

Analysis of the Perceptual Space in the Movie *La Cara Oculta*

Emine Köseoğlu, Gizem Nur Öncü

Fatih Sultan Mehmet Vakıf University, İstanbul, Turkey.

Abstract

The phenomenon intended to be conveyed in cinema is communicated to the audience through fictionalized spaces. The space defined by architectural elements is experienced through the senses and the character's relationship with the place in the film is conveyed to the audience, eliciting a response to the fictionalized scene. "La Cara Oculta" is a film that unfolds within a single location, portraying the story of Belen, the main character, who becomes trapped in a secret shelter within the house she shares with her partner Adrian. The examination of the relationship between Belen and the space she inhabits throughout the course of these events proves to be of significant interest. For this reason, the film is worth examining. In this study, qualitative research methods were used, with a case study design on *La Cara Oculta*. Following a purposeful sampling approach that emphasizes spatial perception and psychology, specific scenes were carefully chosen and analyzed using thematic analysis. Consequently, 24 scenes yielded 12 distinct codes, which were subsequently grouped into three overarching themes that explore the relationship between space and human experience: spatial boundary, spatial atmosphere, and spatial confinement. The study aims to address inquiries regarding how architectural space elements influences spatial perception, how spatial experiences evolve, and how spaces can be transformed into fear-inducing environments. The film's demonstration of how the space can cause psychological disorders emphasizes its intersection with architecture. Thus, this study is instructive in understanding the concept of architectural space.

Keywords: *Perceptual Space, Senses, Architectural Elements, La Cara Oculta, Architecture in Cinema*

Introduction

Architecture, often referred to as the "art of building" (Soygeniş, 2006), encompasses a multi-dimensional realm that intersects with various disciplines. Cinema, as a distinct discipline, shares a connection with architecture through its structure. Throughout history, cinema and architecture have mutually influenced and nourished each other, fostering a symbiotic relationship that has propelled both disciplines forward. These two art forms collaborate in their utilization of similar means of representation, defining the essence and dimensions of physical space while also crafting experimental depictions of life situations (Pallasmaa, 2001). Space serves as the foundation for action in both domains, as wherever there is humanity, there exists space. Since its inception, the human body has been enveloped by space, considering it an intrinsic and ordinary component of existence, as Merleau-Ponty eloquently states, "existence is spatial" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p.293). Architecture, as a practice, materializes spaces within the tangible world, while cinema fabricates artificial portrayals of spaces. As Lefebvre (1991) defines, the production of space entails a multifaceted process wherein lived space, perceived space, and conceived space form an inseparable and complementary trio. Cinematic spaces, imbued with liveliness, function both as supportive backdrops for fiction and as central elements that shape the narrative. Spatial perception emerges as a consequence of cognitive processes that incorporate external information such as color, sound, light, and size (Baysal and Tekarslan, 1987), subsequently influencing spatial behaviors.

When examining the literature on cinema and architecture, one of the most frequently referenced books is "Architecture and Cinema: Melies, Mallet-Stevens, Multimedia" by Widdis (1999). This study explores the utilization of cinematic spaces in architectural education. Another no-

table study is Chappel's (1973) "Films on Architecture", which investigates the contribution of architectural elements to cinema. Recent works in the field include Tawa's (2022) exploration of spatial atmosphere titled "Atmosphere, Architecture, Cinema: Thematic Reflections on Ambiance and Place", as well as Wilson's (2022) research on the use of architecture in movie. Özdamar (2006), Özen (2006), Ergin (2007), Hacıömeroğlu (2008), and Ertem (2010) have examined the partnership between cinema and architecture, focusing on the utilization and structural aspects of space. Kaçmaz Erk (2009) authored the book "Architecture in Cinema: A Relation of Representation Based on Space", delving into how space takes center stage in movies. Adiloğlu's (2005) study, "Architectural Expansions in Cinema: Halit Refiğ Films", explores the intersection of architecture and cinema. A recent study by Ergün Bilgili and Dinç Kalaycı (2021), titled "Reading Place and Placelessness at the Intersection of Architecture and Cinema: The Loss of the Soul in Ahlat Tree", examines architectural space in cinema through the lens of landscape architecture. Additionally, Akyol Altun's (2022) study "Use of space in Yeşilçam Cinema in the context of symbolization of traditional-modern dilemma", highlighting the symbolic representation of the traditional-modern dilemma.

Upon examining studies conducted at the intersection of architecture and cinema, one noteworthy analysis is Köseoğlu and Yücel's study (2023) by intriguing parallels in its approach, including the utilization of purposeful sampling to select specific scenes, extracting relevant codes from those scenes, and ultimately deriving thematic insights from the codes.

In the context of cinema, the spaces created generate positive or negative emotions within the audience based on their spatial perceptions and experiences. Psychological thrillers and horror movies, for instance, belong to the film genres that evoke unsettling feelings in viewers. *La Cara Oculta*, a Spanish-Colombian co-produced psychological thriller, stands out as a remarkable example of a single-set production. In *La Cara Oculta*, the space is almost a character in itself, with emotions and behaviors related to it explained through spatial elements. The space depicted in the film transforms into a fear-inducing environ-

ment due to its meticulously designed elements. Directed by Andrés Baiz, the movie opens with the couple Adrian and Belen relocating to a new house. Driven by the desire to confirm her lover's fidelity, Belen hides within a secret shelter located in the bedroom. Unfortunately, she misplaces the shelter's key upon entry, finding herself trapped inside, and thus, the series of events unfold. Spatial experiences arise when data pertaining to space design undergo transformation into perceptions through the senses, ultimately influencing the behaviors of movie characters.

In the research literature, only a limited number of studies have been conducted on *La Cara Oculta*. For example, Diaz-Perez (2014) analyzed film titles that include *La Cara Oculta* from a cognitive-pragmatic approach, while Liktor (2016) investigated the portrayal of women as ghosts or ghostly figures. However, no studies have been found that examine *La Cara Oculta* from the perspective of architectural or environmental psychology. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap in the existing research.

The study of architecture and cinema has received significant attention in recent years within the field of architecture. This study specifically focuses on analyzing the perceptual aspects of the spatial collaboration between architecture and cinema. To achieve this objective, a psychological-thriller film was selected, where the perceptual space holds more significance than the physical space itself. The film's notable feature lies in its setting, a closed and secretive shelter, which serves as a single location. This unique characteristic adversely impacts the psychology of the characters and directly influences their relationship with the space. Consequently, this study stands out as it investigates the perceptual space through the lens of a psychological-thriller film.

Fear in psychological-thriller movies is evoked through a range of intense and unsettling emotions, creating a gripping and suspenseful atmosphere. Restlessness permeates the narrative, with characters experiencing an uneasy sense of anticipation and discomfort as they navigate through menacing situations. Helplessness engulfs them, instilling a profound feeling of powerlessness and the inability to control their circumstances. Sadness lingers, as the characters confront harrowing events that elicit a profound sense of loss or despair. Anxiety

fuels their actions, with a constant sense of impending danger and the unknown. Panic sets in, triggering a heightened state of fear and a rapid heartbeat. The feeling of constriction and squeezing amplifies the sense of claustrophobia, further intensifying the characters' distress. These complex and interconnected emotions create a web of fear that captivates audiences and immerses them in the thrilling world of psychological cinema. Within the scope of this study, we examined Belen's spatial experience while she was confined in the shelter. The design of the shelter space, a crucial element in the film's narrative, was analyzed in terms of its perceptual aspects. Perceptual aspects of space encompass how individuals perceive and experience the physical environment around them. These aspects involve various sensory modalities such as vision, hearing, touch, and proprioception, which contribute to our understanding and interpretation of space. The objective of this study was to investigate how architectural elements contribute to spatial perception, how spatial experiences are shaped based on perception, and how emotional connections to space are formed. By exploring these questions, we aimed to gain a deeper understanding of the intricate relationship between architecture, perception, and the human experience of space.

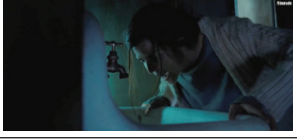



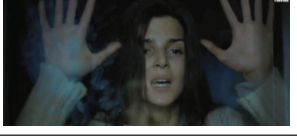

2. Research Methodology

This qualitative research study explores the intricate relationship between space and human beings. To analyze this connection within the context of space perception and psychology, the film "La Cara Oculta" was selected as the primary material. Data was collected through a comprehensive review of relevant document review (Bretschneider et al., 2017), and a case study approach was employed. Using the purposeful sampling, 24 scenes were deliberately chosen from the movie, specifically focusing on spatial perception and experience. Thematic analysis was considered the most suitable method for this study, as it aims to identify patterns and themes emerging from qualitative data. Thematic analysis typically focuses on providing descriptive insights. Codes were derived from the data collected, and these codes were subsequently grouped based on shared characteristics,

at times forming clusters and directly contributing to the development of thematic elements (Alho-jailan, 2012). The resulting codes were organized under various headings, giving rise to diverse themes. The study's findings are presented based on these thematic elements.

Table 1. The scenes analyzed

Scenes-Chronologically	
	
S-1 0:49:43	S-2 0:5 0:32
	
S-3 0:53:38	S-4 0:53:39
	
S-5 0:54:19	S-6 0:54:59
	
S-7 1:00:41	S-8 1:00:50
	
S-9 1:01:00	S-10 1:11:27
	
S-11 1:03:05	S-12 1:03:15



	
S-13 1:03:54	S-14 1:04:11
	
S-15 1:05:10	S-16 1:05:14
	
S-17 1:06:23	S-18 1:06:43
	
S-19 1:09:21	S-20 1:09:25
	
S-21 1:18:05	S-22 1:18:16
	
S-23 1:22:57	S-24 1:26:34

3. Findings

In this scene that depicts how the events in the movie unfold, Belen wants to test Adrian's love and loyalty by playing tricks on him. She leaves a note for him, pretending to have left him. Later, Belen goes to the shelter through a secret door in the bedroom and hides there. Her aim is to find out how much Adrian loves her in her absence. The



two-sided secret door, which serves as a passage between the shelter and the bedroom, can be accessed through the wardrobe. In this scene (S-1, S-2), showcasing the bedroom and the shelter, it becomes evident that light plays a pivotal role in shaping the perception of space. The quality and quantity of light significantly influence our perception in various situations, exerting powerful effects on human emotions, communication, and behavior (Hayward, 1980). The bedroom creates an impression of brightness, spaciousness, cleanliness, and warmth, while the shelter evokes a sense of darkness and pessimism, contributing to its distinct atmosphere. These types of spaces create a feeling of anxiety in the person. After analyzing the scenes, the code C-1 "feeling of anxiety" was derived as a significant finding (Table 2).

Table 2. Code-1 from scenes

Scenes-Chronologically		Code-1
		"Feeling of anxiety"
S-1	S-2	


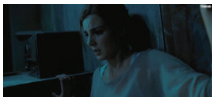
The main function of spatial behavior is communication, which is formed through sensory tools such as sight, touch, smell, and hearing (Hall, 1966). In the fifty-third minute of the movie, Adrian stands in front of Belen but is unaware of her presence. Belen had dropped the key of the shelter in the bedroom at that time and yelled at him from behind the door, even though she knew that Adrian would not be able to hear her (S-3, S-4). Spatial delimiters create distance. The architectural space in this scene is limited by the glass inside the wardrobe, which serves as both a physical and visual/auditory limiter. The one-sided mirror is hindering Belen's communication due to the spatial limitations it imposes. After analyzing the scenes, the code C-2 "distance" was derived as a significant finding (Table 3).

Table 3. Code-2 from scenes

Scenes-Chronologically		Code-2
		"Distance"
S-3	S-4	



Space, serving as a barrier between individuals and their surroundings (Hasol, 2010), facilitates a range of actions within its bounds. This space, shaped by these actions, elicits both positive and negative emotions. In this particular scene, fear emerges as one of the emotional responses to potential events. Fear encompasses three elements: cognitive, physiological, and behavioral. The wall, functioning as an architectural element that demarcates and confines the space, becomes the target of Belen’s attempts to dismantle it due to the fear she experiences (S-5, S-6). After analyzing the scenes, the code C-3 “feeling of fear” was derived as a significant finding (Table 4).

Table 4. Code-3 from scenes

Scenes-Chronologically		Code-3
		“Feeling of fear”
S-5	S-6	

The shelter is a specially designed room that provides isolation from the environment. However, individuals staying in such rooms for a short period of time may experience panic due to the absence of sound (Leland, 2006). Fear and anxiety can elicit various psychological and physiological responses, including increased blood pressure, elevated heart rate, blood vessel dilation, and muscle tension. In the particular scene where Belen and Adrian are facing each other, Belen strikes the plumbing pipes with stick and she shouts, but Adrian is unable to see or hear her (S-7, S-8). The isolation created by the wall and glass, which serve as boundaries between the two spaces, prevents mutual interaction. This situation results in stress for Belen. After analyzing the scenes, the code C-4 “panic attack” was derived as a significant finding (Table 5).

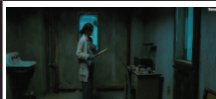
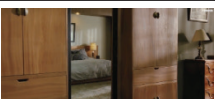
Table 5. Code-4 from scenes

Scenes-Chronologically		Code-4
		“Panic attack”
S-7	S-8	

Zevi (1957) argued that space is a structure that can be perceived both realistically and abstractly. Light plays an important role in the formation of

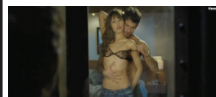

space, as demonstrated in this scene where Belen experiences an anxiety attack while alone in the shelter after Adrian leaves the house (S-9, S-10). The emotions conveyed by these two spaces are starkly different. The shelter appears suffocating, dark, and dirty with only old washbasin and small table and chair present. In contrast, the bedroom feels warm, friendly, and peaceful. The transition between these two spaces is provided through a glass allowing for visual comparison between them. After analyzing the scenes, the code C-5 “suffocating and peaceful” was derived as a significant finding (Table 6).

Table 6. Code-5 from scenes

Scenes-Chronologically		Code-5
		“Suffocating and peaceful”
S-9	S-10	

Bachelard (1971) argues that architecture creates multi-sensory spaces that enable bodily experiences beyond mere functionality and social needs. In the Spanish psychological thriller film, emotions are conveyed through the facial expressions of its protagonists Adrian, Belen, and Fabian in two particular scenes at one hour and three minutes into the movie. From her shelter space, Belen sees Adrian cheating on her but is unable to intervene (S-11, S-12). The emotion on Belen’s face reflects how this experience is shaped by the specially designed space around her; unhappiness, disappointment, and jealousy. After analyzing the scenes, the code C-6 “emotional turmoil” was derived as a significant finding (Table 7).


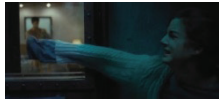
Table 7. Code-6 from scenes

Scenes-Chronologically		Code-6
		“Emotional turmoil”
S-11	S-12	

In these two scenes observed from the shelter, Belen covers her ear, weeps, and angrily strikes the glass where the mirror is situated. Belen witnesses firsthand that Adrian is cheating on her and hear it with her own ear (S-13, S-14). The one-sided auditory experience of the place induces a sense of unrest in Belen. Fear, defined as the ap-


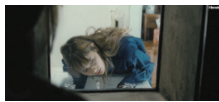
prehension of facing danger (Tanyeli, 2022, p.25), emanates from the environment. The danger that Belen faces is Adrian’s infidelity. After analyzing the scenes, the code C-7 “feeling of unrest” was derived as a significant finding (Table 8).

Table 8. Code-7 from scenes

Scenes-Chronologically		Code-7
		“Feeling of unrest”
S-13	S-14	

Sound is the result of air in motion, manifesting as a sequence of pressure waves in the air. In this scene observed from both the shelter and the bedroom’s bathroom, Belen discovers the shared connection between the sinks in the bathroom and the shelter. Leaning over the sink, she calls out to Fabian, with the sound spreading outward instead of remaining confined (S-15, S-16). The origin of sound holds more significance than its destination (Pasnau, 1999, p. 310). Fabian perceives the sound and instinctively turns his attention towards it. This realization of Belen’s voice instills hope within her, as it presents a potential means of escaping the shelter. The interplay between sound and hearing, and its impact on spatial experience, is demonstrated in this scene. After analyzing the scenes, the code C-8 “voice of hope” was derived as a significant finding (Table 9).



Table 9. Code-8 from scenes

Scenes-Chronologically		Code-8
		“Voice of hope”
S-15	S-16	

Space forms the fundamental material for architecture, but it is perceived through life and movement within it (Hoogstad, 1990). In the fifty-eighth minute of the film, Belen begins to dig through the wall that separates her shelter from her bedroom using a spoon she found (S-17, S-18). Despite its impossibility, this act becomes conceivable due to Belen’s fear and unease. As she moves around in the cramped space of the shelter, her agoraphobia intensifies. The same place produces different emotions for Belen as she falls into despair. After analyzing the scenes, the code C-9

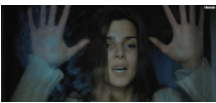

“claustrophobia” was derived as a significant finding (Table 10).

Table 10. Code-9 from scenes

Scenes-Chronologically		Code-9
		“Claustrophobia”
S-17	S-18	

According to Merleau-Ponty, human exists in sounds through hearing in space (Merleau-Ponty, 2016, p. 228). Spaces also return sounds to the ear. In this way, communication with the space is communicated through sound. Places where the sound is not heard and communication cannot be provided cause stress for the person. In the hour and ninth minute of the movie, Fabian finds the key to the secret shelter. Belen, who sees Fabian, starts shouting at her. However, because the shelter is invisible and inaudible, Belen is left alone with her despair (S-19, S-20). After analyzing the scenes, the code C-10 “despair” was derived as a significant finding (Table 11).



Table 11. Code-10 from scenes

Scenes-Chronologically		Code-10
		“Despair”
S-19	S-20	

Space is perceived through surfaces, and surfaces are experienced through touch. In the movie, at the one hour and eighteenth minute mark, Fabian becomes aware of Belen’s presence in the shelter. However, Fabian chooses not to rescue Belen and, in a deliberate attempt to provoke jealousy, even embraces Adrian, Belen’s ex-girlfriend. Upon seeing them, Belen becomes greatly upset and begins hitting the glass where the mirror is located (S-21, S-22). The tactile quality of surfaces within spaces serves as a captivating means of communication, stimulating both the sense of sight and touch (Gezer, 2007). Glass is typically considered a transparent and delicate material due to its texture. However, it is worth noting that non-transparent and unbreakable glass can also be produced, such as in the case of shelter construction. Despite this fact, Belen still attempted to break the glass where the mirror was located. After analyzing the scenes,

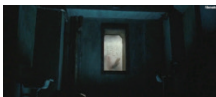

the code C-11 “sadness” was derived as a significant finding (Table 12).

Table 12. Code-11 from scenes

Scenes-Chronologically		Code-11
		“Sadness”
S-21	S-22	

“The various components and elements within a space play roles in determining, directing, focusing, providing continuity, carrying meaning, combining and separating. These roles provide clues for observers to comprehend the space” (Gür, 1996, p.54). After locking Belen into the shelter, Fabian becomes worried when she receives no response from her. She asks “Estas Bien?” (“Are you okay?”) but still gets no answer (S-23, S-24). Eventually, he opens the hidden door that acts as a gateway between the two sides after realizing something might be wrong with Belen. This effectdouble-sided steel door is concealed behind a mirror in the bedroom closet. The components of the space, which play a segregating role in both scenes, contribute to a sense of confinement or entrapment. After analyzing the scenes, the code C-12 “incarceration” was derived as a significant finding (Table 13).

Table 13. Code-12 from scenes

Scenes-Chronologically		Code-12
		“Incarceration”
S-23	S-24	

Auditory perception also plays a significant role in shaping our experience of space. The sounds we hear provide valuable information about our surroundings, including the size of the space, its boundaries, and the presence of other entities within it. The resonance, echoes, and acoustic qualities of a space have the power to influence our perception of its dimensions, openness, and privacy. In the film, the spatial boundary is occasionally established through auditory cues, while at other times, it is reinforced by visual indicators. Architectural space acquires definition and meaning through its boundaries. Unlimited infinite space can only be conceptualized, not per-

ceived (Altan, 1993). Spatial boundary refers to the demarcation or limit that defines the extent of a given space. It plays a crucial role in shaping our perception and experience of a place. The concept of spatial boundary encompasses both physical and psychological aspects. Physically, it can be represented by walls, doors, fences, or any other physical barriers that separate one space from another. Codes such as C-2 “distance”, C-4 “feeling of fear”, C-6 “emotional turmoil”, C-8 “voice of hope”, and C-10 “despair” are used to explore the elements that delineate and limit the space. In this context, these codes have been grouped to form the theme of “spatial boundary”.

Space is profoundly sensory. Within the individual’s interaction with the space, they perceive and make sense of it through their senses. The overall perception and experience of the environment are intertwined with various sensory elements, including lighting, temperature, acoustics, and visual aesthetics. The spatial atmosphere can range from dim and muffled to vibrant and lively, depending on the purpose or design of the space. Codes C-1 “feeling of anxiety”, C-5 “suffocating and peaceful”, and C-12 “incarceration”, which depict the general ambiance and mood of the space, have been grouped to form the theme of “spatial atmosphere”. Visual perception plays a pivotal role in shaping our comprehension of space. Codes that facilitate the assessment of size, depth, and spatial relationships between objects and their environment contribute significantly to our perception of visual cues. These cues include elements such as perspective, lighting, color, as well as the perception of distance, form, and texture within a given space.

Tactile sensations, such as the texture of surfaces or the temperature of objects, offer tactile feedback that enables us to understand the physical properties of space. Proprioceptive cues, such as changes in body orientation and posture, assist us in determining the dimensions and boundaries of space relative to our own bodies. Spatial perception is influenced by an individual’s psychology and, in turn, can shape their psychology. The psychology of an individual impacts their actions within a given space. Codes C-3 “feeling of fear”, C-7 “feeling of unrest”, C-9 “claustrophobia” and C-11 “sadness” reflect Belen’s actions in the mov-

ie as she finds herself confined within the shelter space and illustrate her relationship with the space. These codes have been grouped to form the theme of “spatial confinement” (Table 14).

Table 14. Themes from codes

Codes	Themes
C-2. “Distance”	“Spatial boundary”
C-4. “Panic attack”	
C-6. “Emotional turmoil”	
C-8. “Voice of hope”	
C-10. “Despair”	
C-1. “feeling of anxiety”	“Spatial atmosphere”
C-5. “Suffocating and peaceful”	
C-12. “Incarceration”	
C-3. “Feeling of fear”	“Spatial confinement”
C-7. “Feeling of unrest”	
C-9. “Claustrophobia”	
C-11. “Sadness”	

4. Conclusion

The intersection of architecture and cinema presents a fascinating exploration of space, where the built environment becomes an integral element in storytelling and visual narrative. In this unique collaboration, architecture serves as a visual backdrop, a character in its own right, and a means to shape the audience’s perception and emotional engagement. Cinematic techniques, such as framing, camera movement, and editing, bring architectural spaces to life, capturing their scale, design, and atmosphere. Architecture in cinema not only provides a realistic representation of physical spaces but also allows for imaginative and fantastical constructions, transporting viewers to new and captivating worlds. Moreover, the fusion of architecture and cinema offers opportunities to explore the psychological and emotional impact of spaces on characters and their narratives. By manipulating architectural elements, lighting, and sound, filmmakers can evoke specific moods, create tension, or establish a sense of place. Ultimately, the symbiotic relationship between architecture and cinema opens up endless possibilities for visual storytelling, offering audiences a multidimensional and immersive experience that transcends the boundaries of both mediums. The space at the intersection of architecture and cinema is not strictly confined to physical reality but often takes

on a fictional nature. In psychological thriller cinema, the emphasis is placed on the perceptual space rather than the physical space. It is through the characters’ sensory characteristics, perceptual capacities, and spatial experiences that the sense of space is formed. Sensory input shapes perceptions, which in turn shape experiences. Therefore, the perceptual aspects of space encompass not only sensory experiences but also cognitive and emotional factors. The psychological state of individuals influences how they perceive and interpret spatial information.

In the movie *La Cara Oculta*, the depicted space evokes negative emotions both in the main character Belen and the audience. Codes such as C-1 “feeling of anxiety”, C-2 “distance”, C-3 “feeling of fear”, code C-4 “panic attack”, C-5 “suffocating and peaceful”, C-6 “emotional turmoil”, C-7 “feeling of unrest”, C-8 “voice of hope”, C-9 “claustrophobia”, C-10 “despair”, C-11 “sadness” and C-12 “incarceration” were devised to reflect the emotional states associated with these spaces. Psychological thrillers delve into the intricacies of perceptual space to heighten tension and engage viewers in the characters’ psychology. Confining environments, such as narrow corridors or closed rooms, serve as physical representations of the characters’ psychological states, intensifying the sense of suspense and curiosity. The study conducted yielded 12 codes, which were organized into three themes “spatial boundary”, “spatial atmosphere”, and “spatial confinement” pertaining to perceptual space. These themes shed light on the multifaceted nature of space perception within the context of psychological thrillers. Spatial atmosphere, spatial boundary, and spatial compression are key concepts that contribute to our understanding of the dynamics and perception of space. Within the scope of this study, the transformation of a location into a fear-inducing setting in psychological thriller movies is explained using a thematic analysis method, aiming to provide a comprehensive explanation.

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Corresponding Author

Emine Köseoğlu

Fatih Sultan Mehmet Vakıf University

İstanbul, Türkiye

E-mail: koseogluemine@gmail.com