

## Space Representation in Science Fiction Cinema: A Semiotic Analysis of Prometheus Film

Bilim Kurgu Sinemasında Mekân Temsili: Prometheus Filmi Üzerine Semiyotik Bir Çözümleme

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### Abstract

This research examines the relationship between science fiction cinema and space representation, with the aim of evaluating the effects of the use of space on visual narrative through interdisciplinary relations. In this context, the study discusses the experimental environment established by cinema art for space design through science fiction cinema and is shaped around two research questions: ‘the effects of space representation on visual narrative in science fiction cinema’ and ‘the integration of space representation in science fiction cinema into visual narrative’. The study employed a qualitative research design and addressed the research questions using Peirce’s semiotic analysis model. This framework was used to analyze the spatial elements that directly or indirectly affect the visual narrative in Ridley Scott’s Prometheus (2012) through the triple relationship of semiotics (representamen, object, and interpretant). The analysis indicates that the representation of space is integrated into science fiction cinema through a series of design factors, including form, color, light, material, and structure. These factors exert a significant influence on the visual narratives of science fiction cinema.

**Keywords:** *Cinema, Space, Science fiction, Prometheus, Semiotic.*

### Özet

Bilim kurgu sineması ile mekân temsili arasında iletişim kuran bu araştırma, mekân kullanımının görsel anlatı üzerindeki etkilerini disiplinler arası ilişkiler üzerinden değerlendirmeyi amaçlamıştır. Bu bağlamda sinema sanatının mekân tasarımı için kurduğu deneysel ortamı bilim kurgu sineması üzerinden tartışan araştırma; ‘bilim kurgu sinemasında mekân temsili’nin görsel anlatı üzerindeki etkileri’ ve ‘bilim kurgu sinemasında mekân temsili’nin görsel anlatıya entegrasyonu’ olmak üzere iki araştırma sorusu etrafında şekillenmiştir. Nitel araştırma deseni ile gerçekleştirilen çalışma kapsamında; araştırma sorularına yanıt aramak için Peirce’in semiyotik analiz modeli tercih edilmiştir. Bu çerçevede, Ridley Scott’ın Prometheus (2012) adlı yapımında görsel anlatıya doğrudan ya da dolaylı olarak etki eden mekânsal unsurlar semiyotiğin üçlü ilişkisi (gösteren, gösterilen ve yorumlayan) üzerinden çözümlenmiştir. Gerçekleştirilen analiz sonucunda, mekân temsili’nin bilim kurgu sinemasına biçim, renk, ışık, doku, malzeme ve strüktür gibi bir dizi tasarım faktörü aracılığıyla entegre edildiğini ve bu faktörlerin bilim kurgu sinemasının görsel anlatıları üzerinde güçlü bir etkiye sahip olduğunu çıkarsamak mümkündür.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** *Sinema, Mekân, Bilim kurgu, Prometheus, Semiyotik.*

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## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1. Problem**

Cinema can be defined a universal method of representation, with the capacity to contribute to both the imaginary experiences of architecture and the diversity of environments that science fiction cinema, which refers to the world of the future, establishes for the discipline of architecture. In this context, the primary challenge of research is to focus on how the concept of space, which gives cinema its distinctive identity, is depicted in science fiction cinema, particularly with regard to its inclusion within the overarching cinematic narrative.

### **1.2. Purpose**

The objective of this study is to initiate a discourse between science fiction cinema, which is regarded as a significant genre within the domain of cinema art, and the representation of space. In this framework, the impact of the utilisation of space on the visual narrative is approached through interdisciplinary relations.

### **1.3. Questions**

The study was designed to address two research questions (RQ1 and RQ2) that emerged from the analysis of the identified problem.

RQ1: What effect does the representation of space in science fiction cinema have on the visual narrative?

RQ2: How is the representation of space integrated into the visual narrative in science fiction cinema?

### **1.4. Importance**

This study, which discusses the experimental environment established by the art of cinema for space design through the concept of science fiction, is of significant importance in terms of making the place of spatial representation approaches in cinema traceable. Furthermore, it enables inferences to be made about the interaction between science fiction cinema and architecture, and it contributes to the existing literature by synthesising the rich research information already available.

### **1.5. Limitations**

The study's limitations are discussed in terms of theoretical and methodological aspects, as well as the internal and external validity of the research. Despite a comprehensive literature review on the research topic, the limited number of scientific studies aiming to establish a dialogue between science fiction (sci-fi) cinema and the representation of space is considered a theoretical limitation of this research. The data were collected solely from the Prometheus (2012 film) directed by Ridley Scott, which limits the generalizability of the findings. The external validity of the study was negatively affected by the limited sample area.

## 1.5. Literature Review

Research attempting to establish communication between cinema and space representation on the scale of the science fiction genre is limited. However, there are valuable studies that examine the subject within its own borders and examine similar points in closely related disciplines. Although these studies do not focus directly on the film *Prometheus*, they are important in terms of understanding how the spaces in science fiction cinema are analyzed.

Tally (2013) presented a discussion of the theoretical foundations of the integration of space into visual narrative and the construction of cinematic meaning, with particular reference to the understanding and utilization of these concepts across different disciplinary contexts. This study, which provides a detailed analysis of the socio-cultural and aesthetic contexts of space, offers a comprehensive perspective for the analysis of the meaning of space in cinema. Topuz (2013) examined the ways in which spatial elements depicted in science fiction films inspire future architectural understanding and designs. This study addresses the construction of architectural elements in films and the potential effects of these elements on future spatial approaches and designs. Similarly, Tekin (2016) conducted an analysis of the contribution of thematic spaces in sci-fi films to visual narrative, the role of these spaces in the construction of cinematic meaning and the effects of these elements on the audience. Bezci and Dündar Türkkan (2017) sought to determine whether technological developments are reflected in furniture through the science fiction films *Tron Legacy*, *Tomorrowland* and *Oblivion*. To this end, the authors examined the films in question and identified differences between the technological developments depicted at the time of their release and those predicted for the future. These differences were then explained through the use of furniture. Cantaş (2017) examined the films *Brazil*, *Twelve Monkeys* and *The Zero Theorem* in order to illuminate the relationship between semiotics and dystopian cinema and to serve as an example of semiotic film analysis. Similarly, Ekinci (2017) analyzed the film *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* with the semiotic film analysis method and revealed the periodical concerns of the dominant structure. Tuğan (2017) sought to elucidate the manner in which Ridley Scott employs film language as an artist throughout the film creation process. To this end, he analyzed the film *Prometheus* in terms of the way cinematographic elements are utilized. Kavut (2019) examined the manner in which science fiction films such as *Metropolis*, *Cloud Atlas*, *Oblivion* and *Upgrade* reflect the incorporation of intelligent technologies into interior spaces. The study sought to determine the degree of reflection between these cinematic portrayals and the actual technologies currently available. Bulu and Kavut's (2021) interdisciplinary research explored the application of the concept of morphogenesis in science fiction cinema, specifically within the fictional spaces of the movie *Annihilation*. Türkmen and Kavut (2021) conducted a study analyzing the effects of spatial representations by focusing on the dystopian universe of post-apocalyptic future fiction through the film *Mortal Engines*. In this analysis, the relationship between the steam machines included in the production processes after the industrial revolution and the Victorian architecture discipline of the 19th century was examined. Kavut and Başçı (2021) examined the impact of characters in the *Star Wars* film series on interior design from a relational perspective. Uzun and Arslan (2023) examined the semiotic equivalents of post-modern society criticism through the film *Blade Runner*, which is regarded as one of the most significant dystopian films. Çelik et al. (2023) conducted an analytical study

of semiotics in cinema, analyzing the spaces depicted in *The Fall*. This study delved into the characteristics of the spaces, the meanings conveyed by the selection of spaces, the relationship between spaces and events, the relationships between spaces and characters, and the meanings conveyed through symbols and signs within these spaces. Similarly, Ural and Yüksel (2023) explored the relationship between conceptual space and cinema through the interior spatial designs in Alejandro Jodorowsky's films. This study aims to offer new perspectives on the integration of space in cinematic narratives.

The existing literature indicates a significant correlation between architectural elements and science fiction cinema. Furthermore, it can be postulated that the depiction of space in science fiction cinema plays a pivotal role in the visual narrative. This research, which examines the relation between science fiction cinema and space representation through Ridley Scott's production *Prometheus* (2012), elucidates its position within the national and international literature.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

The intersection of architecture and cinema presents a multitude of commonalities. Both disciplines are founded upon a narrative and possess a starting point. While cinematographic elements, such as color, light, and composition, inform architectural designs, the periodic and artistic approaches of architectural designs also affect the messages conveyed through cinema. Moreover, the social perspective is of significant importance to both concepts, with the works created at the intersection of architecture and cinema reflecting the social, political, and cultural context of the period in question. However, it is evident that the overarching concept uniting both disciplines is that of space. While architecture is concerned with the design and utilization of physical spaces, cinematographic studies are focused on the creation of a fictitious atmosphere and the utilization of space to convey the narrative. Consequently, while cinema is concerned with the relationship between scenario and space, architecture focuses on the experience of the user and the narrative of space. These concepts have also attracted the attention of numerous theorists. Aristotle defined space as 'the unity of objects' or, in other words, as 'the achievement of the unity of all phenomena that encompass each other from the broadest to the narrowest sense' (Von Meiss, 1990, p. 101).

From this perspective, cinema, which is a branch of art that produces various representations of existence, has established a relation with architecture both materially and spiritually. This is due to the fact that cinema is an art form that deals with the concept of space and its interaction with other phenomena, as well as the experiential results of this interaction.

Pallasmaa (2012) interprets the concept of living space with an existentialist understanding at the interface of cinema and architecture. He states that cinematic events cannot be separated from the discipline of architecture in terms of time and space, and that a director is obliged to create architectural experiences. This approach, which attempts to elucidate the spatial images revealed in films, discusses the spatial narratives that underpin our existence through ideas. Similarly, Agrest (1993) has exhaustively explored the symbolic dimension of architecture through a series of insightful essays, examining the modern city from a multidisciplinary perspective. He has also provided a comprehensive overview of the interaction between cinema and architecture, summarizing their relationship as follows:

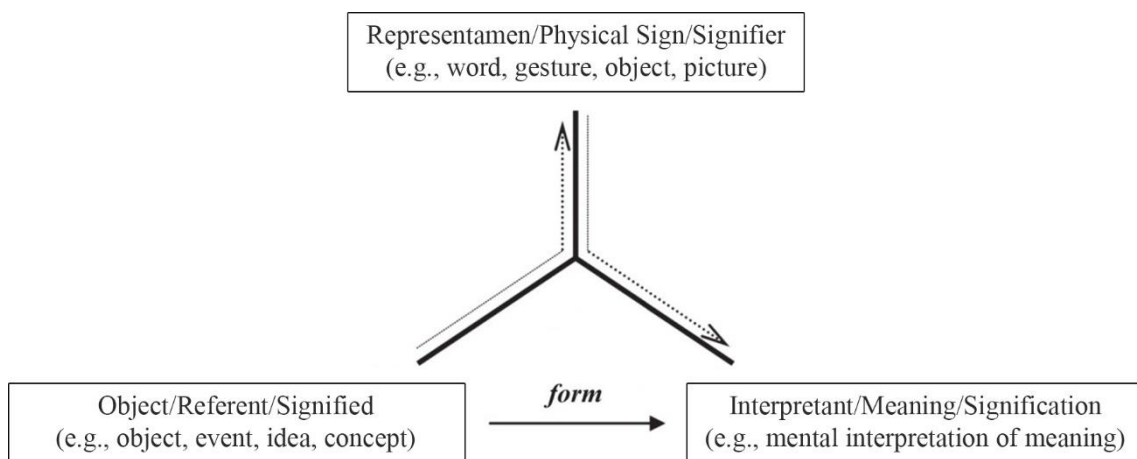
“Given the nature of the problems facing today’s architecture and the character of the city, it is evident that the most apparent visual art with which architecture is associated is cinema.” This proposition demonstrates that the concept of architecture is far more intricate than the notion that it is merely a backdrop for cinematic content.

It is becoming increasingly evident that the conventional architectural definitions, derived from the representation of space, have become inadequate in the context of the contemporary era. In this context, science fiction cinema, which makes predictions about hypothetical future fiction through physically metamorphosing spaces and produces scenarios about how the layers in future spaces will be shaped, shares similar theoretical infrastructures with the fictions that constitute futuristic architecture. Within this theoretical framework, it is necessary to examine the processes through which space tends to evolve into different future scenarios and to analyze the concepts that define the transition from volumetric discourses to spatial practices (Ülker, 2011). This theoretical infrastructure in literature is a key motivation for this research.

### 3. Method

#### 3.1. Model

This study is based on a general inductive approach. In this context, a qualitative research design was used, with Charles Sander Peirce’s triadic model of semiotic analysis serving as the analytical framework. Semiotic analysis, which is accepted as an interdisciplinary field, is the study of all factors that involve the interpretation, production or understanding of signs (Campbell et al., 2019). In Peirce’s triadic model of semiotics, this process is defined by three factors: Representamen (physical sign/signifier), Object (referent/signified) and Interpretant (meaning/ signification) (Atkin, 2010) (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Peirce’s Triadic Model of Semiotics

The rationale behind this approach was to facilitate an understanding of the relationship between architectural concepts and cinematic techniques, with a particular focus on the spatial implications of sci-fi films. This analytical method allowed for the unveiling of the selection of symbols, the analytical process, and the overarching structure of the research.

### **3.2. Sample**

The research sample comprises the science fiction (sci-fi) film *Prometheus*, directed by Ridley Scott and written by Jon Spaihts and Damon Lindelof. Released in 2012, the film is regarded as a significant example of sci-fi cinema. The film represents a precursor to the “Alien” franchise, exploring themes of creation, existence, and the origins of humankind. It follows the crew of the spaceship *Prometheus* on their journey to a distant planet in search of answers about the creation of humanity. The film presents a complex narrative, exploring advanced biotechnology, artificial intelligence, and ancient astronaut theories. The spatial and architectural design in *Prometheus* significantly increases the atmospheric tension and thematic depth of the film. The utilization of space in the film by Scott serves to reinforce the visual narrative, which represents an important intersection between cinema and architecture.

### **3.3. Data Collection Tools**

A comprehensive literature review was conducted in order to gain a new perspective on the theoretical limitations of this study, which aims to establish a dialogue between science fiction cinema and space representation. This approach describes the process of scanning, analyzing, segmenting, summarizing, and synthesizing the sources published on a particular research topic. In addition to printed documents, a wide range of online scientific resources were scanned, including reports, papers, theses, dissertations, articles, and books, accessible through national and international databases.


### **3.4. Data Analysis**

The elucidation of the research problem and the development of theoretical and practical solutions necessitate the analysis and interpretation of the data obtained. The process of analysis is the determination and differentiation of the fundamental elements of the data. In this context, the semiotics model was deemed the most appropriate methodology for analyzing the data obtained in the research. The data was analyzed in two phases. In the initial phase of the analysis, a descriptive approach was employed to identify the prevailing trends. This entailed examining the qualitative studies that could potentially address the research questions. In the second phase of the analysis, the data obtained were analyzed through the triple relationship of semiotics (representamen, object, and interpretant).


## **4. Results**

Within the framework of the study, which aims to establish a dialogue between science fiction cinema and the representation of space, Peirce’s triadic semiotic model of analysis has been preferred to answer the research questions. In this context, the spatial inputs that directly or indirectly contribute to the visual narrative in Ridley Scott’s production *Prometheus* (2012) are analyzed through three factors: Representamen (screenshots of scenes), Object (description of scenes) and Interpretant (interpretations of scenes). The analysis has revealed that space representation is integrated into science fiction cinema through a number of design factors, including form, color, light, material, and structure. It can be reasonably argued that the above-mentioned factors have a significant impact on the visual narratives of science fiction cinema. This is evidenced by the findings presented in Table 1-8.

**Table 1.** Semiotic Representation of Space [00:07:01]


<b>Representamen</b>	
	
<b>Object</b>	<b>Interpretant</b>
The inner surface of the cave	The mural on the wall of the space, which is 35,000 years old, depicts giant beings that were worshipped by humans. A narrative of worship that dates back to the origins of human history emphasizes that life has always been under the control of a superior creator. The pallor and age of the drawings, as well as the dark and lightless atmosphere, emphasize the depth of the narrative.

**Table 2.** Semiotic Representation of Space [00:13:41]


<b>Representamen</b>	
	
<b>Object</b>	<b>Interpretant</b>
Hyper-sleep chamber of the Prometheus	The hyper-sleep chamber, designed to enable long-distance travel in space without the effects of ageing, is also a reflection of humanity's journey towards the unknown, and the overcoming of its limitations. There is an emphasis on the fact that the human desire to overcome its limitations is constrained by the limitations imposed by the artificial intelligence world of technology.



**Table 3.** Semiotic Representation of Space [00:36:50]


<b>Representamen</b>	
	
<b>Object</b>	<b>Interpretant</b>
<p>Walls covered with ancient inscriptions</p>	<p>The room is covered with ancient epigraphic inscriptions, which suggest a connection between the prehistoric origin of humanity and engineers. This is evidenced by the resemblance of the inscriptions to the ancient cuneiform. The shadings that emerge when the lights shone on the walls of the room create a sense of depth, which can be interpreted as a reference to the control of engineers over humanity dating back to ancient times.</p>

**Table 4.** Semiotic Representation of Space [00:38:38]


<b>Representamen</b>	
	
<b>Object</b>	<b>Interpretant</b>
<p>Hall of monolithic head sculpture</p>	<p>The central positioning of the head sculpture serves to create a focal point within the hall. The surrounding metal structure of the walls and the mysterious vases lined up on the floor reinforce the effect of this focus. The colossal head sculpture serves as a metaphor for the formidable and ambiguous authority of engineers. Its placement at the center of the hall symbolizes their potential inclination towards domination.</p>




**Table 5.** Semiotic Representation of Space [01:07:12]

<b>Representamen</b>	
	
<b>Object</b>	<b>Interpretant</b>
<p>Columns of ampules in the cargo room</p>	<p>The cargo room, where the ampules belonging to the engineers are stacked on top of each other, creates the appearance of three carrier columns. The floor of the space is covered with a foggy ambience. While the destructive virus inside the ampules and its regular hierarchical arrangement reflects the scientific progress of the engineers, the hazy environment on the floor is a reference to the potential threat of scientific progress.</p>


**Table 6.** Semiotic Representation of Space [01:08:14]

<b>Representamen</b>	
	
<b>Object</b>	<b>Interpretant</b>
<p>Room with statues of engineers in suits</p>	<p>The room with a series of large engineer sculptures positioned in a line facing each other is a clear reference to the greatness of the creator. The collective structure of the sculptures both suggests that the engineers may be united for a purpose and make an important contribution to the spatial pattern. The size of the sculptures symbolizes the dominance of the creator over humanity.</p>

**Table 7.** Semiotic Representation of Space [01:41:15]

<b>Representamen</b>	
	
<b>Object</b>	<b>Interpretant</b>
Engineers' pilot chamber	The spherical engineer's pilot chamber is centered around the pilot's chair, which is the primary location for space travel. The axes emerging from the central plan of this raised circular platform, which is accessed by a staircase, merge with the wall surface. The complex structure of the space symbolizes both the dominance of engineers over space travel technology and the control of humanity.

**Table 8.** Semiotic Representation of Space [01:41:18]

<b>Representamen</b>	
	
<b>Object</b>	<b>Interpretant</b>
Structural corridor design of Juggernaut	The corridor, which is designed in an organic form, is surrounded by axes that originate from the ceiling and extend to the floor. This design, which also resembles the spine, has enabled the mechanical structure of Juggernaut to gain a biological identity. This design, which represents the combination of science, technology, and nature, refers to humanity's encounter with a manipulated creation.

## 5. Conclusion

The objective of this research is to initiate a dialogue between science fiction cinema, which represents a significant branch within the field of film, and the representation of space. In this context, a qualitative research design was employed, with the semiotic analysis model serving as the analytical framework. The framework permitted the analysis of the impact of space use on visual narrative to be conducted alongside interdisciplinary relations. The research sample comprises the 2012 science fiction film *Prometheus*, directed by Ridley Scott. *Prometheus* can be considered an important contribution to the science fiction genre and exemplifies the defining characteristics of the genre in several ways. These include the use of special effects, the creation of alternative, new worlds and creatures, and the depiction of the human will to explore beyond the confines of the known space (and the potentially lethal consequences of such a leap towards the unknown) (Sanna, 2023, p. 97).

The first finding of this study is that the representation of space exerts a considerable impact on the development of visual narratives. Sammon (1999) describes Scott's extensive and eclectic filmography as "ornate, sophisticated and state-of-the-art style." These descriptions are also evident in Scott's 2012 film *Prometheus*, particularly in the interior of the spaceship. This conclusion provided an answer to the first research question (RQ1) of the study.

The second finding of this study is that the representation of space in *Prometheus* contributed directly or indirectly to the visual narrative through a series of design factors, including form, color, light, texture, material, and structure. The visual world created in *Prometheus* serves as a clear illustration of Ridley Scott's assertion regarding the significance of space and the manner in which cinematographic elements are arranged within the realm of science fiction cinema (Tuğan, 2017, p. 232). The use of cold colors in the spaces, low-level lighting and general plans that reveal the relationship between the space and the characters in a more meaningful way not only conveyed the excitement of the discoveries that will change the history of humanity on a new planet to the audience, but also revealed the effect of cinematographic elements in establishing a coherent, holistic world. Furthermore, the visual language employed in the film enables the director to construct the message he wishes to convey and the world he desires to create through the use of cinematographic elements. This illustrates the pivotal role of spatial representation in the construction of cinematic meaning. This conclusion provided an answer to the second research question (RQ2) of the study.

This research, which discusses the experimental space environment established by the art of cinema through the concept of science fiction, is of significant importance in terms of making the place of spatial representation approaches in cinema traceable. Furthermore, it enables inferences to be made about the interaction between science fiction cinema and architecture and contributes to the existing literature by synthesizing the rich research knowledge that already exists. However, the fact that the research was conducted only on the film *Prometheus*, which was released in 2012, is considered a significant methodological limitation of this study. The limited sample size reduces the possibility of generalizing the findings and negatively affects the external validity of the research. Therefore, it can be concluded that the analyses are descriptive rather than conclusive. In order to overcome the problem of low external validity and to ensure that the data obtained from the research can represent the study population, it is recommended to plan new studies involving different movies in the science fiction genre. Moreover, without a comparative study of the space

representations of science fiction cinema, it will be challenging to gain a comprehensive understanding of the effects of this genre on visual narrative. This framework presents a potential avenue for future research: the comparative study of fictional space in sci-fi cinema.

### Author Contribution Rate

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*Write the number(s) corresponding to the relevant explanation in the contribution section.			
1. Designing the study 2. Collecting the data 3. Analysis and interpretation of the data 4. Writing the article 5. Critical revision			

### Author's Note

This article is based on an ongoing master's thesis which aims to investigate the impact of space representation on visual narrative in science fiction cinema by Mert Kılıçaslan under supervision of Dr. Anday Türkmen at Istanbul Gedik University, Department of IAED.

### Conflict of Interest

The authors reported no conflict of interest related to this article.

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