

-Research Article-

**At the Intersection of Cinema and Architecture:  
An Exploration of How Architectural Space Transforms into a  
Subject of Social Resistance in the Film Leila's Brothers**

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**Abstract**

*The use of space holds a distinctive place in cinematic narrative, as spaces created primarily in adherence to the story are also intertwined with the ideological situation within the narrative. Transforming a place into a space is possible through communication established with that place and even a location initially planned as structural boundaries becomes a space through interaction with human. In cinema, space is a distinctive area where the story lays out and the narrative is directly shared with the audience. Thus, the style of space within the context of the story also finds its place in the cinematic narrative. The relationship between cinema and architectural space design signifies the combination of visual, auditory, and spatial elements within the artistic values of cinema, conveying a specific atmosphere, emotion, or meaning on the aesthetic plane to the audience. The correlation between architectural space design and cinematic narrative allows filmmakers to shape narratives and evoke emotions by strategically selecting specific environments. Directors use architecture to reflect their personal perspectives, deepen the character development, and explore themes, enhancing audience understanding and immersion in the cinematic experience. Architectural design of spaces also advances the flow of the story and lead the character development while managing conflicts of the story. When architectural design of the film is conceptualized as a cinematic space, it can be reconceptualized in alignment with the narrative of the film. Films can redesign existing architectural spaces in line with the requirements of the story. Thus, when considered as an integral part of the story, where the story takes place evolves into a cinematic space. The film Leila's Brothers (2022), directed by the Iranian director Saeed Roustayi, serves as a symbolic example of the strong structure of cinema by attempting to convey conflicts to the audience in ideological, cultural, and societal terms. It also emphasizes the significant role of architecturally designed cinematic spaces in carrying these nuances. In this context, the study attempts to discuss the film Leila's Brothers within the framework of spatial theory, providing a comprehensive perspective that goes beyond the physical environment to understand social relationships, power dynamics, and cultural structures. Space stands not only as a physical area but also as a social, cultural, and political phenomenon. This research aims to explore the transformation of architectural space design into cinematic space within the context of a film, aiming to reflect the thematic essence of the narrative. The analysis will be conducted by examining ideological spatial elements of the film, within the framework of Iran's societal dynamics.*

**Keywords:** Cinema, Architecture, Space Design, Iran Cinema, Cinematography, Cinema Philosophy

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-Araştırma Makalesi-

## Sinema ve Mimarlığın Kesişiminde: Leyla'nın Kardeşleri Filminde Mimari Mekanın Bir Toplumsal Direniş Konusuna Nasıl Dönüştüğünün İrdelenmesi

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### Özet

Sinematik anlatıda mekân kullanımının önemli bir yeri vardır; çünkü hikâyeye referansla oluşturulan mekânlar, anlatı içindeki ideolojik durumla da iç içedir. Bir yeri bir mekâna dönüştürmek, o yerle kurulan iletişim yoluyla mümkündür ve başlangıçta yapısal sınırlar olarak planlanan bir konum bile insan etkileşimiyle bir mekâna dönüşür. Sinemada mekân, hikâyenin olduğu belirgin bir alan ve anlatının doğrudan seyirciyle paylaşıldığı yerdir. Dolayısıyla hikâye bağlamında, mekânın tarzı da sinematik anlatıda yerini bulur. Sinema ile mimari mekân tasarımı arasındaki ilişki, sinemanın sanatsal değerleri içinde görsel, işitsel ve mekânsal unsurların birleşiminden oluşur; bu da seyirciye estetik düzlemde belirli bir atmosfer, duygu veya anlam aktarmayı amaçlar. Mimari mekân tasarımı ile sinematik anlatı arasındaki ilişki, film yapımcılarının stratejik olarak belirli alanları seçerek anlatılarını şekillendirmesine ve duyguları harekete geçirmesine olanak tanımaktadır. Yönetmenler, mimariyi kişisel bakış açılarını yansıtmak, karakter gelişimini derinleştirmek ve temaları keşfetmek için kullanabilir, bu da seyircinin sinematik deneyimine katkı sunmaktadır. Mekânların mimari tasarımı, hikâyenin akışını ilerleterek karakter gelişimini desteklerken senaryonun çatışma alanlarını da yönlendirebilir. Bir mimari tasarım mekanı, sinematik bir mekân olarak, film anlatısına uygun şekilde yeniden tasarlanabilir. Dolayısıyla, hikâyenin geçtiği yer, bir sinematik mekâna dönüştüğünde, film hikâyesinin ayrılmaz bir parçası haline gelir. İranlı yönetmen Saeed Roustayi tarafından yönetilen *Leyla'nın Kardeşleri* (2022) filmi, ideolojik, kültürel ve toplumsal alanlardaki inlemeleri seyirciye aktarmada sinemanın güçlü bir araç olduğuna örnektir. Aynı zamanda, mimari mekanların sinematik anlatıdaki önemli rolünü de vurgular. Bu bağlamda, çalışma, mekân teorisi çerçevesinde *Leyla'nın Kardeşleri* filmi özelinde, sosyal ilişkileri, güç dinamiklerini ve kültürel yapıları anlamak için fiziksel çevrenin ötesine geçen kapsamlı bir bakış açısı sunmayı amaçlar. Mekânlar sadece fiziksel bir alan olarak değil, aynı zamanda sosyal, kültürel ve siyasi bir olgu olarak da ele alınır. Bu araştırma, mimari mekân tasarımının bir filmin hikâyesi ve söylemek istedikleri bağlamında sinematik mekâna dönüşümünü inceleyerek, anlatının tematik özünü yansıtmayı amaçlar. Analiz, İran'ın toplumsal dinamikleri çerçevesinde filmin ideolojik mekânsal unsurlarını inceleyerek yapılmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Sinema, Mimarlık, Mekân Tasarımı, İran Sineması, Sinematografi, Sinema Felsefesi

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## Introduction

The concept of space, as a challenging concept defying straightforward definition, is a term interrelated with various disciplines. Given that space denotes a vital phenomenon, it is natural for any discipline involving human elements to have a connection with space. While the definition of physical space may align with more concrete expressions, the definition of perceptual space can also be closely related to fields focusing on human aspects such as psychology and sociology. In the realm of psychology, space can coexist with concepts like place, home, identity, and belonging, while in sociology, it may be associated with culture, politics, and economy. In architecture, space involves physical arrangements, designs, and planning structures. For cinema, which also considers the interrelation with architecture, space holds a distinctive position as an indicator and executor of the narrative structure. Cinematic spaces provide context, setting the stage for character interactions, conflicts, and resolutions. Cinema, as another discipline, has common aspects in terms of architecture and space design. Space designs, which form the basis of cinema's storytelling, have a highly integrated structure with the branch of architecture. Moreover, architectural space design and cinematic space design often intersect in their utilization of spatial storytelling techniques to shape audience perceptions and enhance narrative immersion (Abu-Obeid & Abuhassan, 2024). Cinema production may sometimes need to redesign the architectural atmosphere and the integration of these two disciplines is very valuable, because most probably cinematic space design draws inspiration from architectural space design.

Cinematic space is essentially the fundamental element in perceiving and presenting the story to the audience, but it always gives reference to everyday living spaces which are designed by the architects focusing on the physical experience of the spaces. In that case it is also not a surprise that film directors may need to manipulate this optimization to narrate the story in the context of their point of view. Nevertheless, the common ground among these diverse perspectives lies in their serving as an expressive form and a point of resistance. From the film side space, as a part of the struggle for human self-actualization, can be considered an arena for showcasing the human essence. Furthermore, the concept of space transcends mere physical boundaries, evolving into a different dimension through human communication, highlighting its deep connection with societal structures. Space, beyond being perceived purely in physical terms, manifests itself in various contexts such as cultural, existential, political, resistant, and ideological reasons. People express their ideologies either by denying social reality, ignoring its undesirable aspects, or by saying that such features are inevitable (Eagleton, 2015 p.51). In this regard, it cannot be denied that ideology is interconnected with conditions. Cultural and economic factors can have a significant influence on an individual's ideological choices and accordingly the depiction of how individuals exist in each space, initiating life with specific identities and cultural codes, holds significant importance as well.

When an individual becomes the subject of a space, that place undergoes a transformation, acquiring a different lifestyle and adopting a new life purpose. People establish and develop their relationships within spaces. Space is not an area independent of relationships, therefore the relationship each discipline will establish with space is different. For example, while sociology discusses the relationship of space with society and areas of resistance, architecture can focus on cultural values, texture, and aesthetics. When space is considered with its communication dimension, it should be discussed together with concepts such as struggle, resistance, and existence, and in this context, space is also political where power exists. People create their own ethos because of their political interaction with places (Foucault, 1983 p.89). Approaching from an alternative side, the human interaction with space becomes evident that the ontological diagnosis of ideology plays a role in transforming the living environment into a realm of resistance. Both economic and cultural codes can serve as influential elements guiding this interaction at the context of human existential values (Therborn, 1999, p.23-24). At this point, it is unique that cinema is a powerful tool to clearly explain and reflect human

life. While it is possible to explain resistance and ideologies in more depth through cinema, the point where resistance and ideology visually meet the audience without the need for words in established cinematic spaces is semantically valuable. Cinema, which possesses compelling arguments in portraying human experiences, similarly attributes great significance to space and it is fundamentally a narrative medium where the spaces created by cinema serve as visual supporters whispering the narrative to the audience both sensorially and philosophically.

In the realm of space, there have been diverse definitions and approaches by scientists and philosophers in the past. Among the scholars approaching space from their respective fields, Henri Lefebvre's definitions and theories on the production of space take precedence. Lefebvre conceptualizes space as a social construct (Lefebvre, 2014, p.21). According to him, space enters the process of reproduction through social phenomena and economic mobility, making the active diversity demonstrated by individuals in space continually reproduce its uniqueness (Lefebvre, 2014, p.24). In this context, the choice of the Iranian film *Leila's Brothers* (Saeed Roustayi, 2022)<sup>1</sup> as a case study for this article is primarily motivated by its attempt to convey political and social concerns through the creation of ideological spaces in cinema. This interdisciplinary article adheres to the principle of examining how architectural designs presented as spaces in films transform into communication spaces in the cinematic narrative. Focusing on key architectural elements within the film, such as the stairs assumed to emphasize resistance and social upheavals, the elevator as a carrier of cross-cultural symbolism, the shopping mall potentially representing a resistance space until the end of the film, and the father's house serving as a crucial symbol of existence and a fundamental authoritative space, these cinematic spaces are analysed under distinct headings. The selected locations, scenes, and unique arguments of the film, which represent the most prominent convergence of architecture and cinema, are emphasized, opening discussions on how cinematography's significant role in narrative can be perceived through elements such as sound, visuals, and montage within a cinematic space.

### Exploring the Conceptual Framework: Theory of Space

Space theory spans various disciplines, offering diverse perspectives on the concept of space. In architecture and urban planning, it delves into the design and societal implications of physical spaces. Cultural and social studies analyse how space influences human behaviour and identity, as philosophers like Henri Lefebvre contributing to discussions on social spaces (Lefebvre, 2014). In literary and cultural criticism, space theory involves how space is portrayed and utilized in artistic works, contributing to narrative, and meaning (Bachelard, 2014). In a space, there are elements of furnishings (objects) that facilitate people's lifestyles and activities. The arrangement, quality, density, and appearance of these furnishings play a role in the perception of the space. Therefore, beyond the compatibility of these elements with the physiological measurements of users, they should be considered in conjunction with other elements of the space, such as the form, colour and texture of the surfaces that define the space (Altan,1993). However, the terms place and space differ in meaning because place indicates the situation more clearly. Rather than size or shape, the latter comes to the fore when talking about space.

<sup>1</sup> Leila, performed by Taraneh Alidoosti, is the family's main breadwinner, struggling to keep them afloat financially. Her brothers include Alireza, who returns home after losing his job; Manouchehr, who is entangled in a debt-ridden pyramid scheme; Farhad, who works odd jobs; and Parviz, a bathroom attendant with a large family. Their father, Esmail, is obsessed with gaining respect within their extended family and spends the family's savings in a bid to be named patriarch, despite the dire consequences for his children. The film highlights the clash between traditional expectations and modern struggles, showcasing the family's constant bickering and the sacrifices made by Leila. Her attempt to unite her brothers to start a business to secure their future contrasts with her father's selfish pursuits. The story delves into themes of gender roles, economic disparity, and the impact of societal pressures on family dynamics. Additionally, *Leila's Brothers* serves as a critique of both governmental policies and traditional societal norms in Iran. The film underscores the detrimental effects of international sanctions on ordinary Iranian families, illustrating how economic hardships are exacerbated by political isolation.



The period of the 1960s-70s, marked by capitalist production, societal transformation, and the differentiation of urban life, necessitated a re-examination of spaces for human interactions. The concept of space, beyond being merely a physical enclosure, came to signify a structure that could be transformed by the individuals within it. Sociologist and philosopher Henri Lefebvre, through numerous works, laid the groundwork for discussions on this matter by generating theories revolving around the interconnectedness of humans, society, and spaces. Lefebvre, particularly in his work *"Critique of Everyday Life"* (2008), presented a critique of the emerging new reality, fragmentation, and the transformation of cities into spaces of capitalist production under the broad term of the city. In *"The Production of Space"* (1991), he emphasized the transformation resulting from the communication between space and humans, highlighting the evolving perception of space for individuals. In his book *"The Right to the City"* (La Droit a la Ville) (2016), Lefebvre pioneered discussions on the theory of space. This work serves as a manifesto, proposing a conceptualization of the *Right to The City* not only as the production of local public services but also as an exploration of what should be understood in a broader sense about the right to the city. Henri Lefebvre's book *"The Urban Revolution"* (La Révolution Urbaine) (2003) focuses on the transformation of urban areas and its societal, economic, and political implications. It particularly emphasizes the impact of urban life and space on social relations. Lefebvre contends that urbanization should be approached not only in terms of architectural and urban planning dimensions but also in the context of power relations, class conflict, and societal transformation.

Members of society tend to transform the place they live in, in line with the economic, cultural, and political values. Human life encompasses a wide array of themes existence like parodies that both shape and organize human life, and they undergo transitions in the realm where individuals discover and try to reconstruct themselves among the physical spaces they inhabit. In the temporal and spatial expanse between birth and death, humans shape their physical and mental lives with the presence of numerous themes. In this process, individuals encounter specific moments defined as "moments" in philosophy, as discussed by Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (as cited in Stern, 2002p.13-14). These encounters determine the arenas of human struggle. Modern life leaves individuals to face repetitions and routine processes. Moments, conceptualized as "moments" in the works of Hegel, representing internal stages of a developing process and social phenomena, are moments that reflect the characteristics of a whole in thought. The "moment" concept, used to denote a specific stage or element of a process, situation, or existence, in Lefebvre's definition, signifies a meaningful moment that becomes apparent within a whole, reflecting the characteristics of that whole. While expressing a specific moment within a system or phenomenon, the "moment" concept is also crucial in understanding and analysing the overall system or phenomenon (Lefebvre, 2013, p.11).

The "moment" concept is used in understanding different aspects, layers, and conflicts of urban life. Lefebvre introduces this concept in his work *"The Production of Space"* (La Production de l'Espace) (1991) and other writings. In these works, Lefebvre emphasizes the semantic richness and diversity of social relationships and spatial arrangements. It encompasses not only the physical structure of the city but also social relationships, cultural dynamics, and the experience of daily life. Lefebvre, by emphasizing different "moments" of the city, seeks to understand the complexity and diversity of urban space. Lefebvre's "moment" theory highlights intense emotions experienced in everyday life and suggests that these emotions reveal the possibility of a free life without alienation. These moments are temporary but of vital importance, offering a glimpse into a better living standard.

Everyday life spaces, known and constantly lived-in spaces within daily life, can create different perceptions according to the rhythm of life, as the street of modern life dictates and presupposes the harmony of needs, desires, and commodities (Lefebvre, 2008, p.328). Life is a sum of moments as it is, and everyday life in the operational domain of individuals becomes a series of repetitions, where everything is functional. Lefebvre's space conceptualizations

through everyday life can be the subject of many disciplines, holding significant importance in the intersection of architecture and cinema. In cinema mainly the preferences of the cinematographic<sup>2</sup> issues are determinative in storytelling and designed with reference to everyday life. In addition to the tangible spaces designed within the realm of architectural discipline, cinema also involves the redesigning of these spaces according to its own narratives. Therefore, the use of fictional spaces alongside real spaces in cinema constitutes a crucial area of application. The incorporation of emotions and physical actions in human experience necessitates a detailed depiction of space in cinema, encompassing the intended meaning in its *mise-en-scène*<sup>3</sup>. The formation of cinematic spaces in a film aligns with the narrative's portrayal of the human experience. However, it is important to note that cinematic space is highly intertwined with the experience of the space itself. In his book *Cine-Spaces* (2013), Richard Koeck elaborates on the connection between moving images and architecture through the human factor. He emphasizes that the architectural spaces and cities constructed by cinema are entirely different from real life (Koeck, 2013, pp.1-2). Furthermore, the audience's personal experience is a significant aspect of the matter. The audience's knowledge of the space and their personal experiences lead to a distinct perception of the cinematic space compared to the architectural space. According to Burch, there are two types of cinematic spaces. The first encompasses everything within the frame, visible to everyone, and constitutes the concept of cinematic space that is straightforwardly perceived. The second definition includes what takes place outside the frame, a complex structure that may fundamentally differ from architectural space yet contributes semantically to the frame even though it is not within it (Burch, 2014, p.17-18). Expanding the definition of cinematic space, Burch emphasizes other cinematographic elements, primarily colour, as factors that enhance the viewer's perception. Illustrating the perception of a space through early George Melies films, he refers to a cinema space in terms of brightness and colour (Burch, 1990, pp.171-172).

In this context, space is physically an existing, framed area, how it will be incorporated into the cinematic narrative as a part of cinematic fiction. Thus, it is essential to integrate the concept of "cinematic space" in this context. "Cinematic space" refers to the setting of events in a film, encompassing the locations where scenes take place, the spaces used for shooting, or the virtual environments created in the film. Cinematic space is a crucial element in understanding, analysing, and evaluating a film because the spaces influence the atmosphere, character relationships, and the development of the story. The convergence and divergence areas between cinematic spaces and architectural spaces form mutually attractive aspects for each other in an interdisciplinary manner. One of the fundamental meeting points in this context is the transformations in human communication. Activities of individuals within a space, which gain new meanings, spirit, and aura, become areas of interest for both architectural design and cinematography. A person's actions in this space become subjective through their experience of the space, and the place transforms into experienced spaces (Bollnow, 2008 p.19).

While Lefebvre argues that "physical, observed, and lived" spaces are worked on through representations, emphasizing that space is not merely confined to structural boundaries but can also be conceptualized at aesthetic and symbolic levels, how space is perceived by an individual is a result of the communication established with that space (as cited in Stanek, 2011, p.149). The presence of human phenomena in a space can generate manipulations in how that space

<sup>2</sup> Cinematography: Cinematography involves the planning and application of camera movements, shot angles, lighting, shading, colour usage, and other visual elements. Cinematography encompasses the elements that make a film visually appealing and impactful, combining a director's vision with technical expertise. The cinematographer, typically a member of the film crew, is the individual responsible for overseeing the imaging process on a specific project. Cinematography is acknowledged as a significant component of the art of filmmaking, contributing to the aesthetic quality of film productions (Brown, 2016).

<sup>3</sup> "Mise en scène" is a French term that translates to "placing on stage" or "staging" in English. In the context of filmmaking and theater, *mise en scène* refers to the arrangement of visual elements within a scene. This includes everything from the placement of actors and props to the lighting, set design, costumes, and overall composition (Bordwell et al, 2020, p.112)

is perceived. This situation, which can develop entirely perceptually, is also subjective. At this point, when the spatial depiction established by cinema and architecture is reevaluated, there will be ideological, sociological, and psychological differences between the space perceived within the frame and the real space. In cinema, with the involvement of the audience and the directors' point of view to the story, there is a contribution to the transformation of space. The concept of perceived space introduced by Lefebvre also undergoes transformation.

### **Analysing Leila's Brothers<sup>4</sup> Through Cinematic Spaces Infused with Residence**

The 19th century marked a period of significant transformation in Iran, as the country experienced increased interactions with the Western world. This exposure had deep effects on various aspects of Iranian society, leading to a process of modernization known as "Tajadodgraei."<sup>5</sup> This modernization touched upon politics, education, law, customs, and culture, introducing new ideas and practices to Iranian life (Moradiyan Rizi, 2015). One notable impact of this encounter with the West was the changing role of women in Iranian society (Dabashi, 2001p.4). While it may not have resulted in radical shifts, there was some leeway for women to participate in different spheres of society. One of the issues that need to be emphasized in Iranian society is the social role of women (Maasoumi, Taket & Zarei, 2018) This issue, which is also at the focal point of the film *Leila's Brothers* (Roustayi, 2022), emphasizes the female deployment area of Iranian society through the character of Leila Jourablou (Taraneh Alidoosti). In her conflict with her mother, Leila symbolizes two women's movements in society: traditional and modern. While modern women tend to be more involved in business life and male-dominated areas (this woman is introduced as Leila in the movie), the traditional woman is in a position of defending and accepting the repression and male-dominated view (this woman is Leila's mother).

However, the extent and nature of these changes varied, and traditional gender roles largely persisted. The attitude to Western ideas also had reflections on sexual and gender norms in 19th century Iran. The conventional binary understanding of male and female roles was challenged (Moradiyan Rizi, 2015). This openness to non-standard gender representation marked a departure from traditional norms and was part of the broader transformation associated with modernity. It's important to note that while these changes were underway, they did not happen uniformly across Iranian society, and resistance to such transformations existed. The 19th century set the stage for further social and cultural changes in Iran, and the effects of modernization continued to shape the country in the following decades. In this context, it is also valuable to mention on the powerful standing of Iranian Cinema. In other words, cinema stood as a scream of directors to announce Iranian society and its oppressive problems to the world. While cinema maintains its strong position as a visual narrative art, the empathy it establishes with the audience can be more obvious than other arts (Dabashi, 2023).

The turning points in Iranian cinema are distinctly evident before and after the 1979 Iranian Islamic Revolution. Prior to the revolution, Iranian cinema evolved as part of the modernization process under Western influence. During this period, despite certain political pressures, various films were produced. However, the 1979 Islamic Revolution significantly impacted Iranian cinema. In the post-revolution period, Iranian cinema had to adhere to

<sup>4</sup> *Leila's Brothers*: (Persian: لیل ناردارب, romanized: Barādarān-e Leilā) is a 2022 Iranian [drama](#) film directed, written and co-produced by Saeed Roustayi, starring Taraneh Alidoosti, [Navid Mohammadzadeh](#), Saeed Poursami-mi and [Payman Maadi](#). In April 2022, the film was selected to compete for the [Palme d'Or](#) at the [2022 Cannes Film Festival](#) (wikipedia.org, 2024).

**Plot:** 40-year-old Leyla spends her whole life taking care of her parents and four siblings. The family goes through a major economic crisis in the tense atmosphere of Iran under embargoes. Leila makes a plan to save her family from the situation they are in.

<sup>5</sup> This encounter ushered in a process of modernization, commonly termed "Tajadodgraei" in Persian, impacting Iranian life across politics, education, law, customs, and culture, while also affording women greater opportunities for participation in society. [Top of Form](#)

the religious and political rules of the Islamic Republic. Iranian filmmakers, grappling with censorship and restrictions, attempted to address social, political, and religious issues without limiting their creativity. During this process, Iranian cinema garnered significant international attention and won numerous awards. This turning point demonstrated Iranian cinema's ability to produce deep and impactful works even under political and religious pressures (Zeydabadi-Nejad, 2009). The evolution of Iranian cinema amidst social, political, and cultural shifts reflected its pivotal role in defining cultural modernity, despite initial rejection by Islamic radicals. Alongside Persian poetry and fiction, Iranian cinema gained prominence in the 1960s. However, its portrayal of femininity and sexuality was complex, showcasing a binary approach: women were depicted either in sexualized roles or as oppressed and passive figures. Despite this, Iranian cinema, especially in the pre-revolutionary period, became a powerful medium of cultural expression, with Film Farsi genre continuing the narrative of Iranian modernity in visual art, albeit with the shadow of women's sexualization (Dabashi, 2023; Cooley, 2020).

The regulation of women's representation in Iranian cinema was stringent, with prohibitions on close-ups of a woman's face or body, point-of-view shots in colloquial scenes between men and women, and any cinematic techniques evoking a direct, sexual gaze between individuals. These restrictions aimed to safeguard female sexuality from perceived illegitimate interactions and to de-commodify women. They were integral to a broader strategy, authorized and emphasizing gender segregation, and reinforcing sexual hierarchies. As Hamid Naficy (2001, pp.15-16), points out, "Every social sphere and artistic expression must be gendered and segregated by some sort of veil or barrier, inscribing the fundamental separation and inequality of the sexes."

Within the framework of the women's movement and social structure, *Leila's Brothers* is a film that clearly reflects the ideology of society in its own settings. In society, especially the elements that reflect the pressure on women and the oppressive regime are symbolizing the top of the stairs in the film. While the staircase is presented to the audience nearly in every scene of the film, it is also possible to feel the reflection of the resistance in the phenomenon of the staircase, which is reflected meticulously. Most notably, the father's house, the shopping mall, and the wedding scene are the important cinematic spaces designed exclusively for the film. For this reason, these places are given priority for the study. In general terms, the film focuses on the issues of poverty, generation conflict, traditionalism, brave female model, belonging and resistance from the perspective of a middle-class family. Particularly with the discourse of brave women and traditional women's conflict, the film also focuses on the existence of women in Iranian society. Within this context, it's important to consider the ongoing evolution and activism of women's movements in Iran, which continually challenge societal norms and advocate for gender equality and empowerment. *Leila's Brothers*, which contains references to the social structure of Iran through the drama of an ordinary family, it is seen that the design of the space is more detailed than expected when it focuses on the elaborate spaces set up as if they were ordinary.

*Leila's Brothers* stands as a significant example in Iranian cinema due to how its locations deepen the story and its themes. Specifically, the settings within the film with symbolic significance, representing various aspects of Iranian society. These locations not only illuminate the characters' experiences and inner conflicts but also enrich the social and cultural contexts portrayed. For example, settings like the father house, stairs, shopping mall, and wedding scene allow for a deeper exploration of the film's central themes and the characters' personal journeys. Within this framework, these settings provide the audience with an opportunity to grasp and empathize with the complexities of Iranian society and the challenges faced by people.



## The Father's House

*Supposing that identity itself had its relations of uncertainty, the faith that we still place in it could be but the reflection of a state of civilization whose duration will have been limited to a few centuries.*

*Claude Lévi-Strauss, Preface to L'Identité (1974–75),  
edited by Claude Lévi-Strauss (Nancy, 2015, p.xii)*

The father typically assumes the role of the sole head and leader of the family. In patriarchal societies, this perception of the father is widely accepted, yet it comes with a tendency to ascribe excessive significance and responsibility to him. Iran, being a male-dominated society, mirrors this perspective on the father figure. In the context of *Leila's Brothers*, the father symbolizes resistance, the quest for identity, and self-existence, yet he falls short of attaining the same level of power. Contrary to common assumptions, in a narrative where power is often synonymous with wealth, the father does not command sufficient respect and fails to establish the authoritative position he aspires to. From another perspective, the father's positioning point in the film does not fully coincide with the described image of the father. On the contrary, his priority is to acquire a social and traditional identity rather than leading his family likewise defined "moments". While the father attempts to establish authority within the household, the space is perceived differently by the siblings. For them, it serves more as a symbol of poverty. Thus, the father's house, as a perceived, lived, and experienced place, has different meanings for the family members living in the house.

It is more important for the father establishing himself as the leader of the tribe than to be the leader of his own elementary family. This situation is like a damaged outcome of masculine existence. Esmail Jourablou (Saeed Poursamimi) stayed away from his family's troubles with the ambition of becoming the new leader of the tribe. It is essential to talk about the search for identity and an existential phenomenon here. His desire to become the new leader of the family society, is over the wealth and well-being of his family, because by the sake of being the new leader, he ignores the needs of his sons. Particularly in the scene where the tribe members gathered after the funeral of the current leader convey that he was rejected by the members, the camera movement that slowly approaches the father's face and creates a deep sadness is an important indicator. This scene flows in complete silence. The most important subject of this scene is the father and the camera focusing on his face, the silence and wordlessness make the pressure accumulated on the father in the scene even stronger. The fact that this state of cinematography is clearly emphasized in many parts of the film as an explanation that needs to be mentioned.

Based on the contrast in the quest for identity and the father figure, it can be observed in the spatial implications of the film that, this dwelling features a compact and uncomplicated structure, comprising merely two rooms and a single bathroom. This is perhaps a reference to a conceptual structure that can be identified with the simple existence of the father. From another perspective, the simplicity of daily life is equated with the father's simple and dysfunctional stance within the structure. At the same time, the father's house is presented in an atmosphere that includes a discourse of poverty, which for the viewer is an architectural element that is far from complex and focuses directly on the subject.

From Lefebvre's perspective of "perceived, conceived, and lived" space, the minimalistic design of the house reflects various layers of spatial experience. Firstly, the perceived space encompasses the immediate sensory impressions of the house, where the minimalistic design evokes a sense of simplicity and austerity. This perception is reinforced by the understanding of the house's materiality and spatial arrangement, which suggests a humble lifestyle and financial constraints. Secondly, the conceived space refers to the abstract representations

and meanings attributed to the house. In this context, the interpretation of the house as a manifestation of poverty arises from conceptualizing it within the broader socio-economic context, considering the restricted resources and infrastructure available to its inhabitants. Lastly, the lived space covers the everyday experiences and practices within the house. Despite the financial limitations, the inclusion of traditional furniture and a sitting set adds a personal touch and cultural significance to the space, shaping the lived experience of its occupants. Furthermore, the modest garden and the entrance door facing the street contribute to a sense of community integration and external engagement, highlighting the lived spatial dynamics of social interaction and connectivity within the neighbourhood. Overall, through the lens of Lefebvre's "perceived, conceived, and lived" space, the minimalistic design of the house reflects both the tangible materiality and the symbolic meanings imbued within the spatial environment, shaping the inhabitants' experiences and interactions within it.

Nevertheless, the overarching impression is that the residence serves as a reflection of a family grappling with economic adversities. The traditional furniture and seating arrangement can reflect the characters' cultural context and, perhaps, their relationships with the past. Filmmakers can use these details to provide the audience with a more in-depth understanding of the characters' emotional states, financial struggles, or cultural ties. A film may explore the challenges and beauties the characters encounter while living in this small house, offering the audience an emotional experience through narrative storytelling.

The paternal residence holds a central position within the narrative framework of the film *Leila's Brothers*. All the siblings, once affiliated with the father's house, return to it collaboratively to mount a resistance against poverty. Years later, they reunite and take their first steps towards re-emergence, leaving behind their disparate lives for the comfort of this space. In this sense, the house becomes highly ideological, transforming into a crucial site where the siblings engage in a resistance against poverty that binds them together with heartfelt unity, as they strive for survival in life. The Father's house assumes different significances for each inhabitant. For the siblings, it becomes a central arena to keep their unity, a place where they can comfort their identity. For the father, it symbolizes prestige, power, and authority, while for the mother, it represents the embodiment of oppression. Viewed in this light, Lefebvre's transformative aspect of space becomes more evident, as everyone perceives the space through their own lens, and it transcends being merely space to become a centre of willpower.

When power and authority in the film is evaluated in terms of the meeting of the phenomenon of space with cinematography, it is important to examine a more cramped psychology in narrow angles, while the wide-angle shots of the film help to perceive the spaces wider. The house reflects the cramped moods of the people living in it with narrow angle shots in its small square meter rooms. Instead of including the entire house within the frame, the director divides it into frames. Fragmentary narrative cinematography is also a method of elliptical narrative<sup>6</sup>. In other words, explaining it by excluding some of it from the frame which may cause a cramped perception in the audience. This type of framing, which is seen not only in the father's house but also throughout the film, is the inability to see the film space in its entirety, especially in crowded scenes. When Burch says that the film space is perceivable by the audiences even though all the elements cannot be visual with in the camera frame. In other words, the director leaves some areas (*off-space*) to the imagination of the audience. Roustayi generally prefers a moving camera in the film. While fixed images provide a more comfortable viewing experience for the audience, a slightly moving camera often creates a perception of eeriness. Cinematographically, the camera's mobility and narrow angles, combined with the crowded population in the house and small spaces, allow for a clearer understanding of the characters who are stuck in life and trying to find their identity.

<sup>6</sup> Elliptical narrative: The images to be included in the cinema frame or left out are the narrative preferences of the directors, and this preference is important in conveying the story to the audience. The images left out of the frame are diminished areas and are part of the narrative (Ryan, 2015, p.174)

## Stairs

Stairs, as physical structures, serve as essential architectural elements designed for vertical movement within buildings, constructed from materials such as wood, metal, concrete, or stone. Varied in design, they can be straight, spiral, L-shaped, or floating, influencing both the functionality and aesthetic of a space. Metaphorically, stairs hold rich symbolism, representing progress, growth, and ascent in the journey of life. They serve as a metaphor for career advancement, educational pursuits, and overcoming challenges, with each step symbolizing a milestone or transition. The act of climbing stairs often embodies symbolic significance related to rank and position, representing the journey of progress and career advancement, with each step symbolizing a milestone or achievement. The climb may signify the pursuit of knowledge and expertise, particularly in educational or professional contexts. In social settings, climbing stairs can be emblematic of ascending the hierarchical ladder, reflecting the attainment of higher social status or recognition within a community. Moreover, the literal act of climbing stairs in various physical structures may lead to offices or spaces associated with elevated positions and authority. Overall, the simple act of climbing stairs transcends its utilitarian function, becoming a powerful metaphor for the nuanced dynamics of personal and professional growth, as well as the ascent through the hierarchies of life (Pallasmaa, 2000).

The father, climbing up the stairs<sup>7</sup> can be interpreted as visual representation of his character's progression, both in terms of personal development and societal standing. The ascent may symbolize the challenges he faces, the obstacles he overcomes, or the pursuit of higher goals and achievements. The staircase is a phenomenon featured in many parts of the film, in the sense of cinematic space design. While the stairs symbolize descent and ascent, they also emphasize the areas of resistance in the film. In the opening scene of the film, where the foreman suddenly orders the workers to take a break, the superiority of a few steps of stairs is felt. The factory is closed, and this oppressive decision starts a resistance among the workers. While Ali Reza (Navid Mohammadzade) was quickly leaving the factory during the conflict, his friend, whom he encountered on the stairs and standing one or two steps upper than him said, "Those who run away by trusting their colleagues that will fight for their salaries are dishonourable."<sup>8</sup> He draws attention to the fact that running away is equivalent to surrendering. The intro scene gives an important reference to the concept of resistance. This dialogue is also an emphasis on resistance and a symbol of struggle within the film, and importantly this conversation takes place on the stairs.

The stairs are described as a phenomenon that refers to the fall as well as access to power. Film is an art form that can present the critical idea through images, even if they are not obvious. Through images, films can transform a phenomenon into an object of philosophical research (Cox and Levine, 2018, p.21). The staircase is an architectural structure that frequently connects floors in daily life, but the film uses this architectural structure as a tool to highlight interclass relations, the dominance of oppressive thought, and existential symbols. Films often utilize such visual metaphors to enhance storytelling, providing viewers with a visual language that complements the narrative themes (Arik & Erkartal, 2021). The act of descending stairs carries with it a nuanced tapestry of symbolic meanings, the interpretation of which hinges on the context and cultural nuances at play. To descend a staircase may signify a transition or regression, a movement from a higher vantage point to a lower one, reflecting shifts in personal or professional spheres. It can also serve as a powerful metaphor for overcoming challenges, with each step downward representing the successful navigation through adversity (Arik & Erkartal, 2021). The symbolism might extend to notions of humility, as the descent could symbolize a willingness to step down from positions of authority, fostering a connection on a more equal footing. In the realm of storytelling, the descent of stairs may be employed as a narrative device, signalling a character's journey into uncertainty, darkness, or a pivotal plot

<sup>7</sup> Time code: 01:31:35- 01:33:30

<sup>8</sup> Time code: 0:11:26

development. Such a fall is encountered when the father falls down the stairs in his own home while arguing with his children about giving 40 gold (Bahar Azadi) as wedding gift<sup>9</sup>. The idea that the film simply wants to examine may be the demonstration of class difference, both in the mentioned scene and in all staircase scenes. When the father falls down the stairs, he begins to lose his authority, and his children oppose his view and inflame the conflict.

With similar cinematography, the wedding scene in the film is debatable in the camera's ability to reflect the location. In the wedding scene, it is important how the father, Esmail Jourablou, ascends the stairs one by one among the bright lights as he becomes the head of the tribe. In this scene, the camera shoots close to the father's feet, while the high angles show the crowdedness of the family community, it emphasizes the oppressive mentality. The scene is cut to wide shots from time to time which is highly elevating the power of this scene cinematographically. Esmail Jourablou steps into a new world, not just an ordinary wedding hall, as the huge doors slowly open. In other words, they are moving up the class with the rented dresses and accessories they wear, and it is valuable that the camera witnesses both the happiness and surprise of the family in close-ups, and the disappointment of them falling back to where they are as a result of the short-lived class upgrade. The audiences do not only explore a wedding hall; spatially it is a wedding hall, but ideologically it is an area where class differences are expressed. It is possible to talk about the attraction of the place here, and cinema makes architectural places attractive in line with its story. Wide shots, moving cameras and lighting in the wedding hall are exactly the core of attraction itself. The father slowly lights his cigarette and silence prevails in this scene. The audience's attention is focused entirely on Esmail Jourablou because the camera focuses on the single character illuminates in silence. There is complete revelation in the wedding scene. The revelation of the family's class difference is first given in the camera's wide shots symbolizing the majesty and in the close-ups of the father, and then the rapid and hectic camera movements that stage the fall confirm this situation. The revealing feature of the camera brings the truth to the audience through its images and the power of framing, while the revealing feature of cinematography presents reality by evolving throughout the process (Kracauer, 1997, p.124).

### **Elevator**

Like the staircase in film, the metaphorical meaning of an elevator typically revolves around concepts of ascent, progress, and transformation. In this context, elevators are often used not only as a means of physical elevation but also as symbols carrying broader, symbolic significance. In the context of career advancement, elevators may symbolize the effort towards professional success and promotions (White, 1940). In the film, the makeshift elevator built later the balcony of Manouchehr's (Peyman Moadi) house symbolizes a similar phenomenon. This unseemly elevator, which metaphorically emphasizes the concepts of ascent and descent, is a resistant exit that also includes poverty. Manouchehr is not a rich man as his family assumes, conversely a poor man who has lost everything, and he tries to hide it. The phenomenon that the film points out is presented hidden within the elevator image. From a perspective of personal development, each floor can represent a new learning experience or a stage of personal growth.

Socially, elevators can symbolize the desire for upward mobility in societal status or achieving broader recognition. Moreover, in a spiritual dimension, elevators might be associated with enlightenment and an ascent in consciousness levels. Ultimately, elevators serve as versatile metaphors that encapsulate themes of progress, growth, and the pursuit of higher ideals. From an architectural perspective, the metaphorical meaning of an elevator takes on additional dimensions that resonate with the design and functionality of buildings. Elevators, as symbols of ascent and progress, reflect the architectural intention to facilitate vertical movement efficiently within a structure. Architecturally, elevators represent not only a

<sup>9</sup> Time code: 01:12:59



means of physically moving from one level to another but also embody the building's design philosophy and its role in accommodating human experiences. When the brothers go to Manouchehr's friend's workplace, they experience a completely modern, luxurious elevator. However, it is important that from the top angle of the camera, the directors remind the audience that the brothers are poor people. While cinematographically the top angle contains repression, it is important that the brothers go up in the elevator as if they want to break this phenomenon within the framework of hope. The elevator could be an indicator of moving up class as going up the floor, the film develops a critical approach to whether this can happen or not. Moving images are images that communicate realistically with the environment they represent. The correlation between the narrative and the moving images also seems to be construed as interactive relationships (Flaxman, 2000, p.111). Referring to this, the elevator represents the brothers' collective movement towards their individual realities, symbolizing the bond they forge with the tangible world. As the floor increases, elements such as moving up, surviving, and connecting to life are reinforced.

In terms of career advancement, the architectural placement and design of elevators can reflect the intentional organization of spaces within a building to enhance accessibility and efficiency. Elevators serve as architectural elements that not only facilitate professional growth by providing seamless vertical connections between different floors, enabling the smooth flow of individuals within a workspace, but also hold symbolic significance. In the film's residence scene, characters ascending to the upper floors with awe in the luxurious elevator are assumed to symbolize admiration for affluent life and the perspective of viewing from bottom to top. Personal development, represented by each floor in the metaphor, can be translated into architectural design that incorporates diverse functions or experiences on different levels. Each floor becomes a unique space contributing to the overall development and purpose of the building, fostering a dynamic and multifaceted environment. Socially, elevators in architecture symbolize inclusivity and accessibility. The design and placement of elevators contribute to creating spaces that accommodate individuals of varying abilities and backgrounds, fostering a sense of equality within a built environment. In a spiritual dimension, the ascent in consciousness associated with elevators can be paralleled with the way architectural design strives to create environments that uplift the human spirit. The vertical movement facilitated by elevators aligns with the architectural goal of creating spaces that inspire and elevate individuals emotionally and spiritually. The film offers a poignant metaphor, visually portraying the ascent of social class while simultaneously depicting access to an illegally constructed dwelling. The two elevator scenes serve as a powerful visual representation of societal critique. On one hand, the elevators symbolize the ambition to climb the social ladder; as characters ascend to higher floors, their lives and social status improve, conveying a message of social mobility to the audience.

On the other hand, the elevators providing access to the entrance of an illegally constructed home emphasizes the chaotic and uncertain environment in which the characters live. This underscores the reality that the desire for upward social mobility often involves dark and illicit paths. By clandestinely entering the interior of the house through these elevators, the film highlights the troubling truths behind the pursuit of social class ascent. This complexity allows audiences not only to perceive the events in the film on a superficial level but also encourages a deeper understanding of the narrative. The elevators, transcending their role as mere physical ascent mechanisms, become a potent metaphor representing the intricacies, conflicts, and ethical dilemmas inherent in the pursuit of social class elevation.

### **Shopping mall**

Shopping, as the most pivotal contemporary social activity, predominantly unfolds within the shopping centre. Developers and designers of the retail-built environment leverage the influence of space and an innate comprehension of spatial organization to enhance

consumption, thereby maximizing retail profits (Bloch, Ridgway, & Dawson, 1994). Their efforts extend to offering an alternative justification for the shopping centre's existence, orchestrating shoppers' conduct through spatial arrangements, and purposefully crafting a symbolic landscape that stimulates associative moods and inclinations in the shopper (Goss, 1993).

In contexts involving users of generally upper-class status, this dynamic is often marked by distinct patterns. The preferences and behaviours of upper-class consumers may be influenced by a desire for exclusive, high-end experiences, and a penchant for luxury goods. Shopping centres catering to this demographic may emphasize upscale brands, personalized services, and an aesthetically refined environment (Heer, 2017). The configuration of space may be geared towards creating an ambiance of exclusivity, fostering a sense of prestige and sophistication for the discerning upper-class shopper. The shopping mall serves as a depiction of the upper echelons of society, where characters perceive the mall's restroom as a materialistic point of departure. While the shopping mall is a significant symbol of the capitalist system, it paradoxically underscores existing class distinctions. Despite being a space that symbolizes consumerism and economic affluence, it still highlights and brings attention to the inherent socio-economic disparities within the society portrayed in the film. The act of sitting on the steps can symbolize a sense of exclusion or obstacles faced by those from less privileged backgrounds, while the ease with which the affluent girls navigate the stairs reflects their social advantage. Staircase becomes a metaphor for the societal structure, where some individuals face hurdles while others effortlessly rise to the top. This portrayal prompts reflection on the broader issues of inequality and class distinctions in society. The restroom within the mall becomes more than just a facility; it becomes a symbolic threshold that accentuates the financial and social differences between the characters, revealing the nuanced commentary on class dynamics within the narrative. The scene at the shopping mall steps, with Leila's brothers sitting and perhaps struggling, juxtaposed with affluent girls effortlessly ascending the staircase, serves as a strong portrayal of social class dynamics. This poignant imagery highlights the disparities and challenges individuals from different backgrounds face.

In addition to being seen as a symbol of capitalism, the shopping mall serves as, the brothers' last hope for achieving a higher standard of living. Their aspiration is to rent the restroom in the shopping mall, which will be redesigned and converted into a shop. Ironically, the toilet, typically associated with meeting basic needs, becomes a lifeline in this context. As the brothers earnestly discuss their plans, a passing gas sound coming out the restroom cabin disrupts the serious talk, highlighting the absurdity of the situation and underscoring the societal chaos in Iran. Throughout the film, the toilet is portrayed as an unhygienic place, emphasizing its contrast with the brothers' aspirations for a better life. At the intro scene of the movie, the father is staining in the toilet to relieve himself, later resorting to urinating in the sink and later passing gas sound at the shopping mall, juxtaposed with their quest for a life upgrade, highlights the irony of their situation. In a cinematic narrative, the toilet is transformed into a beacon of hope when redesigned, symbolizing a shift in fortune. The cinematic narrative established by Roustayi in this scene may be an ironic commentary on social dynamics, class disparities, and systemic complexities. This not only constitutes a family issue but also serves as a critique of the societal system.

## Conclusion

The analysis of cinematography and architecture in the film *Leila's Brothers* underscores the originality of the study and holds a significant place in the literature. In this context, the impact of space on the film's narrative and the connection it creates with the audience can be considered a key outcome of the study. The role of space in the film supports the psychological depth of the characters and the dramatic structure of the events, thereby enhancing the audience's emotional investment in the story. Additionally, the position and value of Iranian

cinema in this context serve as another crucial aspect that underscores the uniqueness of the study. The distinctive narrative techniques and the nuanced use of space in Iranian cinema become more evident through the analysis of *Leila's Brothers*. These analyses offer a new perspective on film studies from both cinematographic and architectural viewpoints.

In this film, architectural elements play a metaphorical role in shaping the narrative's flow, serving as integral components of the screenplay. The director, aiming to depict the clash between modernism and tradition, with a particular focus on the women's movement in Iranian society, employs various methods, extensively incorporating architectural features. With this information, it's evident that at the intersection of cinematography and architecture, these disciplines complement each other within both narrative structure and visual design. This symbiotic relationship highlights the nuanced interplay between cinematic storytelling and spatial aesthetics.

The intertwining discussions between architecture and cinema are not only supportive of the cinematic narrative but are also crucial in creating distinctions. Directors, by selecting what to include or exclude within the frame, express their own conceptualizations. Whereas architecture usually aims to evoke feelings of comfort, peace and well-being within a space, cinema occasionally necessitates disrupting these endeavours. In other words, cinema redesigns what architecture has planned, according to the flow of its own story. At the intersection of cinematography and architecture, it becomes evident that these two disciplines mutually reinforce each other within the realms of narrative and design.

Both architecture and cinema share perspectives on spatial concepts, but cinema's philosophical inquiries about spaces play a crucial role in transforming architectural spaces into cinematic realms. They both contribute to understanding space as a social construct by framing human experiences within specific environments. Through visual storytelling, cinema highlights the social and cultural significance of spaces, while architectural spaces in films gain symbolic meanings and social functions. This interaction shows that spaces are active participants in narratives, shaping and being shaped by social dynamics. Henri Lefebvre's theory on the social production of space further emphasizes that spaces are not merely physical locations but are produced and continuously shaped by social relations and cultural practices. The study of space in *Leila's Brothers* deepens our comprehension of architectural spaces as integral components of social reality. Further research could delve into how various architectural elements might be redefined through traditional cinematic features such as sound and lighting design, or how new technological advancements can be integrated into cinematic spaces.

### **Conflict of Interest Statement**

The author of the article declared that there is no conflict of interest.

### **The Researchers' Statement of Contribution Ratio Summary**

The first author contributed 50% to the article, while the second author contributed 50% to the article

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