like origami, a sheet of paper, and the entire urban space, streets and buildings are inverted, bent. The dreams take the form of complex, multi-level structures, which the architects project according to the rules of logic, but also symbolism. Each dream is a labyrinth with a specific structure, which must be controlled so that it does not collapse under the influence of the dreamer's emotions or memories. Architecture thus becomes a metaphor of the human mind – orderly, but at the same time prone to chaos.
- The Shining [Kubrick 1980] – the hotel where the film is set was inspired by several real places with tragic events in the past. Although the film does not depict a specific historical building, the hotel in The Shining acts as a metaphor for these places. It stores traces of past events (murders, suffering) that affect the characters, especially Jack Torrance. His space becomes a living symbol of trauma. The characteristic architectural element of the film is the labyrinth – both the real one, in the garden, and the symbolic one, the hotel's corridor system. The labyrinth is a universal archetype, symbolizing loss, inner journey and confrontation with one's own darkness.
- Avatar [Cameron James 2009] – the filmmakers created the world of Pandora, full of detail and life in itself, which has become one of the most famous examples of digitally created film architecture. The constructions of the Na'vi people, such as the houses in the giant trees or the mystical "Tree of Souls", are based on harmony with nature and create a metaphor for coexistence with nature. In contrast, the people's infrastructure, including massive, brutal, in-industrial military bases, in stark contrast to the Na'vi architecture's adaptation to the planet, symbolizes expansion and colonization. Pandora's entire landscape is designed to highlight the dissonance between technocratic civilization and spiritual symbiosis with nature, creating a profound ecological and social context.

- Schindler's List [Spielberg 1993] – is a film that makes unusually powerful spoof use of architecture to commemorate real places of historical significance, mostly related to the Holocaust. The architecture in this film not only reflects authentic locations, but also acts as a vehicle for collective memory, symbolizing the tragedy and trauma of World War II. The film was shot in many real locations, including Krakow, Poland, as well as the Plaszow concentration camp. Spielberg took care to faithfully recreate the appearance of the Krakow ghetto and the labor camp. The buildings become witnesses to history, reflecting oppression and dehumanization and preserving the memory of the tragic events. Through authentic localizations and attention to detail, the film becomes a form of “architectural memory” that allows viewers to experience and understand the past.
- The architecture of “Dune” [Villeneuve 2021] was designed in a spoof way that reflects the atmosphere of the ancestral planets and the character of a particular family (collective memory). For example, the harshness of the desert planet Arrakis and its architecture refer to brutalism. They are dominated by simple, massive forms. Cold, geometric structures symbolize not only power, but also isolation from a hostile environment. The Fremen's abodes, on the other hand, inscribed very naturally and seamlessly into the rocks that provide natural shelter, show the desire to survive and adapt, to adapt to natural conditions, to seize opportunities without destroying the ecosystem. On the planet Caladan, where architecture is an expression of harmony with nature – living spaces are embedded in the landscape, and buildings merge with their surroundings as if they were part of the natural order. From a narrative perspective, Caladan provides a backdrop that emphasizes the theme of loss and transformation. The planet, full of life, is a symbol of stability and home, which the Atrides must abandon in order to take over the rule of Arrakis, which comes with many dangers and challenges. Villeneuve used thoughtful set design, combining practical effects with CGI to create a vision of the world full of political and environmental allegories.
- Blade Runner 2049 [Villeneuve 2017] – The world depicted is a futuristic version of Los Angeles. The set design combines elements of cyberpunk, brutalism and post-apocalyptic aesthetics, showing a city full of neon signs, advertising screens, monumental skyscrapers and vast, desolate spaces. Here, the architecture shows immense dehumanization and social stratification. Scenes in dilapidated Las Vegas, full of gigantic, empty buildings, underscore the theme of the collapse of civilization. The film's set design shows the city as a space full of traces of the past, distorted by technological and social degeneration. The set design, supported by advanced digital effects, creates a claustrophobic and dark atmosphere, which is an important element of the story about the identity and limits of humanity.

- Matrix [Wachowski, Wachowski 1999] – architecture plays a key role here in constructing two contrasting realities. The virtual world of *The Matrix* is a city inspired by modernism and brutalism, featuring austere buildings with cold interiors – symbolizing enslavement and uniformity. In contrast, the underground city of Zion, depicted in later parts of the series, is organic and chaotic, being a symbol of freedom and rebellion. Special effects and set design have created a space where architecture is integral to the narrative of illusion and reality, rather than just a backdrop to the events in the film.

Each of these films demonstrates how carefully designed architecture and set design can enrich the narrative, acting as a symbolic medium that reflects the key themes and values of the depicted worlds.

5. SELECTED PATTERNS IN THE CONTEXT OF COLLECTIVE MEMORY

Analyzing even such a narrow slice of cinematography, there are some recurring archetypes in which architecture has been used to depict the plot. Symbols seen here include:

- tower (the dwelling tree in *Avatar*, Dune – the palace on Arrakis, the towering skyscrapers in *Blade Runner 2049*);
- cooperation with nature (Dune – Fremens, *Avatar* – Na'vi);
- brutality (Dune – city on Arrakis, human base in *Avatar*, *Blade Runner 2049* and dehumanization, including of architecture);
- contrast (Dune and *Avatar* – architecture that disrespects the planet vs. architecture that is sustainable, natural, *Matrix*);
- labyrinth (*The Shining*, *Inception* – labyrinth as a metaphor for confusion and complex human psyche).

It is worth mentioning that Alexander cites *High Places* as one of the models. The towers in the aforementioned films perform different functions and convey different narratives. The tree is a place full of life, where the entire population lives in symbiosis with other beings on the planet. The palace on Arrakis is a symbol of might and power. And the abandoned skyscrapers symbolize a lack of hope, a certain longing for memories, dehumanization.

The tree can be combined with the pattern *Tree Place*. Alexander encourages the creation of social spaces with trees. Here we can see a very clear connection with the function the tree plays in the film.

For what it's worth, from the principle of the patterns themselves (they were created to build good social relations), you won't find a pattern that speaks of brutality or disrespect for nature.

The archetypes and the architecture used to outline them become part of a narrative in which the space reflects the current state of society, as well as the memory of past events, ideologies and beliefs.

6. SUMMARY

Analyzing the relationship between film architecture and the collective unconscious allows us to understand why certain spaces in films evoke deeper emotions and resonate with viewers on a symbolic level.

Spatial and architectural patterns in films appear to be more than just scenographic elements – they are tools that shape narrative, cultural identity and collective memory, appealing to universal archetypes present in the human psyche. The repetition of these patterns in many films to portray similar emotions or relationships, indicates the possibility of creating a catalog of archetype patterns of film architecture or using, at least in part, an already existing one, such as Alexander's "Language of Patterns".

Alexander's "Language of Patterns" provides some theoretical framework for analyzing how film space can act as a vehicle for collective memory and refer to cultural archetypes. However, it seems insufficient to describe all the archetypes used by film.

It is worth investigating whether at least some of the patterns written by Alexander can be found in the architecture of the film (one). One can also focus on the search for one particular pattern in many films. Another direction of research is the reception of the archetype by users from different groups (e.g., from different countries, continents, of different ages, professing different religions).

One can also deepen the topic by analyzing the impact of new technologies (such as CGI and virtual sets) on the creation of film spaces. Can these digital constructions also be linked to archetypes, even though they often have no physical counterpart in reality?

The proposals presented here do not completely exhaust the topic of archetypes and architecture in film. It remains of great interest, especially in the context of the growing awareness of how architecture influences film audiences. Further research can not only deepen the understanding of the relationship between film space and collective memory, but also contribute to improving the quality of architecture depicted in films.

LITERATURE

- Alexander C., 1979, *The timeless way of building*, Oxford University Press, New York.
 Alexander C., Ishikawa S., Silverstein M., 1977, *A pattern language: towns, buildings, construction*, Oxford University Press, New York.
 Cameron J., 2009, *Avatar*, Universal Pictures, Los Angeles.

- Centrum Badań Historycznych Polskiej Akademii Nauk w Berlinie, 2024a, *PAMIĘĆ ZBIOROWA*, <https://cbh.pan.pl/pl/pami%C4%99%C4%87-zbiorowa> (access: 5.12.2024).
- Centrum Badań Historycznych Polskiej Akademii Nauk w Berlinie, 2024b, *SPOŁECZNE RAMY PAMIĘCI*, <https://cbh.pan.pl/pl/spo%C5%82eczne-ramy-pami%C4%99ci> (access: 5.12.2024).
- Copik I.M., 2022, *Architektura na ekranie a nowa tożsamość miasta – filmowy Gdańsk przełomu lat 50. i 60.*, "Journal of Urban Ethnology", 20, pp. 181-193.
- Gliwka G., 2020, *Pamięć zbiorowa – jej funkcje i mechanizmy przekazu w kontekście badań Barbary Szackiej i Andrzeja Szpocińskiego*, "Rozprawy Społeczne", 13, no. 3, pp. 13-27.
- Jung C.G., 2012, *Man and his symbols*, Doubleday and Company, Inc., Garden City, New York.
- Kubrick S., 1980, *The Shining*, Hawk Films / Peregrine Productions / The Producer Circle Company, London.
- Kulig A., 2008, *Rekonstrukcje architektoniczne – źródła i metody odtworzeń zabytków*, "Czasopismo Techniczne. Architektura".
- Nolan C., 2010, *Inception*, Warner Bros. Pictures / Legendary Pictures / Syncopy, Los Angeles.
- Nuttall J., 2002, *Archetypes and architecture: The conjunction of Canary Wharf*, "Psychodynamic Practice", 8, no. 1, pp. 33-53.
- Skoczylas Ł., 2014, *Pamięć społeczna miasta: jej liderzy i odbiorcy*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, Warszawa.
- Spielberg S., 1993, *Schindler's List*, Universal Pictures, Los Angeles.
- Tarkowska E., 2016, *Pamięć w kulturze teraźniejszości*, "Kultura i Społeczeństwo", 60, no. 4, pp. 121-141.
- Villeneuve D., 2017, *Blade Runner 2049*, Warner Bros. Pictures / Columbia Pictures / Alcon Entertainment, Los Angeles.
- Villeneuve D., 2021, *Dune*, Warner Bros. Pictures / Legendary Pictures, Los Angeles.
- Wachowski L., Wachowski L., 1999, *The Matrix*, Warner Bros. Pictures / Village Roadshow Pictures, Los Angeles.
- Wójcicka M., 2024, *Retoryka pamięci zbiorowej – ujęcia, perspektywy i problemy badawcze*, "Res Rhetorica", 11, no. 1, pp. 52-65.

FILMOWA ARCHITEKTURA JAKO NOŚNIK PAMIĘCI ZBIOROWEJ: MOŻLIWOŚCI WYKORZYSTANIA ARCHETYPÓW DO TWORZENIA ARCHITEKTURY NARRACYJNEJ

Streszczenie

W artykule ukazano rolę architektury filmowej w kształtowaniu pamięci zbiorowej, wykorzystując archetypy. Przedstawiono, w jaki sposób architektura może odwoływać się do archetypów kulturowych, stanowiąc nośnik przekazujący głębsze znaczenia i symbolikę. Analizowane przestrzenie filmowe pokazują, jak architektura i urbanistyka wspierają narrację, wywołując emocjonalne reakcje u widza.

W pracy odniesiono się krótko do teorii Christophera Alexandra, którego wzorce mogą zostać użyte do kreowania przestrzeni w filmach w celu wywołania wpływu na emocjonalne zaangażowanie widza, budując jednocześnie refleksję nad społeczną i kulturową rolą przestrzeni. Wskazano na potencjał wzorców jako narzędzia do projektowania przestrzeni filmowych, które odwołują się do uniwersalnych wartości i doświadczeń.

Wzorce przestrzenne w filmach to narzędzia, które kształtują narrację i pamięć zbiorową, nawiązując do uniwersalnych archetypów obecnych w ludzkiej psychice. Powtarzalność tych wzorców w wielu filmach, służąca ukazaniu podobnych emocji czy relacji, wskazuje na możliwość stworzenia katalogu wzorców archetypów architektury filmowej lub wykorzystania, przynajmniej częściowo, już istniejącego „języka wzorców” Alexandra. Ponadto w artykule podkreślono, że przestrzeń filmowa, odwołując się do archetypów, może wpływać na budowanie wspólnej tożsamości kulturowej i odtwarzanie pamięci o przeszłości w nowoczesnych narracjach wizualnych.

Słowa kluczowe: psychologia architektury, archetypy, pamięć zbiorowa, kinematografia, architektura w filmie