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The Impact of Architectural Space on Narrative in Social Class Division Films

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Abstract

The connection between architectural space and film narrative has been an important field of scholarly interest, focusing on the importance of spatial elements to storytelling, theme and character development. In spite of the increasing number of books and research articles that have examined the intersection of architecture and film, how the spaces in socially engaged film affect the narrative is not well studied. The social hierarchy and mobility are often dramatized in films through architecture, including staircases, windows, spatial arrangement and others, but there are very few detailed analyses of the role of such elements in film plot and character development. To fill this void, the method of study adopt a triangulation method, quantitative content analysis by using Pearson's Chi-Square (χ^2) test with a combined film data, while qualitative semi-structured visual elicitation interview with thematic analysis. The comprehensive strategy uncovers how directors make built environments agents of narratives, thus providing a better understanding of societal inequalities and the deep influence of architecture on the narrative of cinema. Finally, the results confirm that spatial elements (in terms of volumetric commodification, structural gatekeeping and visual permeability) do not merely carry the plot but create socioeconomic boundaries themselves. Cinema uses these architectural elements to impose upon the marginalized, physically and psychologically, while structurally embodying the privileges of the elite, in a manner shaped by its socially conscious nature.

Keywords Architectural Space; Spatial Semiotics; Class Division; Film Narrative; Methodological Triangulation; Cinematic Architecture.

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Introduction

In recent years many scholars have shown an interest in examining how architectural elements impacted the film narrative, and how these elements involved in unpacking the film narrator and character development (Zhan & Liang, 2020). However, the way these elements function within the film space has not yet been deeply explored, even though there is a large amount of literature on this relationship, specifically on how architectural space affects the class division film narration (Zhan & Liang, 2020; Kochhar, 2022; Beda, 2025).

The film *High-Rise* (2015) and *Parasite* (2019) are two of many examples that well demonstrate the use of architectural elements such as stairs, windows and vertical space to visually suggest social stratification and mobility effectively; but detailed notes on how these elements help to drive the development of the plot and unpack characters inner thoughts in these films are lacking (Karaca & Agocuk, 2021; Zhan & Liang, 2020; Yilmaz, 2024). While scholars of film have suggested that architecture can be an agent of action, co-participating in the thematic focus via spatial clues, there is a curious absence of frameworks which identify and delineate what this means for films of class divisions in particular (Tobe, 2016). Cinema has always been using the architectonic space as an active element of narration and has been depicting emotional stakes and social structures from the very beginning of its history in the late-nineteenth century (Bordwell & Thompson, 2010; Barut, 2020). In film, architecture has emerged as a way of representing and negotiating social class divisions and remembering working-class identity (Hallam, 2010).

Perhaps more importantly, although the foundational work of Pallasmaa, Bruno, Tobe, Penz, and Koeck have firmly laid the groundwork for establishing architecture's phenomenological and spatial role in cinema, their approaches are frequently generic. this study continues their work by providing operational definitions of the way that these spatial mechanics operate as tools of structural gatekeeping and psychological compression in a context of class warfare. In response to these above-mentioned gaps in scholarly research and gain insights into the interconnection between spatial semiotics and storytelling, the following research objectives have been set:

- To investigate the relationship between architectural space and narrative in class division films.
- To analyse the use of architectural space by the narrative of class division films.
- To propose a framework that connects architecture space with film narrative in class division films.

Literature Review

Space also plays an important role in storytelling in terms of how it affects characters' development and character's psychological condition (Smith, 2022; Seilatuw et al., 2020). The organization of the space and the interaction of the characters in the space enrich the story (Bordwell & Thompson, 2010; Bruno, 2002;

Zhan & Liang, 2020; Lei, 2024) and make the space an active part of the story rather than just a setting. The concept of "scenic space" and "Mise-en-scène" of the film frame, which is connected to the concept of spatial narrative, is a central aspect in the interaction between the spatial and the aesthetic qualities of architecture (Abu-Obeid & Abuhassan, 2024; Salim & Idris, 2021). In this narrative space, movement and orientation affect character interactions and audience involvement in the narrative (Thompson, 2003; Richardson, 2019; Oyallon-Koloski, 2024). In addition, spatial hierarchies are social structures, showing social and power relations, and the "narrative function of space": space to serve as a catalyst for plot developments, plot tension, and/or plot resolution (Lefebvre, 1991; Chatman, 1980).

Architectural devices are utilized as specific elements of story-telling. The architectural layout is the tangible and material environment in which the size and structural design of settings allow for freedom or restriction on character movements of different kinds (Bordwell & Thompson, 2013; Tuan, 1977; Tschumi, 1996). Open layouts imply privilege and potential, closed layouts potentially impinge or restrict or impose social limitations (Koeck, 2013). Windows represent viewpoints, thresholds and connections, representing separations between interior and exterior worlds, and, in the case of character isolation and character integration (Tobe, 2016; Pallasmaa, 2000), viewpoints and thresholds, respectively. Up stairs means social mobility, hierarchy and transitions; upward movement means aspiration, progress; downward means decline and entrapment (Russell, 2025; Sanath, 2015; Erickstad, 2012; Bruno, 2002). Besides, architectural designs and textures represent innovation, supremacy, advancement, socioeconomic level, etc, of the story making it more profound (Tobe, 2016; Bačun, 2020; Pallasmaa, 2000).

A social class, however, needs to be based in a relevant theory, such as the major sociological theories and how architectural space is understood as a signal of social division (Wayne, 2005; Levin, 2015; Panjaitan et al., 2024; Huang, 2024; Suandi et al., 2025). The Marxist approach prioritises relations, seeing class as production related (bourgeoisie vs proletariat), emphasising property and ownership and spatial inequalities (in this regards the distinction between luxury labour and hidden labour) (Wayne, 2005; Suandi et al., 2025). The Weberian lens, however, looks at status and market position, with class construction relating to education, skill and prestige, and architecture style and aesthetics indicating social identity and cultural capital (Huang, 2024; Panjaitan et al., 2024). Additionally, Lefebvre's theory of the Production of Space involves triadic understanding of space, which includes perceived (spatial practice), conceived (representations of space), and lived (representational space). This framework in three-parts is an operationalization of the phenomenological from the inhabitation, bringing up the hierarchy of space, to suggest, that space is not only the result of social, political and economic distortion, but also a "social map" on which class boundaries and power structures are visually transcribed (Elden, 2007; Stanek, 2011; Minati, 2020). Within the spaces, mobility is a metaphor for spatial mobility, for upward and downward movements of class as well as the horizontal mobility of persistent class boundaries without a shift in status (Frias-Martinez et al., 2012; Tobe, 2016).

These environments are interpreted using a strong symbolic framework. De Saussure (1916) described the sign as the physical form (the signifier), and the impression that it makes on the brain of the viewer (the signified). Eco built on this with his application of semiotics to architecture, demonstrating ways in which spaces communicate in this manner more far-reaching socio-political meanings (Eco, 1986). The theories used as foundations mostly focus on static symbol-meaning relationships thus the particular theories that are used for understanding the transmission of this meaning are of the Communication Model put forward by Jakobson (1974) and cited here where the meaning is transmitted via the different components such as the Speaker, the Addressee, context, information, contact, and code (Krebs, 2016; Naufaldi et al., 2022).

To operationalize the semiotic communication of class division in film, this study synthesizes Lefebvre's triadic conception of space (Lefebvre, 1991; Elden, 2007) with architectural semiotics (De Saussure, 1916; Eco, 1986). The framework maps physical architectural elements (windows, spatial layouts, stairs, lighting) as structural codes that shape spatial narrative components, such as character movement, interaction, and spatial hierarchies (Bordwell & Thompson, 2013; Koeck, 2013; Krebs, 2016). Rather than treating these elements as static symbols, they are analyzed dynamically across three spatial dimensions:

- *Conceived Space*: The structural design and physical layout imposed to maintain social hierarchy, such as volumetric commodification and structural gatekeeping (Lefebvre, 1991; Elden, 2007).
- *Perceived Space*: The physical spatial practices, movements, and orientations of characters across thresholds like stairs and boundaries (Stanek, 2011; Tobe, 2016).
- *Lived Space*: The phenomenological, psychological reality of the occupants—capturing the spatial agency of the elite versus the physical and mental entrapment of the marginalized (Lefebvre, 1991; Pallasmaa, 2000; Smith, 2022).

By utilizing this triadic lens, the study transforms architectural elements from mere settings into active agents of cinematic narrative and social stratification (Wayne, 2005; Tobe, 2016).

Methodology

In order to extend the description of a hermeneutic investigation of the relation between physical environment and film story the relationship approach of triangulation is followed in this research. The title of the study is split up into two main case studies, namely the film *Parasite* (2019) and *High-Rise* (2015). The films covered are purposefully chosen in order to be considered as some of the most renowned and prized examples of cinema-based architecture, championing social commentary. Architectural layering — from the semi-basement to the luxurious villa to the hidden bunker — and the expressions for slope and stairs—are all conceptual elements employed by “*Parasite*” to build its layered narrative and a character

psychology that can be subdivided into several classes (Zhan & Liang, 2020; Wang, 2023). Similarly, “High-Rise” is a building with terra-cotta facades and panoramic balconies, vertically stacked and creating one operative space, which frames and thrusts class conflict (Klein, 2020; Yılmaz, 2024). These two case-studies give an excellent empirical basis. However, generalization as to all the "social class division cinema" from just two widely known films presents a Sampling limitation. In addition, the geographical range excludes anything outside the North East Asian and British settings. It should be noted, however, that the undeniable body of class-conscious films from South/Southeast Asia, Latin America and Africa, places where spatial marginality can be most clearly seen are not here; a mark of an important gap to address in future studies.

The quantitative part of this study is a systematic content analysis of both films for statistical analysis of the spatial elements when they occur. Extracted data was then used to create a combined dataset, which was then tested for significance using Pearson's chi-Square (X^2) test to ascertain if associations could be seen between certain architectural features and certain aspects of the spatial narrative such as (e.g. stairs, windows, layouts). For the quantitative analysis the scenes were chosen in a discrete manner for both movies "Parasite" (N=74) and "High-Rise" (N=42), yielding a total dataset of N=116 scenes. During the cross-tabulation analysis of spatial hierarchies, the data was distributed across three categorical environments: High-status (N=53), Low-status (N=48), and Transition spaces (N=15), accounting for the entirety of the sampled scenes. Applying a statistical assessment provides an objective measure of the frequency and consistency of specific relationships between characters and the architectural elements (serving as the measure for Conceived Space), and relationships between the character and the other characters which result in the occurrence of signs of power dynamics in the film, across both film worlds. Furthermore, to ensure the rigorous consistency of this categorical coding, an inter-coder reliability test was conducted on a randomized 40% subset of the data by an independent second coder. The test yielded an average Cohen's κ of 0.92 (with individual variables ranging from 0.86 to 1.00), a statistic denoting near-perfect agreement and well within standard requirements for publishability.

In response to the statistical data, the qualitative phase utilizes a thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews, the results of which complement the statistical data. In order to have a strong and diversified perspective on the interpretation of the filmic spaces, the study opted for purposive sampling of expert participants with high relevance to the study from various fields. Fellowship candidates had to have a broad range of professional and academic experience with architectural practice and sustainable urban design; and/or international independent filmmaking and directing ; and/or creative multimedia and digital visual arts. To accurately reflect the focused nature of the resulting data, the study relies on the deep insights of three specific, named experts: an architectural academic, an independent filmmaker, and a digital visual artist. This precise selection was made in order to ensure the thematic analysis is based on their excellent technical expertise of spatial design, scenic composition and narrative construction.

The qualitative interviews were designed in three modules of a visual elicitation strategy to best draw these expert findings. The purpose of Module 1 was to use the Visual Elicitation Methodology (VEM) with the interviewees reviewing the social-economic implications and the psychological atmosphere which presented in the screenshots from the films dataset (Rose, 2022), directly assessing the Lived Space. Module 2 utilises Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), where participants were asked to perceive brief video segments showing movement between the characters and an interaction between the character and the spatial elements within the architecture space (capturing the Perceived Space), then assess to help in understanding the implications of structural elements (e.g., the positioning of stairs) for power dynamics and hierarchies (Smith et al., 2022). Finally, module 3 focuses on the Contextual Spatial Narrative, which consists of a comparative set of images (high-status environments vs. low-status environments), in order to examine how the architectural transitions create a wider narrative of social mobility or physical entrapment within the film's diegesis (Peng & Ng, 2023).

Results

The proposed framework developed in the literature review was then tested with empirical data using a categorical data analysis that was performed on the combined dataset from *Parasite* (N=74) and *High-Rise* (N=42) to assess whether architectural space actively contributed to the narrative and class division in cinema. Core mise-en-scène architectural elements (Physical Space, Lighting and Stairs) were cross tabulated with the variables of Spatial Hierarchies (High-status and Low-status). Pearson's Chi-Square Test of Independence (X^2) was performed to assess the statistical significance of the relationship in a multi-film cinematic spectrum.

The correlation between Spatial Hierarchies and Physical Space was statistically highly significant ($X^2=87.01$, $p<0.001$). The math calculations are loaded with numbers and demonstrate that volumetric space is intentionally intended as a signifier to create class structures. Of all 53 “High-status” scenes in both movies, 49 of the spaces (92.4%) noted as “Large” spaces. In contrast, 97.9% (47 scenes) of the 48 “Low-status” scenes were limited to “Small” spaces. This extreme binary ($p=9.62 \times 10^{-19}$) validates the claim that “the physical compression of the lower class and the spatial expansion of the elite” is a universal cinematic language, establishing the structural framework of the Conceived Space. Additionally, the interaction between Spatial Hierarchies and Lighting was also highly significant ($X^2=31.31$, $p<0.001$). Light is an important measure of socioeconomic status. The “Bright” environments were the overwhelming majority of characters from the “High-status”, while the “Dark” environments were occupied by the characters from the “Low-status”. Both the combined data and the behavioral result reveals that darkness in small spaces could be a signifier of a low class status, further reinforcing how elite designers weaponize Conceived Space against the marginalized. Additionally, the function of the stairs in class warfare was found highly significant ($X^2=28.14$, $p<0.001$). The statistical

distribution of stairs mathematically confirms theories on metaphoric architectural ascents, directly dictating the character's Perceived Space (spatial practices and physical movements). In the case of characters assigned to "Social hierarchy" type (High-status/Low-status), the role of stairs was mainly to act as an enforcer of "Social hierarchy" maintaining the micro-power dynamics (N=27). The function is changed abruptly however, when the narrative enters a "Transition space", the stairs become the literal "Transition" (N=12) which are macro-borders between the classes. Last but not least, the relationship between Spatial Hierarchies and Windows (Visual Access and Boundary) was statistically highly significant ($\chi^2=48.70, p<0.001$). The "Windows" provide "Connections" (N=21 Connections vs. N=6 Separation), overwhelmingly at "High-status". Conversely, windows in "Low-status" environments act more as agents of "Separation" (N=21 Separation, N=4 Connections), as almost impenetrable architectural obstacles, trapping the lower class.

As a means of illustrating those statistical trends, the three main experts—architectural academic, independent filmmaker, and digital visual artist—were included in this study through a qualitative thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews with them. The transcripts of the interviews were analyzed deductively and emergently to discern the narrative/physical space interaction.

Visual Permeability & Ownership was highly visible in every interview, and so it was a deductive code. A filmmaker pointed out access to the window sets social class; "When we take a look at the *mise-en-scène*, the eye level of the camera is positioned relative to the window. You can see the window is at the bottom of the street level, which shows the position of where the occupants are staying and what class they belong to." Another gave the contrasting example of upper class and lower class windows, and said, "When we talk about a large-sized window, we talk about freedom. If you look at many frames after this, where we see the richer society, their house has a full-size window. There are no grilles or black frames. That itself shows there is no 'frame within a frame.' It becomes completely transparent. It becomes like a rich man watching lions in the zoo". On the other hand, for lower class "it's different because of the railing and the black metal frame. They are stuck... a smaller window just locks the person behind it, forcing them to see society from a narrower perspective." This constraint captures the essence of marginalized Lived Space, where characters physically experience separation.

The Structural Gatekeeping deductive code focuses on vertical topography and stairs. when asked where and when "If you notice, to reach their home, they have to go through multiple levels of staircases... to make things even worse, they go down yet another staircase. This is what I was trying to say: you don't go past the seven levels of hell, but here they go past the three layers Žižek mentioned". an expert explained. Another participant pointed out that the steep stairs were oppressive: "This staircase looks like it is meant for maintenance, maybe, but not for the public... This design looks like it's to support maintenance workers; it's not meant for the public.". Moreover, it is exposed in terms of

power - "The impact of vertical placement is significant... The president's office, ministers' rooms, and executive suites are all on the highest floor level.". Through these hostile descents, the rigid Conceived Space of the architecture enforces grueling physical spatial practices (Perceived Space) onto the lower class, solidifying their physical subjugation

The deductive code Volumetric Commodification, explored physical compression."People living in high-rises compared to people living in landed properties reveals a clear class system, because landed properties offer more physical space, whereas high-rise living is just occupying air." said one expert. "The amount of space to me, it can restrict or constrain the character somewhat." noted by another expert.

Multiple emergent codes emerged as well. Architectural superpowers such as surface condition and environment convey class, such as Material Textural Signifiers. One interviewee said, "Every material you see here... has a 'skin,' which is its texture. That texture identifies what it is made of and who it was made for". Another agreed, saying, "cleaner lines and a well-kept space definitely give you that premium impression." The new code of conduct that was developed as well was Architectural Codependency which states that physical space regulates human behavior. An expert noted "the relationship between characters and landscape or architecture is deeply codependent. My behavior in this office is very different from my behavior at home.", illustrating how intentionally conceived environments actively manipulate the psychological Lived reality of their inhabitants. Finally, the new emergent code, Psychological Spatiality, took to the mental states/physical volume connection. "Disregarding the story, yes, a smaller space is claustrophobic, meaning you feel almost as if you are choking for air. You have less breathing room... in order for you to think, you need space." and expert later explained.

Discussion

This combination of quantitative content analysis of the two sets of films, and qualitative thematic analysis of the expert interview accounts allows addressing the core research objects related to the spatial semiotics of the films considered in the analysis (Zhan & Liang, 2020; Smith et al., 2022). This section uses methodological triangulation and validates the statistical significance of the architectural aspects of the stair, the window and spatial volumes, with the basis of class division as provided by the theories of the sociologist, and with the current theory of cinematic communication (Wayne, 2005; Eco, 1986; Pallasmaa, 2012). This production of synthesis and use of actual film architecture creates an empirical case study that shows how architecture functioned as a much more active character agent; not only does it narrate the structuring of socioeconomic stratification, but it also determined the scene of the characters' agent capacity to act (Tobe, 2016; Barut, 2020). The findings are organised and analysed

under the following Themes, to serves as a way to uncover the communicative potential of the built environment and uncover how built space influences film narrative:

Volumetric Commodification

In film, physical volume is strategically commercialized as a tool to inforce a strict social structure, being a material barrier of socioeconomic stratification. For this, the mathematical support came from the content analysis which showed that there was a highly significant statistical relationship ($X^2=87.01$, $p<0.001$). Specifically, 49/53 of the High-status scenes (92.4%) happened in “Large” spaces; while 47/48 of the Low-status scenes (97.9%) were “Small” spaces. The qualitative interviews also support this dichotomy: "People living in high-rises compared to people living in landed properties reveals a clear class system, because landed properties offer more physical space, whereas high-rise living is just occupying air.". This is supported by the literature, which states that the open layout implies power and opportunity while the closed layout implies conflict, restriction or social barriers (Tschumi, 1996; Koeck, 2013). As these dimensions combine, we find that in films volumetric commodification serves as a compression of the low class, but expanding the elite, proving that the size of a room or space is used as a signifier to signal the low class has been trapped, or the liberation of the rich. From the perspective of the marginalized occupant, this structural deficit directly curtails their spatial agency, forcing them to navigate a highly constrained Lived Space that severely restricts their physical autonomy and narrative potential.

Illumination as Privilege

It is not just a superficial expression of fancy; it is an indicator with definite socioeconomic parameters that is rigorously preserved. The joint distribution shows this effect to be highly significant ($X^2=31.31$, $p<0.001$), with nearly all the characters of the "High-status" noted in "Bright" spaces (39 Bright vs. 14 Dark) and almost all the characters of the "Low-status" presented with "Dark" spaces (39 Dark vs. 9 Bright). an interviewee added “From Bong Joon-ho's Parasite, a subterranean window like this definitely speaks of a lower-class status—people with a lack of natural lighting, which I would consider a privilege to have access to.”. This fits perfectly into what the literature suggested that light usually indicates openness and goodness, whereas dark or shaded light denotes cloaked, threatening or marginalized (Erickstad, 2012; Pallasmaa, 2012). The deprivation of light goes beyond aesthetics; it phenomenologically alters the marginalized occupant's Lived Space, enforcing a harsh, unforgiving visual reality that isolates them from the comfort and safety afforded to the elite.

Structural Gatekeeping

Physical constraints like topography and stairways are hostile, and set up rigid class structure, demarcating social hierarchies. There is quantitative evidence to support their deliberate use of these

structures ($X^2=28.14$, $p<0.001$): stairs are used in establishing the structure of "social hierarchy" ($N=27$) and it became macro-borders in "Transition spaces" ($N=12$). Qualitative testimony focuses on the oppressive nature of the descents "If you notice, to reach their home, they have to go through multiple levels of staircases... to make things even worse, they go down yet another staircase. This is what I was trying to say: you don't go past the seven levels of hell, but here they go past the three layers Žižek mentioned". Stairs are symbols of transitions, in academic terms, an upward step of stairs is an ambition or progression, downward is an entrapment or decline (Bruno, 2002; Tobe, 2016). Therefore the vertical elevation signified a narrative power, with stairs used as literal transitional tools utilized by the character to move between classes. However, for the marginalized, these architectural ascents and descents function as grueling spatial practices (Perceived Space), deliberately designed to exhaust them physically and deny them spatial agency.

Visual Permeability & Ownership

Window scale and window design become weapons to give the sense of a 'home' to the rich, and to impose a psychological and physical distance on the poor. Statistically, this is highly significant ($X^2=48.70$, $p<0.001$). High-status environments have windows that serve as "Connections" ($N= 21$ Connections, $N= 6$ Separation), while Low-status environments have a function of "Separation" ($N= 21$ Separation, $N= 4$ Connections). Many interviewees pointed out the contrast in the way the audience can perceive the window size, "When we talk about a large-sized window, we talk about freedom. If you look at many frames after this, where we see the richer society, their house has a full-size window. There are no grilles or black frames. That itself shows there is no 'frame within a frame.' It becomes completely transparent. It becomes like a rich man watching lions in the zoo." This brings window imagery in line with the literature which regards windows as a link (or a division between) interior and exterior spaces and contexts, and therefore their ability to provide a view of character isolation or character integration (Pallasmaa, 2012; Tobe, 2016).

Temporal Spatialization

The concept of architecture in film makes an audience go through the dimension of time, which is used to prolong the absorption of class indicators in an environment. "When you stretch time in film, you allow the audience to dwell on these details... you are forced to start thinking, 'Where was this shot? Is this in Hungary? Which part?' All these answers are hidden within the architecture and space.", an interviewee stated. This fit perfectly in relation to Lefebvre's Production of Space theory which illuminates a politics of space beyond the rhetoric of conventional design thinking, by suggesting that space is an active product resulting from social, political and economic constructs (Elden, 2007; Stanek, 2011). In the use of time and space, the viewer's cognitions are able to process the buildings' historical

and economic "skin", which allows to unfold the dialogue between the building and the social surrounding.

Psychological Spatiality

The physical buildings, as constructs, have explicit implications on the mental capacities of characters, its scope and their psychological dynamics. The large number of characters in Low-status that are unable to be free of "Small" environments is correlated directly to mental entrapment, where film data reveals 97.9% of low status scene was assign with "small" space. One of the participants said, "Disregarding the story, yes, a smaller space is claustrophobic, meaning you feel almost as if you are choking for air. You have less breathing room." This is echoed in literature, which maintain that space plays a crucial role in the narration and development of a story, and in terms of the characters, their mental state is captured by the space (Smith, 2022; Seilatuw et al., 2020). When a building's size is reduced down and the physical space is capped off, the psychological ambition is naturally confined, fully operationalizing the suffocating nature of the Lived Space where the marginalized occupant's mental reality becomes inextricably linked to their physical enclosure.

Conclusion

This research aimed to examine the extensive correlation between space of the architecture and the movie story in socially conscious film (Zhan & Liang, 2020; Barut, 2020). The research used a mixed-methods triangulation analysis: the films, *Parasite* and *High-Rise*, were analyzed quantitatively using Pearson's Chi-Square (X^2) analysis, and the expert visual elicitation interviews were analyzed thematically with a qualitative analysis (Smith et al., 2022; Rose, 2022). Built environments, however, that were the subject of this study, perform as active story-tellers throughout their design, development and use, and the empirical evidence collected here addresses the central research questions in that regard.

As for the first objective of the research, the results clearly establish the link between architectural space and narrative, as the volumetric space and the light in the city are increasingly marketed and packaged into systems that help enforce class systems (Wayne, 2005; Suandi et al., 2025). The physical enclosure of the lower class and the spatial spread and lightness of the elite is a cinematographic language that is used universally, validated statistically ($X^2=87.01$, $p<0.001$), and firmly establishes the rigid Conceived Space of the narrative. The psychological state, ambition and mood of characters are inherent to the very nature of the physical scale and their codependence with architectural space, as well as psychological space (Seilatuw et al., 2020).

In fulfilling the second research objective, the study mathematically and qualitatively proves how specific architectural elements are actively weaponized by the film narrative (Pallasmaa, 2012; Bruno, 2002). The data reveals that windows grant visual permeability and ownership exclusively to the upper class, acting as transparent connections, while serving as heavily fortified barriers of separation for the marginalized ($X^2=48.70$, $p<0.001$). Furthermore, structural gatekeeping—such as steep staircases and vertical topography—forces downward mobility and physical entrapment upon lower-class characters, mathematically confirming that vertical ascents and descents map directly to societal power dynamics (Erickstad, 2012; Tobe, 2016) and dictate grueling physical spatial practices (Perceived Space).

Finally, answering the third research objective, this research proposes a comprehensive framework that conceptualizes architecture as an active plot device rather than a mere backdrop. By synthesizing architectural semiotics with Lefebvre's triadic conception of space, the framework demonstrates that the built environment actively drives conflict restricts movement, and communicates deep socioeconomic divides without relying solely on character dialogue (Lefebvre, 1991; Eco, 1986). Ultimately, cinematic architecture structurally codifies the privileges of the elite while physically and psychologically trapping the marginalized, transforming built space into a profound mechanism for narrative progression and social commentary that fully encapsulates the suffocating Lived Space of the lower class (Yılmaz, 2024; Zhan & Liang, 2020).

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