

Architecture and Cinema for Cultural Promotion: A Literature Review Toward the Design of a Cinematographic Complex in Yaoundé, Cameroon

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Abstract: Cinema and architecture have shared, since the birth of the seventh art in 1895, an indissociable history in which the built environment conditions the emergence, legitimization, and diffusion of the moving image. Yet in many African cities, and in Yaoundé in particular, this dialogue remains underexploited: historic cinema halls have progressively disappeared, and no contemporary facility articulates, within a single architectural program, the technical requirements of film exhibition with the promotion of a plural and living culture. This article presents a systematic literature review structured around three interconnected axes: the historical and theoretical foundations of architecture, from its earliest principles to its social, cultural, economic, technical, and functional roles; the evolution of cinema, from its technical and narrative principles to the specific architecture of the movie theater; and the concept of culture and cultural promotion as a framework through which a cinematographic facility can become a vector of collective identity. Drawing on architectural theory, film studies, cultural sociology, and museology, and supported by a comparative analysis of two international precedents, Le Grand Rex in Paris and the Koninklijk Theater Tuschinski in Amsterdam, the review identifies a persistent gap in the literature: the difficulty of reconciling technical performance, sensory experience, and cultural rootedness within a single facility, particularly in tropical, Sub-Saharan urban contexts. The article establishes four founding principles technical rigor, spatial narrative, cultural inclusiveness, and climatic and material adaptation that ground the conceptual and programmatic basis for a cinematographic complex capable of reconnecting the population of Yaoundé with its cinematographic heritage and reinforcing cultural promotion in Cameroon.

Keywords: Cinematographic Architecture; Cultural Promotion; Movie Theater Design; Film Industry; Cultural Identity; Cameroon; Yaoundé.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Architecture has always been one of the principal instruments through which societies give shape to their collective practices, translating into built space their social organization, technical knowledge, and belief systems [1]. Among the programmatic types that architecture has produced since the turn of the twentieth century, cinema occupies a singular position: born of a scientific invention transformed into a mass cultural practice, it required, almost immediately, a dedicated architecture capable of

accommodating collective viewing, the technical apparatus of projection, and the promise of an alternative world.

This dual condition technical apparatus and cultural experience has intensified over the current period. In many Sub-Saharan African cities, and in Yaoundé in particular, the historic infrastructure of film exhibition has largely disappeared, replaced first by home-video consumption and, more recently, by digital streaming, while the built heritage of colonial and early postcolonial cinema halls has rarely been renovated or reinvested in [2]. Beyond its technical and

economic dimension, this situation raises a pedagogical and cultural issue that the literature addresses only partially: namely, how a cinematographic facility can become an active vector of cultural promotion rather than a mere site of commercial film exploitation.

This article addresses the central question of how the historical and theoretical foundations of architecture can be articulated with the technical and narrative principles of cinema, and with the theoretical framework of culture and cultural promotion, in order to design a cinematographic complex capable of reconnecting the population of a Sub-Saharan African city, Yaoundé, with its cinematographic heritage and cultural identity. To answer this question, the article develops a systematic literature review structured around three complementary axes: the historical and operational foundations of architecture; the evolution, principles, and specific architecture of cinema; and the theoretical framework of culture and cultural promotion applied to the design of cultural facilities. A comparative analysis of two international precedents completes this framework and grounds the identification of the research gap that justifies the design proposal of subsequent research phases.

The contribution of this review is threefold. It articulates, within a single operative framework, bodies of knowledge usually treated separately namely, the history and principles of architecture, film theory and the staging of the moving image, and cultural-policy studies. It identifies, through a critical reading of two emblematic cinema halls, the precise programmatic and spatial gap that a new generation of African cinematographic facilities must fill. And it establishes the theoretical principles that will govern the design of a cinematographic complex adapted to the urban, climatic, and cultural context of Yaoundé, Cameroon.

II. ARCHITECTURE: HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS AND OPERATIONAL PRINCIPLES

➤ *Definition and Historical Evolution*

“Space is a social practice” [1]; indeed, this proposition conveys the extent to which the built environment functions less as an accumulation of materials than as the receptacle of human interaction and symbolic expression. Architecture, defined by Le Corbusier as “the masterly, correct, and magnificent play of masses brought together in light” [3], has followed, in both Western and African contexts, a comparable trajectory from the megalithic monuments of the Neolithic, whose circular forms already encoded gathering and memory, through the stone temples of Egyptian and Nubian antiquity that materialized a language of eternity [4], the Greek architectural orders and Roman structural engineering, up to the medieval cathedral, whose quest for elevation and mystical light foreshadows the later importance of lighting in cinematographic space [5].

This narrative would nonetheless be incomplete without its African counterpart: extending from the pyramids of Nubia and the cities of Carthage to the Sudano-Sahelian

mosques of Timbuktu and Djenné, by way of the organic geometries of Grassfields architecture, the continent has produced its own monumentality, rooted in local materials and climatic response. This African architectural intelligence continues to feed the “critical regionalism” advocated as a response to global standardization [6] and is illustrated in recent African cultural facilities such as the Thabo Mbeki Presidential Library [7] precedents that confirm the relevance of a locally grounded formal vocabulary for a Cameroonian cinematographic project.

➤ *Classical, Modern, and Contemporary Design Principles*

The design of architectural space is governed by three successive registers of principles. The classical register, codified by Vitruvius in *De Architectura* [8], rests on the indissociable triad of firmness, commodity, and delight a balance between structural durability, functional adequacy, and formal harmony that remains a reference for any building intended to accommodate a demanding public program. The modern register, formulated through Le Corbusier's five points of a new architecture pilotis, roof garden, free plan, free façade, and ribbon windows [9] freed the building envelope from its structural role and opened the way to the spatial flexibility that later became essential to multiplex cinematographic complexes.

The contemporary register, finally, is organized around sustainability and ecological responsibility [10], flexibility and adaptability of use [11], digital innovation in design and fabrication, formal sobriety and functional clarity, as well as a renewed link between interior and exterior space through natural light and planted transitions principles directly transposable to a cinematographic program called upon to reconcile technical performance, evolving audience practices, and climatic response.

➤ *Social, Cultural, Economic, Technical, and Functional Roles*

Beyond its formal and technical dimension, architecture fulfills five interdependent roles. Socially, built space organizes interaction and structures cohabitation, shaping collective life rather than merely accommodating it [12]. Culturally, architecture operates as a language that materializes the identity of an era and transmits shared aesthetic and historical values from one generation to the next [6]. Economically, major facilities such as a cinematographic complex constitute levers of territorial attractiveness within the creative industries. Technically, the Vitruvian requirement of structural firmness remains a condition of any design ambition.

Functionally, finally, the configuration of space must follow from use, in accordance with the principle that form follows function [13] a precept particularly decisive for a building typology whose spatial morphology is dictated by acoustics, sightlines, and public flows.

III. CINEMA; HISTORY, TECHNICAL PRINCIPLES AND CINEMATOGRAPHIC ARCHITECTURE

➤ *Origins and Evolution*

Cinema, defined as encompassing at once a technical process, a mode of production, a practice of collective viewing, and a cultural institution [14], was officially born in Paris on December 28, 1895, when the Lumière brothers transformed a scientific invention into paid public spectacle. The professionalization of film production between 1905 and 1915, marked by the emergence of the first dedicated studios, rapidly extended beyond Western Europe to reach the African continent as early as 1896 first as an object of colonial curiosity and propaganda from which African filmmakers were structurally excluded, then, around the time of independence, as the ground for an emerging African cinema, illustrated by pioneers such as Paulin Soumanou Vieyra, Sembène Ousmane, and, in Cameroon, Jean-Pierre Dikongué-Pipa.

Exhibition architecture evolved alongside this technical and cultural maturation. Early screenings occupied improvised spaces tents, cafés, and courtyards with no acoustic or visual optimization; the emergence of the Nickelodeon around 1905 initiated the institutionalization of a dedicated built form, culminating, between 1920 and 1950, in the monumental movie-palace typology, capable of accommodating several thousand spectators within an eclectic décor ranging from neo-Egyptian to Art Deco.



Fig 1 Interiors of Historic Movie Palaces from the 1920s–1930s, Illustrating the Monumental Typology that Preceded the Multiplex.

Source: Fondation Pathé Collection, 2024.

The introduction of synchronized sound and widescreen projection subsequently imposed strict technical constraints absorptive wall treatments, trapezoidal auditorium geometry, and parabolic seating tiers that definitively subordinated the architectural form of the auditorium to acoustic and optical performance rather than decorative ambition. The decline in attendance caused by television from the 1960s onward led operators to adopt the multiplex model, fragmenting a single large-volume auditorium into several independent screens in order to diversify programming and adjust capacity to demand. Contemporary cinema, finally, mobilizes immersive technologies IMAX, stereoscopic projection, and spatialized Dolby Atmos sound that redefine the auditorium as an experiential environment whose very structure becomes a sensory instrument, offering an immersion that domestic streaming cannot reproduce.



Fig 2 Contemporary Immersive Projection: Stereoscopic 3D as an Experiential Extension of the Auditorium.

Source: Eclipse Optics, 2024.

➤ *Technical, Narrative, and Staging Principles*

Cinematic language rests on a set of technical, compositional, and narrative principles whose spatial implications extend directly into architecture. On the technical plane, the illusion of movement, grounded in retinal persistence, is standardized at twenty-four frames per second, while the synchronization of sound and image establishes what Michel Chion calls “audio-vision” a relationship in which sound and image mutually inflect one another and must therefore be supported by rigorous acoustic design [15].

On the compositional plane, the rule of thirds, the balance of visual masses, and depth of field understood by André Bazin as a device preserving the continuity and ambiguity of the real [16] find a direct architectural analogue in the hierarchization of built volumes and the framing of user pathways. On the narrative plane, the classical three-act structure and devices such as ellipsis and flashback construct what Gilles Deleuze calls a contemplative “time-image” [17] a temporal manipulation that, transposed to the building, invites the architect to conceive the cinematographic complex not as a mere functional container but as a sequential device in which volumes, light, and circulation orchestrate a true narrative promenade preparing the visitor for the filmic experience.

➤ *Roles of Cinema*

Cinema fulfills roles that go well beyond entertainment. Socially and politically, the auditorium transforms a multitude of individuals into an ephemeral collectivity and constitutes a medium through which social struggles and national identities are negotiated on screen. Culturally, film operates as an instrument of heritage transmission and popular education, particularly for younger generations. Economically, the seventh art constitutes a genuine industry occupying, as a product both cultural and commercial, the intersection of creation and market — an ambivalence already identified in the critique of the culture industry as a system in which production is subordinated to a logic of profitability and standardization [18].

On the urban and territorial plane, finally, cinema actively participates in the production of urban imaginaries rather than merely reflecting the city [19], and the establishment of cinematographic infrastructure and festivals functions as an instrument of territorial marketing and local revitalization [20].

➤ *Cinematographic Architecture: Spatial Principles of the Movie Theater*

Cinematographic architecture, defined as the art of staging built space to arouse emotion even before projection begins, is not a decorative imitation but, according to Juhani

Pallasmaa's phenomenology of architecture, a true "architecture of the mind" [21]. Since cinema cannot exist without a spatial framework, real or virtual, capable of hosting its illusion, the design of a movie theater is governed by interdependent principles. Functional organization establishes a strict hierarchy between "served" spaces, accessible to the public, and "servant" spaces, technical and invisible, with the auditorium conceived as a volume isolated from exterior noise and vibration, its seating tiers calculated to guarantee every spectator an unobstructed sightline to the screen.

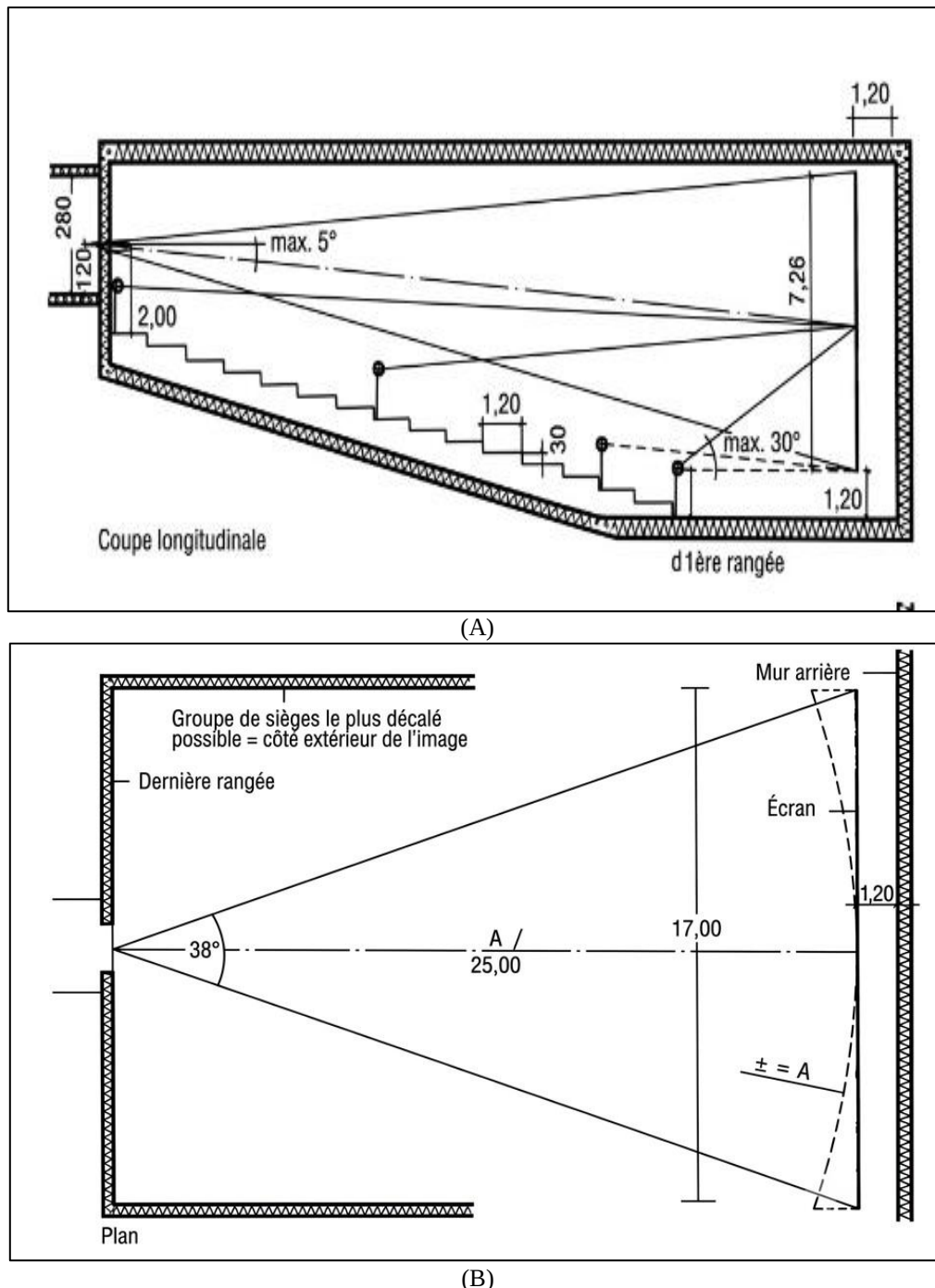


Fig 3 Normative Section (a) and Plan (b) of an Optimal Movie Theater, Showing Sightline Geometry and Seating-Tier Slope.
Source: adapted from Neufert, 10th ed. P.269, 2009.

Acoustic performance requires massive partitions and absorptive wall treatments so that dialogue and music are perceived with equal clarity regardless of seat position, while optical design conceives the screen as an enveloping device, supported by concealed loudspeakers and a vibration-absorbing rear wall that prevents sound pressure from disturbing the projected image. The management of circulation flows, finally, obeys a golden rule of non-crossing between entering spectators, exiting spectators, and service staff, structured around a unidirectional circuit sized according to fire-safety standards expressed in units of passage.

Beyond these normative requirements, a sensory and experiential dimension completes cinematographic architecture through forced perspectives, architectural framing devices, and the deliberate manipulation of light and materiality, which construct what Gernot Böhme calls an “atmosphere” a tactile perception of space in which the eye touches texture and volume, detaching the visitor from ordinary reality even before the film begins [22].

IV. CULTURE AND CULTURAL PROMOTION: A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

➤ *Components and Typology of Culture*

According to the UNESCO definition, culture encompasses the distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual, and emotional features of a society, including its ways of life, value systems, traditions, and beliefs, in addition to the arts and letters [23]. Applied to the design of a cinematographic complex, its components crystallize into four operative cultural strata: a heritage culture, anchoring the building in durable, locally available materials that symbolize historical depth [24]; a scholarly culture, requiring acoustically rigorous spaces for transmission such as screening and conference rooms; a popular and urban culture, positioning the complex as a “third place” between home and workplace [25]; and a digital and global culture, integrating immersive technologies and media façades that interface the local context with universal exchange networks [26].

➤ *Architecture as a Reflection of Cultural Identity*

Architecture constitutes one of the most visible expressions of culture, materializing value systems that would otherwise remain invisible. As a built form, it fixes in stone, earth, or concrete the founding moments of a society and participates in the construction of what Benedict Anderson calls an “imagined community” [27]; distinct regional and national styles Sahelian, forest, or coastal in the African case translate differentiated collective identities. Public buildings, in particular, function as supports of ideology insofar as they render visible a worldview and a hierarchy of values, an idea consistent with Engelbert Mveng's characterization of African art, architecture included, as a manifestation of a cosmic liturgy and a religious language [28]. It is therefore not enough for a cinematographic complex to satisfy technical requirements; it must also become a legible statement of local identity, a physical monument to a shared culture rather than an imported formal template.

➤ *Cultural Promotion: Actors and Strategies*

Cultural promotion designates the set of strategic actions ensuring the passage of artistic production from the field of creation to that of social and economic reception, seeking to optimize the fit between cultural supply and the expectations of diverse audiences [29]. Its implementation mobilizes three categories of actors: institutional actors — the State, local authorities, and international organizations such as UNESCO and UNCTAD — which recognize creative and cultural industries, architecture and cinema explicitly included, as strategic levers of economic growth [30]; private-sector actors associations, businesses, sponsors, and media; and cultural professionals, whose mediating role builds shared meaning between the work and the spectator and transforms passive consumption into engaged citizenship [31].

This mobilization is operationalized through five key actions: dissemination via festivals and events, cultural mediation through educational workshops, institutional communication, digital strategies for archiving and audience outreach, and structural support for emerging creators. The joint effectiveness of these actions depends on their physical anchoring within an architectural facility capable of sustaining them over time.

➤ *International Precedents: A Comparative Analysis*

• *Le Grand Rex (France)*

Inaugurated in 1932 on the Grands Boulevards of Paris, Le Grand Rex was designed by architect Auguste Bluysen and engineer John Eberson as a monumental leisure palace, its white Art Deco façade and thirty-five-meter corner tower functioning as an urban beacon clearly legible from the surrounding boulevards.



Fig 4 Le Grand Rex, Paris: Art Deco Façade and Corner Tower.

Source: png.archi, 2022.

Beyond its emblematic exterior, the complex is organized around four functional poles: a cinema-and-performance pole comprising the 2,702-seat “atmospheric” main auditorium, whose décor simulates an ancient city under

a starlit sky and whose retractable 280 m² “Grand Large” screen instantly converts the stage between live performance and large-format projection, complemented by seven smaller screening rooms; a heritage-and-tourism pole, offering a fifty-minute interactive backstage tour through the projection booths and technical areas; an events-and-private-hire pole, with modular reception spaces able to host up to a thousand guests; and a nightlife pole, the Rex Club, operated semi-independently in the basement.



Fig 5 The 2,702-Seat “Atmospheric” Main Auditorium of Le Grand Rex, Whose Décor Simulates an Ancient City Under a Starlit Sky.

Source: Le Grand Rex, 2022.

This programmatic diversification allows Le Grand Rex to contribute to cultural promotion well beyond its function as a screening venue, by hosting premieres, concerts, exhibitions, and award ceremonies that turn the building into a permanent site of cultural life and a driver of the creative economy.

- *Koninklijk Theater Tuschinski (Netherlands)*

Inaugurated in 1921 in Amsterdam and designed by architect Hijman Louis de Jong for entrepreneur Abraham Tuschinski, the Koninklijk Theater Tuschinski fuses the Art Deco, Art Nouveau, and Amsterdam School idioms into a monumental façade flanked by twin towers and ceramic ornamentation, transforming a formerly derelict neighborhood into a hub of entertainment.



Fig 6 Koninklijk Theater Tuschinski, Amsterdam: (a) Monumental Façade; (b) the 150 m² Entrance Hall.

Source: Locaties.nl, 2026.

Its spatial organization is structured around four poles: a ceremonial arrival-and-transition pole, whose entrance hall saturated with murals, carpets, and sculptural lighting choreographs the visitor's passage into a world of dreams; a performance pole of six auditoriums, three historic and three within a modern extension, anchored by a 500 m² main auditorium accommodating between three hundred and 736 spectators beneath gilded ceilings and detailed frescoes; a reception-and-socializing pole comprising VIP lounges and a bar that extend the spectator's experience before and after the screening; and a technical-and-logistics pole housing state-of-the-art projection booths and facilities for artists.



Fig 7 The 500 m² Main Auditorium of the Koninklijk Theater Tuschinski, Accommodating Between 300 and 736 Spectators. Source: Locaties.nl, 2026.

Today operated by the Pathé group, the Tuschinski remains the primary venue for national and international premieres in the Netherlands, combining blockbuster film programming with festivals, candlelight concerts, and heritage guided tours that highlight its connection to Amsterdam's Jewish memory and its status as a national monument.

V. DISCUSSIONS: TOWARD A CAMEROONIAN MODEL OF THE CINEMATOGRAFIC COMPLEX

➤ *Synthesis and Research Gap*

Confronting the theoretical literature with the analysis of Le Grand Rex and the Koninklijk Theater Tuschinski reveals that the movie palace, far from being a historical curiosity, remains a viable model of programmatic diversification in which cinema, live performance, heritage tourism, and hospitality coexist within a single architectural organism. This synthesis, however, also exposes a persistent limitation: both precedents were designed within temperate European climates and financed within mature, vertically integrated film economies [32], conditions largely absent from the Cameroonian context, where the disappearance of historic exhibition venues has left a critical infrastructural deficit that compromises the reindustrialization of the national film industry [2].

Existing academic work shows that the film industry follows an economic logic in which the valorization of a film

rests on the quality of the spectator experience and the attractiveness of the building. In Cameroon, the profitability of exhibition requires complementarity between supply (the film) and the comfort of the venue, while adapting to local purchasing power. Moreover, sociological analysis confirms a persistent mismatch between available supply and the expectations of an urban public that demands modernity [34]. The literature thus identifies a precise gap: no precedent fully succeeds in reconciling technical rigor, sensory immersion, heritage value, and adaptation to the tropical urban context of Sub-Saharan Africa.

➤ *Founding Principles*

This critical reading allows for the establishment of four founding principles for the design of a cinematographic complex adapted to Yaoundé: technical rigor, ensuring that acoustic, optical, and safety performance meets international standards regardless of context; spatial narrative, in which circulation and volumetric sequencing transform the visitor's itinerary into a promenade that prepares body and mind for the cinematographic experience, following the very logic of cinematic staging; cultural inclusiveness, positioning the complex as a plural "third place" open to diversity of age, social origin, and artistic discipline, so that it functions simultaneously as a site of exhibition, transmission, and creation rather than as an isolated commercial enclosure; and climatic and material adaptation, in which passive bioclimatic strategies and locally sourced materials respond to Yaoundé's humid tropical climate while asserting a legible architectural identity rooted in the Cameroonian context.

➤ *Implications for the Cameroonian Context*

Applied to Yaoundé, these principles imply an architecture that reconciles solar protection, natural ventilation, and humidity control through adjustable brise-soleil, ventilated façades, and planted screens, with an immersive, sequential spatial narrative grounded in locally available materials — earth, timber, and volcanic stone whose thermal and tactile qualities can themselves become markers of cultural identity. They further imply a genuinely inclusive social program, capable of hosting festivals, film-library activities, and creator-incubation initiatives, in line with international recommendations for the development of cultural and creative industries in Global South countries, as well as a territorial function conceived as an active contribution to the city's cultural life rather than as an isolated architectural object. This theoretical and comparative framework thus establishes the conceptual foundation on which the architectural design proposal for the cinematographic complex can be built, as a device for cultural promotion and collective reconnection with the seventh art.

VI. CONCLUSION

This article has established a systematic literature review articulating the historical and theoretical foundations of architecture, the technical, narrative, and spatial principles of cinema and cinematographic architecture, and the theoretical framework of culture and cultural promotion. The comparative analysis of two international precedents, Le Grand Rex and the Koninklijk Theater Tuschinski,

demonstrates that the movie-palace typology can operationalize cultural promotion with significant programmatic and symbolic effects, while also revealing the persistent difficulty of transposing this model to a tropical Sub-Saharan African context marked by a fragile film industry and an impoverished exhibition infrastructure.

The four principles identified technical rigor, spatial narrative, cultural inclusiveness, and climatic and material adaptation provide a rigorous and transposable foundation for the design of a cinematographic complex in Yaoundé, where the promotion of a rich and diverse cultural production remains structurally under-supported by dedicated architecture. Architecture alone cannot resolve the structural fragility of the Cameroonian film industry, but it can create the spatial conditions through which the population experiences, understands, and durably appropriates its cinematographic and cultural heritage. This is the theoretical foundation on which the subsequent design phase of this research rests.

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