The Interrelation of TV-series and Interior Design in the Construction of Meaning: Cinematic Narratives and the Psychological Function of Space

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Abstract

This paper explores the complex relationship between TV series and interior design, intending to emphasize the significant impact of spatial design on the construction of cinematic meaning. The study proffers the notion that both visual media and interior design function as potent storytelling instruments, employing spatial dimensions not solely to portray physical environments, but also to convey emotional profundity, psychological intricacy, and thematic richness. Through a detailed analysis, the study illustrates how interior design is employed to mirror the psychological states of characters, propel the narrative forward, and amplify the portrayal of emotions and social dynamics. Focusing on Turkish television series such as *Masumlar Apartmanı* (2020) and *Şahsiyet* (2018), the paper underscores the pivotal role of interior d in visual storytelling. These series demonstrate how meticulously designed spaces can enhance narrative depth and emotional resonance. The findings of this study offer valuable insights that can guide future research in the intersection of interior design and visual media, emphasizing the significance of spatial design in crafting compelling cinematic experiences.

Keywords: interior design; cinematic narrative; Turkish television series; spatial design; psychological function

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Introduction

In the realm of visual storytelling, the interplay between space and narrative has long been a subject of fascination and scholarly inquiry (Psarra 2009, pp. 34-36) (Akleman, Franchi, Kaleci, Mandell, Yamauchi and Akleman, 2015, p. 129) (Goodnow, 2020, pp. 265-274) (Carley, 2021, pp. 107-108) Television series, as a dominant medium of contemporary culture, have increasingly leveraged the power of interior design to construct meaning, evoke emotions, and deepen the psychological complexity of their narratives (Alqadi, 2023, p. 303). This paper delves into the intricate relationship between television series and interior design, exploring how spatial design functions as a silent yet potent storyteller within cinematic narratives. By examining the deliberate crafting of interior spaces in TV series, this research highlights how these environments reflect characters' inner worlds, propel narrative arcs, and enrich the depiction of emotions and social dynamics.

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Television, much like cinema, is a visual medium that relies on the careful orchestration of visual elements to convey stories (Mikos, 2019, p. 6). However, while film often benefits from the grandeur of expansive landscapes and elaborate set pieces, television series frequently unfold within more confined, intimate settings. This constraint has led to a heightened focus on interior design as a means of storytelling. The spaces characters inhabit —are not merely backdrops, but active participants in the narrative —be it a cozy living room e.g. *Friends* (1994), *Big Bang Theory* (2007) and *Seinfeld* (1989), a labyrinthine office e.g. *Mad Men* (2007), *The Office* (2005) and *Suits* (2011) or a criminal's e.g. *Dexter* (2006), *Breaking Bad* (2008) and *Good Girls* (2018). They serve as extensions of the characters themselves, offering insights into their psychological states, social standings, and personal histories (Koeck, 2013, pp. 1-4).

As mentioned in the book of Forget, important factors that create architectural presentation tools for the cinema/movies are the selection and connection of materials, the relation of spaces and analytical drawings (Forget, 2013, p. 169). In all probability, the significance of interior design in television series extends beyond mere aesthetics (Nalçakan, Canoğlu and Özsavaş, 2017, p. 68). It plays a crucial role in shaping the audience's emotional engagement with the story (Manolopoulou, 2004, p. 315). A well-designed interior can evoke a sense of comfort, nostalgia, unease, or even foreboding, often without the need for explicit dialogue or action (Penner and Rice, 2004, pp. 271-272). This emotional resonance is achieved

through the careful selection of colours, textures, lighting, and spatial arrangements, all of which contribute to the series' overall mood and tone (Rafsanjani and Rezaei, 2021, p. 107). Moreover, the evolution of a character's relationship with their environment can mirror their personal growth or decline, adding layers of meaning to the narrative.

This research focuses on the psychological and narrative roles of interior design in Turkish television series, with particular attention to *Masumlar Apartmanı* (2020) and *Şahsiyet* (2018). The apartment building used in both these series was Jurnal Sokak No:14 Temel Apartmanı in Istanbul, Turkey, and continues to be the consistent filming location. This seven-story building has a 360-square-meter basement and 12 apartments, each measuring 190 square meters. The property has an irregular polygonal geometric shape and has a flat terrain topography. The ground floor and most other floors feature two apartments per floor. The floors of the building are covered with wooden parquet and marble. These series exemplify the sophisticated use of spatial design to enhance storytelling; for example, in *Masumlar Apartmanı*, the titular building is not just a setting but a character in its own right, its labyrinthine corridors and interconnected lives reflecting the complex web of relationships and secrets that drive the plot. Similarly, in *Şahsiyet*, the protagonist's home becomes a mirror of

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his fractured psyche, with its shifting layouts and eerie atmosphere underscoring his descent into paranoia and moral ambiguity.

The existing academic studies related to these television series are mainly related with psychological themes (Tanrıvermiş, 2021, p. 1257) (Gündüz and Attar, 2020, p. 127) (Kaynak and Nazlıgül, 2019, p. 204). This paper, in contrast, seeks to underscore the growing importance of interior design in visual storytelling. It argues that the meticulous design of interior spaces is not merely an aesthetic consideration, but a narrative tool that can deepen the viewer's understanding of characters and themes. In doing so, this research provides fresh perspectives on the psychological and narrative functions of interior design, offering new insights into its role in the construction of meaning within television series. Through this exploration, the paper aims to contribute to the broader discourse on the intersection of space, narrative, and emotion in visual media.

The Role of Space in Cinematic Narratives

In cinema, space transcends its physical dimensions to become a dynamic narrative tool, intricately woven into the fabric of storytelling to convey meaning, evoke emotions, and mirror the inner worlds of characters (Arısoy and Rouyandozagh, 2024, pp. 183-184). As Bordwell and Thompson argued in their book, the mise-en-scène means 'putting into the scene', referring to the arrangement of all aspects within the frame (Bordwell and Thompson and Smith, 2019,

pp.169-170). It plays a crucial role in shaping the audience's perception of a film's narrative and themes.

'Space is never empty it always embodies a meaning' (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 154). Interior design, in particular, serves as a powerful visual language that reflects the characters' psychological and emotional states. The design of a room, the arrangement of furniture, the play of light and shadow, and even the choice of colours and textures all contribute to creating an environment that speaks volumes about the characters who inhabit it (Spence, 2020, p. 14). For instance, a cluttered, dimly lit room with peeling wallpaper and oppressive furniture can evoke a sense of entrapment and despair, mirroring a character's internal turmoil or psychological distress. This aligns with Bruno's assertion that space in cinema is not merely a backdrop, but a 'site of meaning' that communicates subtext and emotional depth (Bruno, 2018, pp. 69-71). Conversely, a spacious, sunlit room with minimalist decor and open windows might symbolize freedom, clarity, or a character's emotional liberation, illustrating how spatial design can function as a metaphor for inner states (Pallasmaa, 2007, pp. 13-21).

Similarly, in *The Shining* (1980), which is a masterpiece among horror films, Stanley Kubrick employs the labyrinthine layout of the Overlook Hotel to create a sense of disorientation and dread, mirroring Jack Torrance's descent into madness (Onay, 2024, p. 402).

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This technique resonates with Tschumi's idea of architecture as an event (Tschumi, 1996, pp. 141-152), where the spatial design actively influences the story's narrative and emotional trajectory. The interplay between characters and their environments can also highlight themes of power dynamics, intimacy, or alienation. For example, in *Parasite* (2019), Bong Joon-ho uses the stark contrast between the Kim family's cramped, subterranean home and the Park family's sprawling, modernist mansion to underscore themes of class disparity and social stratification. This spatial dichotomy reflects Soja's concept of 'spatial justice,' (Soja, 1996, p. 5) where architecture and space reveal underlying social inequalities.

Moreover, the evolution of a space throughout a film can signify character development or shifts in the narrative. A chaotic and disordered room that gradually becomes organized and harmonious might symbolize a journey toward self-awareness or resolution, echoing Bachelard's notion of the 'poetics of space,' where domestic spaces evoke memories, emotions, and psychological transformations (Bachelard, 1958, pp. 3-9). The strategic use of space also extends to framing and camera movement, where the positioning of characters within a room or their movement through it can emphasize their relationships, conflicts, or emotional states.

In *In the Mood for Love* (2000), Wong Kar-wai uses narrow hallways, cramped staircases, and partitioned spaces to visually convey the emotional distance and unspoken tension between

the two protagonists. This practice illustrates Deleuze's concept of the 'any-space-whatever,' where space becomes a site of affective and emotional intensity (Deleuze, 1986, pp. 3-9). Ultimately, interior design in cinema is not merely a backdrop, but an active participant in the storytelling process, enriching the narrative by providing a visual and emotional context that deepens our understanding of the characters and their journeys. Through its ability to evoke mood, symbolize themes, and reflect inner realities, space becomes an indispensable element of cinematic language, transforming the physical into the profoundly psychological.

The Apartment *Masumlar Apartmanı* (The Innocent Apartment): A Metaphor for Trauma and Memory

Masumlar Apartmanı (2020) is a Turkish drama television series written by Deniz Madanoğlu and directed by Rana Mamatlıoğlu, with Çağrı Vila Lostuvalı, Ender Mıhlar, and Çiğdem Bozali. The series was adapted from the chapter entitled 'Çöp Apartman' in Gülseren Budayıcıoğlu's novel 'Madalyonun İçi', published in 2004. The series, produced by OGM Pictures, is designed to elicit a profound emotional response, particularly in those with a penchant for psychological dramas and for exploring real-life challenges. The narrative is intricately woven around the lives of individuals in a residential complex, with each bearing the scars of a troubled past. It also focuses on the complex web of relationships that they weave.

Masumlar Apartmanı is a poignant depiction that takes viewers on a profound emotional

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journey, while concurrently posing significant questions concerning our society's psychological underpinnings.

A recurrent theme in *Masumlar Apartmanı* (2020) is the pressure that society exerts on individuals in the process of adaptation to it. The traumas experienced by the characters inhabiting the apartment building are indicative of society's historical pressures and traditional values. Indeed, the character's familial and societal conflicts are a reflection of the societal shaping processes at work. While the series addresses issues such as loneliness, isolation, and inner turmoil in modern society generally, it also highlights the impact of psychological problems and societal trauma on individuals. As evidenced by the design of Else's apartment and the jeweller's shop in the 1929 film *Asphalt*, architecture can serve to externalize and emphasize the internal social and psychological characteristics of characters or narrative (Bergfelder, Harris and Street, 2007, p. 320). The narrative functions as a metaphor for individuals' psychological states and the social structures that destabilize their emotional balance. *Masumlar Apartmanı* tells the story of the characters' efforts to break free from this social structure, liberate themselves, and step outside of social norms. As such, it encourages reflection on related issues such as gender roles, family structures, social pressures, and individual identity formation.

Figure 1: The main apartment building (Rana Mamatlıoğlu, Çağrı Vila Lostuvalı, Ender Mıhlar & Çiğdem Bozali, 2020).

The main apartment (Fig. 1 and 2) in *Masumlar Apartmanı* transcends its functional role as a living area to assume the significance of a character in its own right, thereby operating as a physical embodiment of the inhabitants' collective traumas, emotional burdens, and unresolved past wounds. Its cramped and confined architectural structure serves as a metaphor for the characters' psychological states, creating a pervasive sense of claustrophobia and tension that defines the atmosphere of the series. Every room, corner and detail within the space is imbued with narrative significance, transforming the apartment into a tangible representation of the character's inner worlds.

Figure 2: Stairs at the entrance of the apartment building.

The apartment in *Masumlar Apartmanı* has been designed to create a sense of tension and unease, with the cluttered, decaying interiors creating a palpable atmosphere of dread, as if the space itself was infused with the ghosts of the past (Fig. 3). The apartment serves as a 'character' in the narrative, constantly reminding the characters and the audience of their own particular traumas. The spatial design also reinforces the theme of psychological tension. The narrow corridors, subdued lighting and compact layout, reminiscent of an internal space within another, collectively contribute to the establishment of an environment that evokes sensations of restriction and oppression. These elements reflect the characters' internal struggles, thereby facilitating a deeper understanding of their psychological states. The apartment is not merely a setting; it is a physical manifestation of the characters' fears, regrets and unresolved conflicts.

Figure 3: Entrance of the main apartment.

The kitchen in *Masumlar Apartmanı* (Fig. 4) is a significant symbol space that reflects the characters' psychological and emotional states. In Turkish culture, this room is widely regarded as the nexus of family life, sustenance and communal interaction. In *Masumlar Apartmanı*, however, the kitchen transcends its physical nature, serving as a metaphor for the intricacies of the character's inner worlds, rife with conflicts and traumas. The kitchen, a space often characterized by its association with domestic routines and shared meals, assumes a heightened significance in the narrative as a site of profound personal significance for the characters. This heightened significance is particularly evident in the case of the two protagonists, Safiye and Gülben, whose preoccupation with maintaining impeccable cleanliness in the kitchen is a recurring theme in the text. The kitchen thus emerges as a space that transcends its practical function, becoming a metaphorical and psychological space. The

excessive order observed here is indicative of Safiye's quest for control. In this place, the

characters' actions are driven by their emotional needs and the pursuit of solace from past

traumas. Safiye's preoccupation with culinary endeavors can be interpreted as a manifestation

of her quest for emotional mastery and a means of regulating her disordered life.

Figure 4: Safiye's kitchen.

The kitchen's interior design and layout must be maintained by the original configuration

established by the mother (Fig. 5). This encompasses the furniture and its placement, which

should remain unaltered. A further restriction pertains to the dining table, which, despite its

presence here, is strictly off-limits for dining, as this would disrupt the established order and

compromise the cleanliness of the space. A significant quantity equipment is present, preserved

in gelatine kitchen equipment, never having been utilized or even opened. Despite the kitchen's

central location within the apartment, it appears to be a distinct and isolated space. This observation is further corroborated by the fact that ingress is typically undertaken in special attire, and with the wearing of slippers. This phenomenon suggests that the kitchen is not only considered a spatial taboo, but also a psychological one.

Figure 5: Safiye's mother's kitchen.

In *Masumlar Apartmanı,* the bathroom (Fig. 6) similarly assumes a significant role and functions as a symbolic representation. Within the context of Turkish culture, the bathroom is associated with concepts of cleanliness and purification. However, in this context, the bathroom emerges as a space that reflects the characters' emotional states, traumas and inner worlds, both physically and psychologically. The bathroom is not merely a space for physical cleansing; it is also a site with profound symbolic significance, representing spiritual cleansing, purification,

loneliness, and attempts to overcome traumas. This space is indicative of the characters' confrontation with their emotional worlds, their interrogation of their ties with the past, and their search for rebirth. The interior design of the bathroom, when analysed within the context of these psychological factors, becomes a significant element in the narrative. The selection of floor and wall coverings conducive to hygiene and cleanliness constitutes a pivotal element in interior design, as does the incorporation of numerous storage units overflowing with cleaning and hygiene materials (toilet paper, bath towels, cleaning materials, etc.). Moreover, here, the conventional method of boiling water in a cauldron is favoured over contemporary methods for water heating. This approach is rooted in the belief that boiling water fosters a sense of cleanliness, which is in alignment with the principles of interior design that emphasize psychological and symbolic elements.

Figure 6: Bathroom.

From an interior design perspective, Safiye's room (Fig. 7) is of profound symbolic value. The presence of antique furniture, discoloured walls, and a disorderly accumulation of broken objects serves not merely an aesthetic function, but also operates as a visual metaphor for the room owner's psychological fragmentation and unresolved conflicts. The room thus becomes a repository of temporality and emotion, where each object carries the weight of pain, loss, and regret. The room, originally intended to provide comfort, has become a repository of memories that bear the marks of emotional distress. Despite Safiye's meticulous cleanliness, the landscape in the background is visibly degraded, and the dilapidated objects are manifestations of past traumas and the characters' inability to confront them.

Figure 7: Safiye's bedroom view 1.

Each room within the apartment functions as a symbolic representation of distinct emotional states and psychological thresholds experienced by the characters. While Safiye's room (Fig. 8) is emblematic of the psychological distress experienced by the characters in question, with the most prominent themes being past pain, loss, and fear, other rooms in the apartment are reflective of the remaining residents' emotional burdens.

Figure 8: Safiye's bedroom view 2.

Another protagonist, Han, is portrayed as emotionally aloof, estranged from both the external world and his interpersonal relationships. This internal discord, stemming from an incapacity to address his past, is reflected in the configuration of the setting, which appears detached from the real world, in a state of deterioration and disarray. The confined interiors, the muted colour scheme and the absence of natural illumination serve to convey Han's emotional

disconnection and his endeavour to evade the repercussions of his past traumas. This serves as a metaphor for Han's struggle to break free from the grip of his past traumas. This different apartment created to reflect Han's personality (Fig. 9 and 10), isolated from both recent and older memories, is designed as a space that serves to distance him from the past. The thematic basis of emotional confinement is further emphasized by his physical and emotional imprisonment within the confines of the space. The apartment thus functions as a reflection of characters' inner world, where the boundaries between past and present, reality and memory, become indistinct.

Figure 9: Han's mezzanine floor view 1.

The constricted and confining nature of the architecture mirrors the psychological and emotional constraints; characters find themselves ensnared within a web of familial expectations and societal pressures. The spatial narrowness of the corridors serves to underscore

the suffocating influence of these external forces, which hinder the ability to make progress towards emotional healing. From a sociological perspective, the apartment can be regarded as a microcosm of traditional family structures and societal norms within Turkish culture. The characters find themselves caught between their aspirations and family and society's collective expectations. The apartment thus becomes a metaphor for entrapment, representing the convergence of historical traumas and societal conventions. This environment perpetuates the characters' emotional burdens and prevents them from escaping their past; more than merely a physical setting, it is also a reflection of the characters' struggles with identity, repression, and transformation. Its oppressive and confined nature accentuates the challenges faced by the characters as they attempt to liberate themselves from the suffocating emotional and societal constraints. In this regard, the apartment functions as a microcosm of broader societal structures that shape and restrict individual agency.

In terms of interior design, the apartment's configuration – characterized by darkness, cramped spaces, and intricate detailing – serves to reinforce the characters' psychological trajectories. Each spatial detail contributes to the audience's comprehension of these internal conflicts. *Masumlar Apartmanı*, through its meticulously crafted setting, highlights the characters' struggles with personal identity, societal expectations, and emotional recovery. The visual language, characterized by dilapidated furnishings and claustrophobic spaces, serves to

underscore the impediments to liberation faced by the characters, both as individuals and as a

reflection of the broader societal necessity for collective healing.

Figure 10: Han's mezzanine floor view 2.

The Trash Room in *Masumlar Apartmanı*: A Materialization of Inner Collapse and Social Loneliness

Certain design approaches are more effective in promoting deeper interpretation. As a

result, varying degrees of 'design intention' exist, encompassing not only story and character

but also, importantly, metaphor and symbolic significance. In the TV series *Masumlar*

Apartmanı, the trash room is of great significance, functioning both as a physical space and a

symbolic element. This is a setting that simultaneously reflects the characters' inner worlds,

psychological disorders, and societal traumas. Its very presence offers significant insights into

the series' fundamental themes, and it symbolizes Safiye, a central character in the series, and

her past traumas and present psychological state. Safiye's personality has evolved into one marked by extreme caution, obsessive behaviour, and isolation, resulting from childhood traumas, fears, and her overbearing mother's control. The collection of discarded belongings and damaged objects within this specified area functions as a concrete manifestation of her emotional and psychological disintegration. These items of refuse serve as metaphorical representations of her repressed emotions, unresolved traumas, and internalized negative thoughts.

Figure 11: Trash room view 1.

The absence of cleanliness and order in her life is indicative of her inner world's chaos and disruption. The disarray and dirt here is indicative of her past memories, which she describes as 'dirty' and 'unforgotten'. The so-called 'trash room' is a physical space isolated

from the rest of the world. Safiye's emotional disconnection is rooted in past traumas, leading

to emotional isolation. The room (Fig.11), therefore, functions as a metaphor for both literal

and emotional isolation. The characters' loneliness, inner conflicts, and unresolved emotional

issues manifest physically in this room, which functions as both a physical prison and a

metaphorical 'hidden' living space, representing her inner world's darkest corners. Safiye's

relationship with this place also reflects her obsessive-compulsive tendencies. Despite her

relentless attempts to impose order, she remains oblivious to the disorder and disarray that exists

here.

Figure 12: Trash room view 2.

The trash room functions as a metaphor for Safiye's trepidation regarding the potential

loss of control and the concomitant metaphorical 'contamination.' Nevertheless, this space (Fig.

12) is also illustrative of the notion that maintaining control ultimately offers no solace or resolution. The room's metaphorical nature functions in two distinct yet interrelated capacities. On the one hand, it acts as a reflection of Safiye's internal world, offering a lens to understand which her inner struggles and experiences. On the other, it serves to fortify the series' social structure and cultural critique, contributing to the broader narrative in ways that are both subtle and profound.

The metaphorical nature of the trash room signifies not only the collapse of the individual, but also functions as a medium for social critique. Within the apartment, where the primary characters reside, individual traumas and psychological issues prevail, while the surrounding people, society, culture, and family structure are also in a comparable state of disarray. The trash room' metaphorical representation emerges in the context of societal pressures and interpersonal misunderstandings. This metaphorical representation can be understood as an illustration of societal structures disintegrating. Beyond its function as an individual space, the trash room also serves as a medium for social critique. It is a metaphor for those disregarded, stigmatized, or otherwise marginalized by society, and considered 'dirty'. This metaphorical nature, as a reflection of Safiye's traumas and inner filth, serves as a response to society's rigid norms and limited understanding. The series offers a robust commentary on social themes,

including class distinctions, social isolation, and feelings of loneliness, particularly through the prism of the trash room.

This place's visual design exerts a substantial influence on the atmosphere and tense structure of the series, as it is perceived by the viewer as a 'hidden reality', a space that is visited by only a select few, and that is universally shunned by others. The pervasive, oppressive atmosphere of the room, characterized by its darkness and sense of confinement, gradually envelops the viewer, evoking the sensation of a looming, ominous threat. This visual intensity parallels Safiye's internal chaos, thereby placing the viewer under psychological pressure. The lighting in the trash room, especially in the obscure dark areas, not only reflects fear, but also alludes to a dark past and repressed emotions. The lighting within the room is frequently inadequate and dim, contributing to an atmosphere of physical and symbolic of decay.

Space and Social Criticism in *Şahsiyet (Persona)*

Şahsiyet (2018) is a Turkish drama and thriller series directed by Onur Saylak, with a script written by Hakan Günday. The story follows Agah, an elderly man who embarks on a journey of revenge after believing that justice can only be served by his own methods. Rather than merely narrate a tale of revenge, it delves into profound themes such as justice, moral values, individual identity, and societal corruption.

Agah is depicted as a retired individual leading a modest and ordinary life, yet he harbours a sense of revenge against a society where injustice and moral decay prevail. Consequently, in taking his revenge, he is not only forced to confront his past but also undergoes a profound inner transformation. Agah devises a deadly plan to eliminate the injustice and wrongdoings he perceives within the system. Therefore, this process also triggers a profound personal transformation, leading Agah to shed his former introverted and timid persona and evolve into a formidable figure driven by a quest for justice. While the narrative examines this transformation, it also reveals the social corruption, personal dissolution, and the depths to which the human soul can sink.

Figure 13: Agah's apartment door (Onur Saylak, 2018).

Onur Saylak and Hakan Günday's *Şahsiyet* is an intriguing look at identity, morality, and social decline in Istanbul. The series takes place in Jurnal Sokak, No:14, Temel Apartmanı, just like in *Masumlar Apartmanı* (Fig. 13). The series mixes elements of the quest for justice, recall of the past, and the human condition to provide a strong social critique, moving beyond a crime drama's usual style. The show's use of space challenges conventional narrative boundaries and offers a commentary on contemporary Turkish society and universal human struggles. Istanbul, the setting for *Şahsiyet*, is presented to us not only as a backdrop but also as a living, breathing space that reflects the dualities of its inhabitants. The city's juxtaposition of the ancient and the modern, wealth and poverty, order and chaos reflects the internal conflicts of the protagonist Agah, who is retired and suffering from Alzheimer's disease. The series uses Istanbul's labyrinthine streets, crowded bazaars and dilapidated neighbourhoods to underline the social inequalities and systemic corruption affecting the city. Moreover, the juxtaposition of affluent and modern neighbourhoods with poor and neglected areas underlines the class divisions and economic disparities that prevail in Turkish society. Arguably, this spatial dichotomy serves as a metaphor for the broader social issues that *Şahsiyet* targets, such as the erosion of justice and the exploitation of the vulnerable.

With Alzheimer's disease at the centre of the narrative, the series uses space as a tool to

explore the relationship between memory and identity. As the protagonist becomes increasingly forgetful, the locations become increasingly confusing and strange. The character's confusion about his professional position reflects wider social issues, emphasizing a general indifference to right and wrong. The use of flashbacks and dream sequences serves to blur the boundaries between past and present, reality and illusion. These shifts emphasize the fragility of memory, and how the understanding of the present is shaped by history. Through Agah's fragmented recollections, *Şahsiyet* critiques society's selective memory, which often ignores and fails to learn from its past injustices.

The series chronicles the journey of this retired court clerk afflicted with Alzheimer's disease, who decides to confront his deteriorating memory by perpetrating a crime that will compel him to relive his past. His transformation from a passive observer to an active avenger is mirrored in the spatial dynamics of the series. The courtroom, once a symbol of justice, transforms into a site of disillusionment, while the streets of Istanbul become the stage for Agah's vigilante actions. *Şahsiyet* criticizes the legal system and highlights larger societal concerns, such as gender inequality and corruption, while also examining the impact of modernity on individuals' sense of self. The series portrays a society where individuals are dehumanized by systemic oppression and a lack of morals. Agah's Alzheimer's disease, which erodes his identity and autonomy, serves as a metaphor for the dehumanization experienced by

many in a society that values power and wealth over compassion and justice.

The Architecture of Memory: Agah's Apartment

In the television series *Şahsiyet*, the concept of space is an active participant in the storytelling process, not merely a passive backdrop for it. The interior spaces within the series are meticulously designed to serve as a reflection of Agah's psychological state, thereby engendering a visual language that communicates his internal struggle. (Fig. 14 and 15)

Figure 14: Agah's apartment entrance.

Agah's apartment is a thematic exploration of memory, identity and introspection. The cluttered space, characterized by dim lighting and a pervasive sense of disorder, reflects the character's fragmented memory. Old photographs and memorabilia on the walls are a physical

manifestation of his efforts to preserve his identity amidst the impending uncertainty of memory loss. The confined nature of the space, perceived as almost suffocating, underlines the feeling of being trapped in the subject's mind. This sense of imprisonment is due to his struggle with the loss of his memories and the moral consequences of his actions.

Figure 15: Agah's apartment staircase.

Agah had lived independently for many years before the arrival of his daughter and grandson, however, the space has been designed for more than one person; the apartment contains multiple seating arrangements and armchairs, indicating a space designed for more than mere functionality (Fig. 16 and 17). An abundance of items, such as pillows, decorative figurines, and personal belongings adorn nearly every piece of furniture. These, and the use of diverse lighting elements—including floor lamps, table lamps, and wall sconces—in addition

to general lighting, suggests that the residence also serves as storage area for accumulated and now obsolete items. Furthermore, the apartment's untidy condition and lack of renovation over an extended period can be attributed to the subject's psychological distress and mood swings, reflecting his inability to maintain or improve the space.

Figure 16: Agah's apartment.

Figure 17: Agah's living room.

The residential spaces in *Şahsiyet* are meticulously designed to reflect the psychological and emotional states of the characters, particularly Nevra, the young and ambitious police officer investigating crimes within the district. Nevra's apartment is a visual representation of her personality and innermost desires. Its modern, minimalist design is indicative of her pragmatic and disciplined approach to both her professional and personal life. This minimalism, characterized by clean lines, neutral colours, modern furniture (Fig. 18 and 19) and a lack of clutter, serves to highlight Nevra's professional dedication and her need for order and control in her personal life. Architect Robert Mallet-Stevens designed the house belonging to Einar Norsen, the protagonist of the 1924 film *L'inhumaine*, with its modern, white, cubic, and geometric design reflecting the film's theme of embracing the future rather than clinging to the past (Wilson, 2022, p. 60). Within this modern architectural framework, Nevra is similarly depicted as character-oriented towards the future rather than the past. Nevertheless, the austerity of her living space also serves to highlight her emotional detachment and the isolating nature of her profession.

The absence of personal photographs, sentimental items, or leisure activities serves to underscore the profound impact of her professional dedication on her capacity to establish interpersonal connections or attend to her own emotional needs. The meticulously curated

environment thus functions as a metaphor for her internal conflict: the surroundings embody her fortitude and resolve but simultaneously reveal the solitude and emotional barriers that accompany her unwavering pursuit of truth. Through these subtle visual cues, the series deepens our understanding of the character, rendering her more complex and relatable.

Figure 18: Nevra's living room.

Figure 19: Nevra's kitchen.

In *Şahsiyet*, the apartment Agah uses to hide corpses and documents is constructed as a space that reflects his complex personality and psychological state. The interior is adorned with physical elements that give deep insights into the character's state of mind and past. Agah's secret apartment (Fig. 20) is characterized by a design that fosters an atmosphere of darkness, as evidenced by the extensive use of dark colours, particularly black and brown, reflecting internal darkness, loneliness and feelings of guilt. The gloomy atmosphere of the interior engenders a disturbing effect on the viewer.

Figure 20: Agah's secret apartment entrance.

The objects and arrangement of the secret apartment create the impression of time suspended, which is related to his psychological state. Agah has experienced significant traumas and losses that have become frozen in time, and the antique furniture and the overall gloomy

atmosphere of the apartment serve to portray the story of one who continues to live in the past.

Agah's secret apartment is associated with the character's desire to conceal his past and the constant haunting of guilt. The apartment's layout and certain elements are shrouded in mystery, and closed off from the rest of the world, akin to Agah's inner world (Fig. 21). The character's desire to be isolated from society is concomitant with his inclination to conceal everything.

Figure 21: Agah's secret apartment living room.

Conclusion

The use of space in *Masumlar Apartmanı* and *Şahsiyet* demonstrates the critical role of interior design in shaping narrative construction and meaning-making in television series. *Masumlar Apartmanı* and *Şahsiyet's* apartment used for filming (Jurnal Sokak No:14 Temel

Apartmanı, Istanbul/Turkiye) remains constant. However, the set designs employed within the apartment have been adapted to create atmospheres capturing the unique spirit of each series. These works illustrate how spaces can transcend their functional roles to become dynamic narrative devices that reflect various psychological states, facilitate narrative development, and serve as platforms for social and cultural critique.

Masumlar Apartmanı is presented to the viewer as both a physical space and one that functions as a metaphor. The architectural structure of the apartment building, with its narrow corridors and antique interiors, functions as a microcosm that reflects the characters' internal struggles, and the wider social structures within which these struggles occur. Each room of the apartment building is presented to the audience with elements that have different symbolic meanings and reflect the psychological disintegration and unresolved conflicts of the characters. The series delves into themes of isolation, identity, and the weight of familial and societal expectations, offering a poignant exploration of the human condition. *Masumlar Apartmanı*'s visual and narrative intricacy offers viewers a poignant emotional journey and an invitation to contemplate the societal forces that influence individual lives. This series offers a profound reflection on the intricate interplay between personal and collective histories, guiding viewers towards a deeper understanding of the psychological and societal barriers to healing and self-discovery. This series leaves a lasting impression on its audience, challenging them to confront

the ghosts of the past and the possibilities of transformation.

Şahsiyet (2018), on the other hand, is a masterful exploration of identity, justice and societal decay. The city of Istanbul is utilized both as a setting and a symbolic character, reflecting the protagonist, Agah's internal and external conflicts. The visual media materials analysed in this study adopt a complex narrative structure and consciously utilize space to transcend the traditional boundaries of the crime fiction format. Offering an in-depth critique of systemic corruption, moral decadence, and the fragile nature of memory, the protagonist's transformation from a passive spectator to an active avenger is reflected in the changing dynamics of his inhabited spaces. The transition from the confines of his complex and depressing apartment to the labyrinthine streets of Istanbul serves as a metaphor for the fragmentation of his mind and the social disintegration that surrounds him.

In both series, apartments are the same, but the interior designs differ according to the characteristics, traumas and other psychological needs of the characters. These design of serve as a reflection of the particular personal trauma. The gloomy and suffocating theme of the design is intended to inform the audience about the character's psychological state of mind. The space is therefore placed at the centre of the narrative, occupying an intermediary position. The power of space design driving the narrative is also reinforced by the design of the additional

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spaces in both series.

This research demonstrates the potential of interior design and spatial design to function as narrative tools, with the capacity to deepen emotional engagement, facilitate character development, and critique social structures. In particular, this research posits that the role of space in visual storytelling can serve as a significant instrument for reflecting cultural contexts and social critiques. With this specific focus, this analysis contributes to broader academic debates about the interplay between space, narrative, and meaning-making in visual media, and provides a framework guiding future research into how spatial design can be used in television dramas and other visual media to enhance storytelling and encourage critical reflection on social issues. The findings of this study offer valuable insights that can guide future research in the intersection of interior design and visual media, emphasizing the significance of spatial design in crafting compelling cinematic experiences.

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ENDNOTES:

[1] [Editor's Note]: There have been previous studies around the series *Sahsiyet* like Yıldırım (2021), Adak &Akser (2023) and Bakan and Yılmaz (2024). The authors' approach in this article takes a different approach that is rich and unique in their methodology.