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## Original Research Article

# Representation of Architectural Space in Asghar Farhadi's Cinema Based on Semiotics Approach Case Study: "The Salesman" Movie\*

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## Abstract

**Statement of the problem:** In recent years, the increasing closeness between architecture and cinema disciplines the characteristics and mutual effects of which have been fully understood, has become a serious academic subject. As a popular media and influential expressive tool, cinema plays a significant role in creating meaning, establishing an emotional relationship with the audience, narrating, and characterizing by the representation of the architectural space. However, what has been neglected in the Iranian cinema is the accurate theorization of the interdisciplinary interaction between these two areas and the solutions to apply the effect of the capacities of architecture in order to the manifestation of the meaning in the movie space.

**Research objective:** The current study aims to analyze the dramatic function of architectural spaces' elements and physique in Asghar Farhadi's cinema, especially "The Salesman", and discover the latent and manifest concepts of the screenplay signs.

**Research method:** This research is a descriptive-analytical research based on the qualitative content analysis and Saussure's semiotics framework.

**Conclusion:** The results obtained from the studies indicate that in Farhadi's cinema, the architectural structure of space, not only as of the background of the story but also as a factor involved in the process of films, is consistent with the behavior of the characters and the theme of the works. Also, it indicates the feelings and even perception of specific meanings of each film. Also, each element and factor of architectural space is represented based on semantic purposes and particular semiotics. The results also show that in "The Salesman", a great volume of signs is applied intangibility and purposive in various spatial and physical elements of architecture, such as a house, color, light, texture, opening, and objects, for the dramatic narration of the story, conveyance of its latent meanings, the definition of function and moods of characters, and stimulation of the audience's feelings.

**Keywords:** *Representation, Architectural Space, Semiotics, Architecture in Cinema, Asghar Farhadi.*

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## Introduction

In its general definition, cinema is the art of representing reality (Saffaran & Malekshahian, 2019, 57) with the creative expression ability through the picture (Goharipour, 2012, 80). This art compared with other media can come much closer to everyday life (Rezazadeh & Farahmandian, 2010, 14), Cinema as an instrument for associating meanings and for expressing both abstract and real world represent spaces, environments, events, symbols, and signs. It also educates, reproduces and reinterprets everyday life for its audience (Habibi, Farahmandian & Basiri Mojdehi, 2016, 228). Architecture is the society's reflection and is a means of mass communication (media), whose audience communicates based on spatial and environmental signs (Dabagh & Mokhtabad Amrei, 2014, 35). Cinema is considered as one of the fantastic realizations in the architectural field. The necessity to consider time, place, space, and understanding them in the cinema works, makes cinema dependent on architecture (Radaee, 2014, 41). In recent years, due to holding important academic conventions on architecture and cinema (Khoshbakht, 2010, 9), there is a growing increase in using cinema as a functional tool in the architectural design process, and using films in the architecture faculties and schools for education, the relationship between cinema and architecture has become an academic subject (Ghahramani, Piravi Vanak, Mazaherian & Sayyad, 2015, 28). Among the conceptual components, space is one of the fundamental concepts of these two arts and plays a determining role in studying their physique, form, and meaning (Sarabi & Molanaee, 2017, 158). These arts have common principles to perceive space, and stimulate human feelings, and apply space to transfer their deepest concepts (Balilan Asl & Eskandari, 2017, 106). Space in architecture is formed based on time and is revealed by moving in time and place of the spatial hierarchy. Therefore, space in architecture has narration (Abedi, Etesam, Mokhtabad Amrei & Shahcheraghi, 2018, 106). A significant part of

the story and narration of the events in a film in the cinema occurs in the architectural space, and by designing it, the quality of the environmental arrangement, which is an architectural issue, is of significant importance in intensifying the considered sense of the cinema narrator or the director (Motamedi & Mirza kouchak Khoshnevis, 2019, 163). The filmmakers use the architectural space in various ways (Madanipour, 2012, 140); For some, the architectural space is only a margin on the screenplay, which becomes a context and environment for the actions. It is also less considered as the separated element in the progress of the story plot. For others, the architectural space is a significant part of the screenplay. The conscious and symbolic use of it plays a significant role in establishing a relationship between the story subject and the richness of the order of its retelling (ibid., 125). There are various approaches to architectural space analysis in the movie (Goharipour, 2019, 165). One of the efficient interpretive- analytical methods for the cinema works with architecture subject is the semiotics (Mahdavinejad, Mahdavinejad, Toghrayi & Qazipoor, 2013, 80). The architectural space can explain the story, theme, or concepts of the movie, and reveal the filmmaker's mentality for the audience by its manifestations in the movie (Yousefi, 2018, 5).

In Iranian cinema, the number of movies in which the architectural space and its aesthetic and conceptual features have been used as structural and semiotic functions have not been numerous, and have been often used as a purely visual element (Loghmani, Etesam & Zabihi, 2019, 29). Asghar Farhadi is one of the directors whose works have an appropriate architectural atmosphere (Pourja'fari, 2016, 57). Although Farhadi is considered an author filmmaker (Ravadrad & Mirzadeh, 2017, 54) who is aware of using the architectural features of space (Samim, Samdani & Amjadi, 2015, 67), none of his movies are analyzed in terms of architecture. Therefore, the current study aims to analyze and identify the dramatic functions of the physique and

architectural space elements in Asghar Farhadi's narrative cinema with an emphasis on "The Salesman" movie. Also, this research attempts to discover the latent and manifest meanings and themes of the signs of the architectural space in the screenplay with semiotics approach. Recognizing this function and its interactive effect on the cinematic elements, such as narration, place, time, and character contributing to creating the cinematic space and representation of these elements, have a considerable impact on understanding the movie's meaning and its works' space (Aminzadeh, 2019, 3).

Taking all the above mentioned into consideration, the authors of this study attempt to respond to the following questions:

- What is the role of architectural space and its intrinsic features in the formation of the narration of Asghar Farhadi's cinema?
- What kinds of architectural spaces have been the context of more events of Farhadi's movies, especially "The Salesman"?
- What signs are used to represent the architectural space in "The Salesman"? And what role do these signs play in advancing the story?

Answering these questions will allow us to achieve the following purposes:

- Identify the role of architectural space in the formation of narration of Asghar Farhadi's cinema;
- Identify and introduce the diversity of architectural spaces used in Farhadi's works, especially "The Salesman";
- Identify and explain the function of architectural space signs in "The Salesman".

## Literature review

The link between architecture and cinema in Iran is ambiguous like in other areas (Hosseini, Abizade & Bagheri, 2009-2010, 119). It is evident that it is due to the inattention of the artists and thinkers in both areas. Also, what has been neglected in the design of movies is the architecture's impact on the meaning manifestation in the movie atmosphere.

Except for two specialized architecture and cinema conferences held in 2007 and 2008 by the Academy of Arts, most studies are partial and scattered—generally in the theoretical academic research—and no study has dealt with such a broad and practical issue. In most of the theoretical studies, either the common context of effective expressive and conceptual elements in the relationship between these two arts such as rhythm, movement, light, and space has been addressed (Motamedi & Mirza Kouchak Khoshnevis, 2019; Sarabi & Molanaee, 2017; Rahimian, 2010; Eslami, 2016; Hosseini et al., 2009-2010) or the perceptual experience of architectural space in the works of famous filmmakers in the world of cinema has been analyzed (Koeck, 2013; Pallasmaa, 2016; Khoshbakht, 2010; Penz & Thomas, 2009; Mokhtabad Amrei & Panahi, 2007). In some studies, the impact of architectural concepts in the Iranian cinema has been the research criterion (Balilan Asl & Eskandari, 2017; Hashemizadeh, Delavar & Mozaffari, 2017; Habibi et al., 2016; Samim et al., 2015; Alaghemandan Motlagh, 2012; Madanipour, 2012; Rezazadeh & Farahmandian, 2010). In the semiotics of architecture and the city in cinema, Panahi (2019) in his work entitled "Architecture and Spiritual Cinema", has achieved the essential role of architectural spaces in understanding the identity and manifestation of the spiritual concepts of semantic films. Amirsardari, Foroutan, Moazzami & Mohammadi (2019, 19) also studied the semiological exploratory of high-rise residential buildings in the cinema after the Islamic revolution of Iran. They found that high-rise residential buildings make privacy and neighborhood borders. Such buildings are the basis of materialism, individualism, and ostentation.

Examples of articles written about Asghar Farhadi's cinema, which in this study have used their theoretical foundations, can be mentioned (Afshar & Kamalinia, 2018; Amini & Sarparastsadat, 2018; Sajjadifar, Ishany & Bavanpouri, 2019; Riazi & Saleh Bolourdi, 2018; Ravadrad & Mirzadeh,

2017; Sadeghi Fasaee & Parvaei, 2017; Rezaei, Hasanpour & Daneshgar, 2014). In most of these studies, social and cultural problems have been studied through a psychological sociological perspective. In general, after searching for research conducted globally and in Iran, the lack of studies on this subject is visible. Therefore, the novelty of the current study is the role of architectural space in meaning-making and narration of the cinematic works using the semiotics approach and presenting a practical model in this regard.

### Theoretical and conceptual framework of research

#### • A reflection on the connection between architecture and cinema

The relationship between architecture and cinema, which has received much attention in both areas, is the venue for review and convincing the audience (Amirsardari et al., 2019, 19). Although architecture and cinema used to be independent areas in the past, in the contemporary era, these areas have become close due to the digitalization in the world and gradual fading the distance between imagination and reality, and cinema has become an axial paradigm in the process of architectural design (Vidler, 1992, 74-76). One of the fundamental discourses is the way filmmakers use space, architecture, and location in the works and the formation of meaning (Ghahramani et al., 2015, 28). Although the presentation in cinema and architecture is different, space and its expression are common because of being visual in terms of various feelings and their abilities to stimulate the feelings (Sarabi & Molanaee, 2017, 158). These artistic forms create space and the spirit of life (Penz & Thomas, 2009, 15). Although creating in space is a delusion of reality, it is concrete of truth in architecture (Abedi et al., 2018, 109). The visual spaces are the most significant expression factor in the movie (Hosseini et al., 2009, 113). The role of the space in the movie is as significant as the context in a painting. Also, any

type of disharmony between the subject and the surrounding space will lead to the lack of attraction and weakening the movie message (Panahi, 2019, 551). Architecture is also an art, an expression of which is through space. Therefore, the formal and objective aspect of the architecture is the special attributes of space (Moazzami, 2012, 60). Architect's art is manifested in the space formation using the expressive tools of walls, ceilings, doors, windows, and facades (Rahimian, 2010, 251). On the other hand, in the cinema, the filmmaker uses various ways to express his/her mentalities and builds the film's space. He/ she can also make any changes in reality. Meanwhile, using lighting, the angle of camera, movement, color, proper decor, and other measures are influential in creating this spatial delusion (Alaghemandan Motlagh, 2012, 22). Space in the cinema is the visual form of the directors' beliefs and reflection of the people's thoughts connected in the frame, and some of their communicative elements is the architecture and building (Goharpour, 2010, 82). The art of architecture in cinema is presented as the main factor in the atmosphere of film events and creates balance and harmony in the form of images and scene composition (Panahi, 2019, 551). If we consider space creation as the final aim of architecture, since in cinema space serves dramatic narration, the director relies on the architectural aspects of the product to unfold its story work (Askarzadeh & Zarif Asyaban, 2016, 13)

#### • Image concept of architectural space

Each cinematic image consists of a "representation subject" and "representation object" (Ejlali & Goharipour, 2015, 234).

- "Representation subject" is a subject that is watched. In the current study, the representation subject is the "architectural space", which consists of two components. The first component is the "functional physique of the architectural" space, including the physical building masses with different land uses. This component is influential in the formation of the role of the film characters

and can express the feelings of the characters or their future (Mousavi & Hoseini Sangtarashani, 2015, 56). The second component is “Architectural Space Elements”, including the constituent elements inside the physique, such as wall, opening, furniture, color, texture, and stairs. The architectural elements can design the scene space to manifest the architectural concepts to play a profound role in the screen of thought (Mokhtabad Amrei & Panahi, 2007, 116). These components can transform into a sign or symbol following Saussure’s pattern, and they evoke the semantic implications into the mind (Ravanshadnia, Mokhtabad Amrei, Diba & Panahi, 2020, 54)

- “Representation object” is the visual angle of view of the filmmaker about the representation, which is divided into two discourses of “world view and attitude of director” and “technological choices and formal approaches”. These are the tools for the filmmaker to present the considered image of the architectural space (Ejlali & Goharipour, 2014, 11). In creating the considered picture, the filmmaker adds signifiers to it to have determined semantic signified and encrypt it (Ejlali & Goharipour, 2015, 235).

#### • Semiotics of architectural space in cinematic films

Semiotics analysis is one of the useful analytical approaches in the media texts, such as cinema works, which are full of signs (Samim et al., 2015, 69). This modern knowledge in cinema sought to influence the semantic depth and discover the fluid meanings within the movie content; It is an approach that shapes the spaces, in which the meaning-making process is done (Shahba, Ghafourian & Nikkhah Abyane, 2018, 13). In this approach, the words, images, music, objects, buildings, and other spatial elements of a movie are considered a sign through which the meanings are created (Hashemizadeh et al., 2017, 92). Indeed, the sign does not have meaning alone. What gives meaning to a sign is the mental perception of the audience and his/her

contemplation (Shahba & Tabarsa, 2012, 37). On the other hand, architecture is a layered spatial text and has various meanings and concepts within its codes (Dabagh & Mokhtabad Amrei, 2014, 35). One of the influential ways in reading the architectural space in a movie is when it is considered as a sign (Yousefi, 2018, 4). Analysis of the visual signs in a represented architectural space in cinema can extract the meaning and thought lie in the movie from the architectural point of view (Mahdavinejad et al., 2013, 80). In other words, semiotics can achieve the architectural work meaning by interpreting the expression resulted from the architectural forms and elements, developing and classifying them, and transforming each element into a communicative tool (Ramzy, 2013, 338).

Ferdinand Saussure presents a two-faceted pattern of a sign as a signifier “phonetic-visual or equivalent of its text” and as a signified “The concept to which signifier implies, or the conceptual imagination”. The relationship between these two internal elements of a sign is considered “signification” (Sojoudi, 2008, 19) (Fig. 1). Moreover, Saussure adds that “the relationship between signifier and signified is optional. It has no cause and there is no rational relationship between the word, concept, signifier, and signified; This makes perceiving meaning interesting and mysterious in texts” (Berger, 2004, 22). However, for the proper understanding of the logic of using the signs in a work, the relationships between the signs leading to meaning must be considered besides the extraction of signs from the screenplay (Goharipour, 2012, 110). According to Saussure, there are two types for the distinction and relation of signifiers: “paradigmatic and syntagmatic relationships” (Rezaei et al., 2014, 129). When a sign or “signifier” is used instead of meaning or “signified”, syntagmatic happens. Also, when some signs create meaning together, there is a paradigmatic in conveying a message (Sajjadifar et al., 2019, 76). Cognitive concepts can be very carefully reinforced in the semiotics of cinema

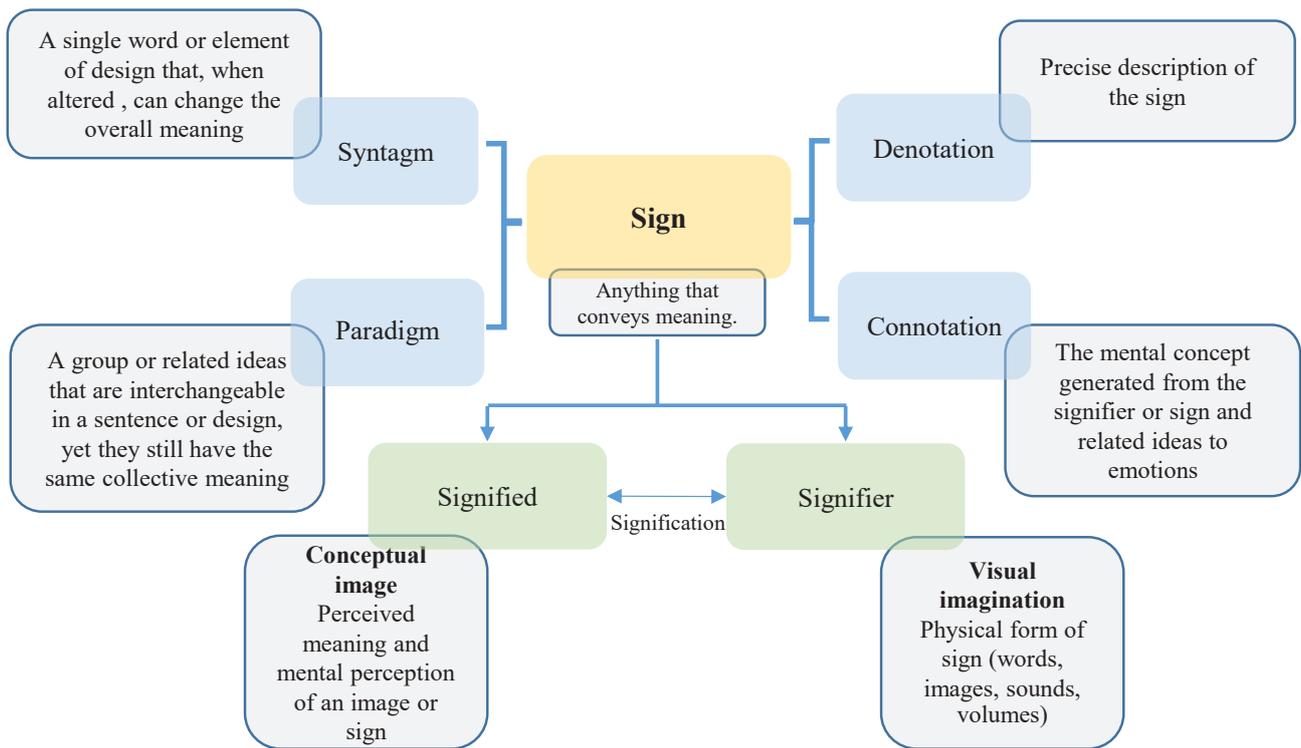


Fig. 1. Saussure's semiotics model. Source: authors.

(Braudy & Cohen, 2017, 141). The paradigmatic analysis is used to discover the manifest meaning of a movie, and syntagmatic analysis is applied to discover the latent meaning and implicit implications of the movie text (Chandler, 2015, 133).

### Conceptual model of research

Figure 2 presents the process used to achieve the content and meaning resulted from the representation of the architectural space in a movie through visual semiotics.

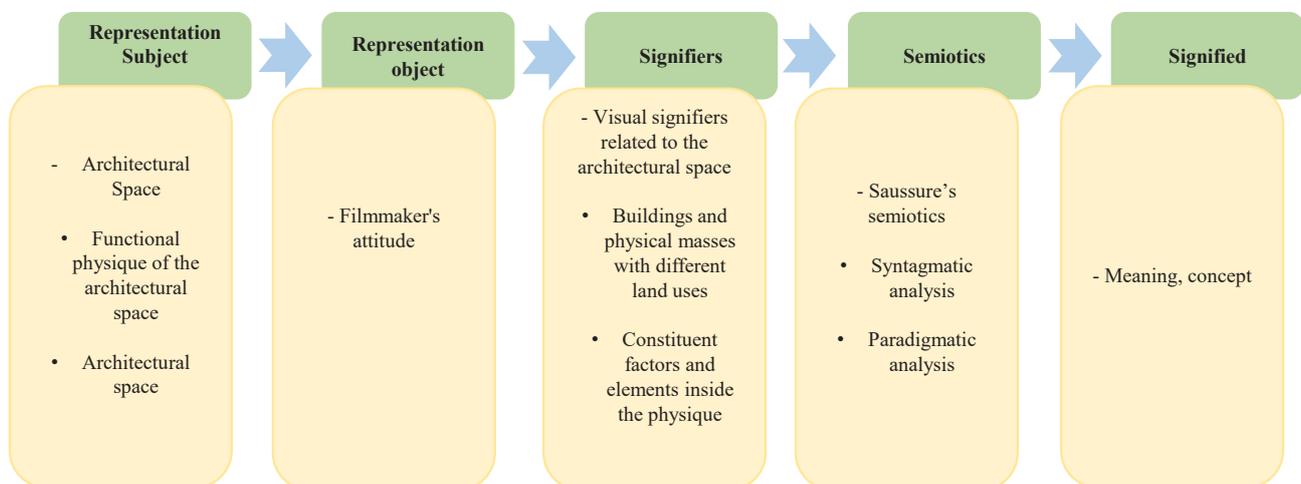


Fig. 2. Conceptual model of research. Source: authors.

## Research methodology

The present study is a theoretical-qualitative research. Its main strategy is an interpretive method based on the Saussure's visual semiotic analysis. The method of data collection is the library and documentary analysis. The analysis tools are books, films, and photos. The type of the findings is analytical-descriptive. The main purpose of content producer, which is the cinematic work, is not research purpose because the movie is considered a literature text that has a conversation with the audience; the audience also sought to read the text and discover the meaning resulted from the presence of architectural space to establish a relationship with the text. It is an interpretation that makes it inevitable to use the semiotics methods. In the current paper, the analysis unit of the movie is a scene consisting of various symbols, which makes a part of the movie story's process. By assuming each scene as a text and architectural space (physique and elements) as a sign, its manifestation and concept are investigated from Saussure's perspective. Then, the meaning of the signs and narrative structure within a movie is discovered. It is necessary to select the scenes where the architectural space is mentioned in the image and has used the visual signs related to that space among various signs of the movie.

## Research findings

### • Structure of architectural space in Asghar Farhadi's cinema

Asghar Farhadi is one of the most influential contemporary filmmakers of Iran. His human tone, addressing the details, expressing human issues in an understandable structure, and his unique realism have increased the global audience of his works (Shahba & Alipanahloo, 2018, 74). Farhadi's cinema can be analyzed in terms of architectural space application in two areas of architectural space representation and its application in narration. For an accurate analysis

of this perspective, we have to go beyond just one film and look at it from a larger perspective, which is a collection of the filmmaker's previous work. Thus, Table 1 investigates the role of architectural space structure in summary in all his movies. Then, in Tables 2 A, B & C, this role is analyzed semantically in detail in important and effective scenes of the movie "The Salesman".

### • Semiotics analysis of architectural space in The Salesman

#### - Film's summary

"The Salesman" is the seventh work of Asghar Farhadi. The story is about a couple of theater artists, starring Shahab Hosseini (Emad) and Taraneh Alidosti (Rana), whose apartment starts to collapse due to unprincipled excavation, and they are forced to leave their home. Because of a friend's insisting named "Babak", they move into a house on the roof of an apartment where a prostitute woman named "Aho" used to live. The apartment has just been vacated and the previous tenant left half of her furniture in a locked room and refused to come to pick it up. When they move to this new house, everything seems to be going well at first, but one night, Rana opens the door, ignoring who is behind the entrance and is abused by an unknown man in the bathroom. This ominous event casts a shadow of a doubt, pessimism, and violence on their lives and forces Emad to pursue a painful truth and a long search for revenge on the aggressor, which ultimately leads to an uncontrollable crisis in Rana and Emad's relationship and imagination.

#### - Spatial plot structure of the film

The movie has a closed, circular, and symmetric form, presented in Fig. 3. In this structure, the hierarchy of the architectural spaces begins with the theater scene and demolishing the house, and leads to this house, and Emad and Rana's make up a scene backstage. In this film, the main physical spaces (theater scene, settling house, classroom, rent house) are constantly repeated and relocated. Urban spaces (inside a taxi, Baguette store, and hospital) that disrupted the rhythm and symmetry

Table 1. Semiotics analysis of architectural space in Farhadi's works. Source: authors.

Table 1. Semiotics analysis of architectural space in Farhadi’s works. Source: authors.

Movie Name	Year	Prominent architectural spaces of movie’s event	Semiotics analysis of influential architectural spaces in movie
Dancing in the Dust	2003	House, Court, Urban Space, Hospital	<p>The broken glass of the house at the beginning of the movie; predicting the fragile and disappointing relationship of the couple in the movie</p> <p>Space as a house and a safe and comfortable place in the movie has no meaning. It has already collapsed and disappeared</p> <p>The presence of barbed wire around Reyhaneh’s house is a sign that the loving couple relationship is captive</p>
Beautiful City	2004	House, Youth Detention Center, Mosque, Court, Urban Space	<p>The blue frame of Firouzeh’s house window and looking out of it; On the one hand, the feeling of isolation and loneliness of the characters, and on the other hand, the display of communication and framing of events inside and outside the house</p> <p>Old house on the verge of collapse of Abolghasem, the dark color of most spaces and coverings; A sign of the lack of emotional and intimate relationships between the people living in it and their disturbed and shaky inner state</p> <p>The frequent emphasis of film framing on fences and steel rods; A sign of the failed destiny of the characters</p>
Fireworks Wednesday	2006	Apartment, Urban Space	<p>The reflected image of Navvab towers on the bus window; a Fully conscious choice to show the negative result of the changes in the city and a prelude to the essential role of the apartment space with all its hidden features and distortions in advancing the story of the film</p> <p>Breakdown of the doorbell, broken window glass, chaos, and clutter in the house, lots of messy appliances, disregard for the interior situation of the house; A reflection of psychological insecurity and critical relationships of residents</p> <p>The presence of large windows without curtains; Lack of privacy and constant visibility</p> <p>Eavesdropping on the common bathroom fan of apartment units and discovering the secret of Mojdeh’s wife’s infidelity; Disruption and insecurity in the apartment and loss of privacy</p> <p>Ruhi and Simin’s images behind the entrance bars of the complex; A kind of visual emphasis on the involvement of characters in the cycle of life</p>
About Elly	2009	Villa, Hospital, Urban Space	<p>Residence of friends in an abandoned villa (blistered walls, broken glass, difficulty in opening doors and windows, dirty and dark color of the movie space); Full correspondence with the horrific events before the story, the lack of safe space for guests and the emergence of the deteriorating relationship between the characters</p>
A Separation	2011	House, School, Court, Urban Space, Bank, Workshop	<p>Patio and the bold presence of windows and glass; Lack of privacy and disclosure of hidden events and secrets</p> <p>Furniture clutter, old tiles and walls, and dark coatings; A sign of unrest in life and its reflection in the behavioral distortion of spatial elements</p> <p>The staircase is one of the enigmatic indicators of the film and the location of the story’s enigmatic knot (fell of the servant)</p>
The Past	2013	House, Urban Space, Pharmacy, Court	<p>Deficiencies and defects of the home environment (incomplete painting of walls, crowded and irregular furniture); Turning away from restless situations within people and their disordered relationships</p>

Table 2. A) Semiotics analysis of the architectural space elements in “The Salesman” (Theater). Source: authors.

Space name	Sequence time	Semiotics of architectural space elements	
		Signifier	Signified
Theater scene	00:01:12 → 00:02:47	Messy double bed	Turmoil in marital life and privacy
		Two single beds with a vertical bar	A noticeable rift in the couple’s emotional bond and the confinement of a secret hidden in them
		Red color blanket, stage lighting, and the text casino hotel sign	Sexual love and affection lies in the content of the film
		Willy’s unprotected scaffolding joints	Being in danger of the family’s privacy
		Semi-open door with yellow light	Anxiety and curiosity for the events ahead of the film

Table 2. B) Semiotics analysis of the architectural space elements in “The Salesman” (Settling house). Source: authors .

Space name	Sequence time	Semiotics of architectural space elements	
		Signifier	Signified
Settling house	00:02:48 → 00:06:36	House and its foundation	The house is a sign of the family and human community, the foundation is the sign of its values and moral foundations
		Excavator	1. Symbol of modernity 2. Symbol of abuser old man in the movie
		The camera’s view from the broken glass of the house to the excavation of the adjacent ground	Disruption of the apartment residents’ lives
	01:36:40 → 01:55:50	Bedroom	The prominent example of the private life
		A large crack of the wall above the bedroom bed	Inducing a serious threat to disruption and gaps in the marital privacy of the film couple
		Emad looks out of the cracked window at the old man dying	Emad’s deep anger and wounds and a kind of identification with an abandoned building
		Closing all the doors and turning off the house light	End of Emad’s effort for revenge and knowing the events of that ominous night
		Background of Rana images with cracks in the wall and steel railings at the entrance	Rana’s wretched mental situation and her growing separation from Emad
		Emad and Rana coming down the stairs	Failure in the relationship, their feelings, and thoughts about each other
	Two opposite seats with headlights	1. Reminding of the court and tribunal space 2. Destruction of the primary happiness between the movie’s couple and turning them into two separated people	

Table 2. C) Semiotics analysis of the architectural space elements in “The Salesman” (Rented house). Source: authors.

Space name	Sequence time	Semiotics of architectural space elements		
		Signifier	Signified	
Rented house	00:13:09 → 00:20:51	Half-floor house with tacky doors and walls on the roof	1. Violating the urban planning principles in construction 2. Promiscuity of the previous tenant	
		Protection at entrances, courtyards, and windows with vertical bars	The bitter fate of a captive couple of the movie in this house	
		Bursting bathroom lamps and dark space	Warning of possible unfortunate tensions ahead in this space	
		Dialogue “What are they doing with this city? I wanted a loader to destroy the whole city and rebuild it ...” and the high-rise buildings around	Referring to the dominance of symbols of modernity over urban space and de-security of the concept of house’s safe privacy and its reflection in human relations	
		Existence of previous tenant furniture in a room with a locked door	The insecurity of the space, the suspension of the story, and the existence of a threatening shadow of the queen woman over the life of Emad and Rana	
		Double-sided steel stairs with surrounding guards	The growing separation between the newcomer couple in this house	
		Reflecting the view of the city and the buildings in the mirror while moving	Emphasis on the horrible reflection of the city and its disordered architecture in the life of this young couple	
	00:25:20 → 00:28:48	Pink mattress with cover	A marital relationship without damage and betrayal of Rana and Emad	
		Installation of bedroom window curtains by Rana	Emphasis on privacy	
		Camera’s pause and emphasis on the semi-open door of the entrance	Failure in the relationship, their feelings, and thoughts about each other	
		00:30:57 → 00:35:27	Pulling the curtains of the bedroom by Emad and the dominant yellow color of the space	The inflamed atmosphere inside the room and the desperate attempt to prevent the outside world from staring at the dignity and messy life of the couple in the film
			A house full of messy furniture	Disturbed mental and behavioral status of residents
		00:36:20 → 44 :00:43	Image of Rana with the background of window guards and the blistered wall of the closed roof	Rana’s spiritual captivity and the deep cracks of her annoyed psyche
			Open view of Rana lonely on the terrace and roof of the house	1. Being under the neighbors’ judgmental gaze 2. Her relationship with Emad is in the edge of collapse and desperate
		00:48:39 → 00:52:04	The drops of abuser man’s blood on the stairs	The transfer of tensions inside the house to the outside and the transformation of a personal event into something visible by stairs
01:02:06 → 01:10:40	Sadra closes the toilet door on Rana	Emphasis on privacy		
	Checking the previous tenant’s belongings	Changing Emad’s personality and invading the privacy of others		
01:17:47 → 01:19:29	Carrying the old tenant’s old mattress down the stairs and Babak insisting on not sticking it to the wall	The wicked personality of the previous tenant and carrying her belongings		

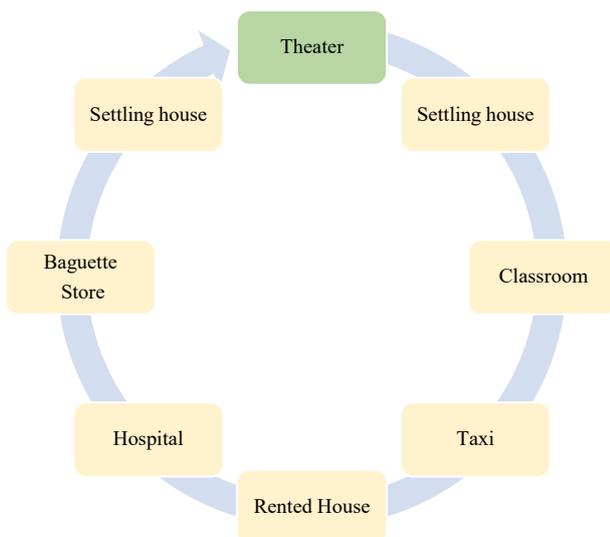


Fig. 3. The spatial plot structure of The Salesman. Source: authors.

are the sudden events and crashes in life that is going to disrupt audiences' mentality and are the solutions for the next scenes.

#### • Semiotics of the functional physique of the architectural space in the film

According to the movie's plot graph, generally, the course of the story's significant events is narrated in terms of physical space of architecture in function, theater scene, house, and school. Semiotics analysis of these spaces is addressed in this part.

##### - Theater

The theater scene in "The Salesman" provides the capacity to represent the more hidden layers of characters and situations. "The Salesman's Death" written by Arthur Miller, is the story of collapsing life and ethical relations of the middle class in the process of the economic crises of the US, the destruction of the traditional texture of the city, and the density of the high-rise architectures in a modernity world devoid of the emotional spirit. Farhadi has also benefited a lot from the content and plot of this play using parallel and metaphorical cuts and adaptation from its theme, the similarity of location (similarity of Emad's new house with Willy's house and confrontation with skyscrapers), objects (socks, messy bed,

glasses) and the details of the dramatic real-life of the film with the theatrical life inside the theater.

##### - House

In the movie "The Salesman", we are confronted with the phenomenon of the modern city and its elements, the most important aspect of which is the lack of a house (Riazi & Saleh Bolourdi, 2018, 85). In this film, most of the events take place in three apartments: the theater stage house, the demolishing apartment, and the rented house. In the opening scene of the film, we see Willie and Linda's house in the play scene, which is mainly reflected in the arrangement of the elements of the house and is surrounded by useless scaffolding as if inside of the space is exposed from outside and is in danger. Then, we face a horrific scene of shaking in the building and cracking in the walls of the residence of the movie's main characters by the excavator, which is excavating the adjacent land at night and indifferent to the life of the people. It transfers a fear of the crisis ahead of schedule to the audience. After the incident, Emad and Rana are forced to reside in their friend's house. Moving to a new place usually means starting a hopeful life. However, this house is located on a roof of an apartment with a cracked and unprincipled view as the slightly unacceptable moral background of the previous tenant. The modern city's view and high-rise buildings surround and dominate this family's new house. In the film's process, there is a paradox between the space ruling the house and its new residents and turns this safe space into an unsafe space, and the central tension of the movie occurs (Rana being abused) in its private space, bathroom. In such a chaotic atmosphere, the film's characters try to put their lives in order and cope with their new environment, but they are subjected to nightmarish fantasies. In the final sequence, Emad and Rana return to the same collapsed house, devoid of any objects. Also, the chapter of the dramatic confrontation between Emad, Rana, and the aggressor tells a fateful fate that ultimately

completes its cycle. It is the collapse of the film's characters.

#### - Classroom

In several sequences, Farhadi uses the educational function of the classroom space and creates a set of signs next to each other to bring the drama into deeper layers in its semantic nature. In these scenes, the school is a space to show the character of Emad, who is a moral and dedicated literature teacher committed to social etiquette and privacy. However, after the incident, neighbors and colleagues constantly violate and check on it, it seems that the story of a "Cow" movie and a gradual transformation of the character is symbolically reproduced within Emad and becomes a ruthless and aggressive vengeful person. During school scenes, Farhadi depicts the complex relationship of the human with modern society, which has not yet developed and matured intellectually. He explains that how individuals gradually lose their missions and identities by being in complex situations, and turn into a cow.

#### • Semiotics of the architectural space elements in the film

By identifying and introducing the influential spatial elements of architecture in the cinematic narration of Asghar Farhadi, these factors are investigated in terms of semiotics in *The Salesman* in this section (See Tables 2 A, B & C). These signs or "signifiers" are the tool to convey the concept and meaning of the "signified" to the audience. The image of the architectural space in this movie is analyzed depending on them.

#### - Staircase

The stairway is considerably emphasized in Farhadi's cinema. It is a spatial interface factor that transfers the tension inside the house to the outside world, and vice versa, in addition to the traffic and people's interaction. In "The Salesman", also the influential events and major worrying signs occur in this element. Both houses in the movie have numerous stairs, reflecting the ups and downs of

the states of the characters and the hardship of the relationships of the rough life.

#### - Window and Glass

In Farhadi's movies, window and glass have a constant and bold presence and have their specific meaning. These elements express our attitude to the outside world and others' lives and signify the lack of privacy and constant visibility. In "The Salesman", since the beginning, when Emad and Rana are framed, an opaque or cracked glass is shown beside them or in front of them, indicating the failure in their emotional relationship, intensifying the sense of security and the possibility of occurring an unpleasant event.

#### - Door

Another spatial element, which constantly opening and closing it makes it a repetitive motive and sign in Farhadi's works is the door. In addition to implying a sign, which is the same boundary that tends to keep the secret and personal privacy happening on the other side, these doors indicate a type of apprehension, curiosity, and waiting. In the movie, the closed and semi-open doors in various scenes have an impact in stimulating the audience's emotional reaction.

#### - Texture

Farhadi has used the background textures to give meaning to the content of his works, which have an obvious presence in the composition of his frames. A repeated scene in almost all of his films in various forms is a character standing in the background with a bar or fence guard, and the camera captures his image from the front as a captive prisoner. A kind of visual emphasis on human captivity in the circle of destiny. Also, the theme of the wall (cracks and paleness) is scattered throughout Farhadi's works. In "The Salesman", these backgrounds are repeated in several scenes. It is a reflection of the internal reality of the characters and their damaged mental situation and the increasing separation of the movie's couple.

#### - Color

Color and its related parameters are among the

influential elements in the process of narration of Farhadi's works. This filmmaker uses color contrast as a factor to attract the audience's attention to the specific details, transfer emotions, and determine the characters' behaviors, displaying the movie's tone and changes in the story. Gray and brown colors with different degrees of contrast indicate sorrow, sadness, and isolation of the movies' characters. The colors turn into suffering and mourning color of black by increasing the tension at the end of the movie. In "The Salesman", these colors can be seen in the city's walls, house furniture, and characters' clothes as a reflection of the characters' tense mental situation and the cold and soulless architecture of the movie's spaces. Red, which is a sign of love, vitality, violence, and sexual desire latent in the movie, has been used in specific parts and minimally for special effects.

#### - Light

Light is a metaphysical element, which plays a significant role in giving meaning to the architectural space and cinema (Zia'bakhsh & Mokhtabad Amrei, 2012, 60). Playing with light is manifested in many scenes of "The Salesman" to show the truth, overcome fear, and warn of adverse events. The story begins with the lighting of the play scene and ends by turning off the lights of the abandoned house.

#### - Furniture

In the cinema world, the objects enjoy concepts and implications. Particularly, when using the cinema elements, such as different lenses, camera angle, and lighting, the representation of the phenomena and latent and manifest concepts is emphasized (Alaghemandan Motlagh, 2012, 22). In Farhadi's movies, the objects and furniture have an influential presence and are considered an inseparable part of the drama. In "The Salesman", the house furniture has a tangible presence beside the story's characters and plays a role in intensifying the spaces' insecurity, anxiety, and suspension of the story.

## Discussion

Given the research findings and analyzing the content of the movie's sequences in Tables 1 & 2, to answer the first question, it can be said that the architectural space and its elements have been influential not only as a story background but also to advance the dramatic process of the movies. They can also indicate the emotions and the perception of the meaning and concepts of each movie. In these works, on the one hand, the architectural space affects the characters, and on the other hand, it represents their cluttered inner side.

To answer the second question of the research, the findings indicate that the house, apartment, and their dependent elements form the most context of the events and representation of the architectural space in all movies. Although the house is a symbol of comfort and safety in most psychological interpretations, since the "Fireworks Wednesday" movie, there is no sign of comfort and security in the house environment. Tension and conflict originate from it and progress inside it. By conscious selection and presentation of this location, Farhadi shows that the house is not only a place for the story of the characters, and he strongly believes in the interactive and influential relationship of the residential space on the characters and formation of their behaviors with environmental features and spatial elements. In other words, in Farhadi's cinema, a house has identity, character, and dramatic function. Sometimes, the turning point of narration, and sometimes, the emotional turning point of some of the most significant movies of Farhadi occur in this space. In "The Salesman", the declining position of the relationship between two couples of the story and the reflection of their unrest and upset states in the space is pictured for the audience through three unsafe houses affecting the story's progress.

To answer the third question of research, it can also be said that given that "The Salesman" frequently refers to the privacy and the consequences of invading the house environment, due to various

limits, it is full of various scenes. In these scenes, the signs have been tangibly and broadly used whether in paradigmatic and syntagmatic axes, in various spatial and physical elements, such as building, color, light, texture, opening, and objects to narrate the dramatic story of the work. Also, they were used to convey work's latent concepts, define the performance and moods of the characters, and stimulate the audience's feelings.

Therefore, in general, according to the research background, in the conducted researches on the connection between cinema and architecture and its effect on the audience's awareness, the representation of the architectural space of a filmmaker's works has not been analyzed with a semiotic approach. Hence, the authors achieved an innovative pattern and practical analytical model by applying the theoretical foundations of previous research and examining the findings of this study. This model can be effective in studying and introducing the function of the architectural space to convey the meaning and narrating other cinematic works.

## Conclusion

The current study was conducted to analyze and identify the dramatic function of the physical and architectural space elements in the narration of Asghar Farhadi's cinema with an emphasis on "The Salesman" movie. Also, this research aimed to discover the latent and manifest concepts and meanings of the spatial signs of the screenplay based on semiotics approach (Fig. 4). Given the findings of the content analysis and answers from the research questions, it can be concluded that Asghar Farhadi is one of the directors who are aware of the mental and semantic impact of architecture and has a purposive method in using the structure of the architectural space. Also, the architectural elements of space are presented in full consistent with the semantic purposes and semiotics. The motifs and physical-symbolic-formal elements of the architectural space have

been repeated in the works of this author-director and have a similar role, such as location, the spatial status of scene objects, texture, light, limited color. These elements function as main tools to convey the theme and psychological booster of the story and induce various emotions in the audience (fear, doubt, suspension, despair, and loneliness) in all of Farhadi's works. Indeed, Farhadi improves the dramatic and narrative building of his movie by the architectural space and approaches the audience to his characters. In other words, it can be said that the architectural space in "The Salesman" has more impact on the audience than dialogue and other narrative elements and has a core position. Unlike other movies with similar subjects, Farhadi's works do not go on in an empty space. He successfully shows a relationship between the architectural physique and character's behavior and emphasizes that these two are not separable. This has been strongly emphasized in architecture. Based on this perspective, the deliberate and symbolic selection of house and apartment as the movie's main location and the reflection of its collapsed image in the residents' behavior indicates the full awareness of the filmmaker about the significance of this relationship's role. In "The Salesman" and other works of Farhadi, a house is not only a functional element. Theme and the main concept of these movies (lack of peace in life, insecurity of the emotional relationships, mental turmoil, characters being under pressure, invasion and investigation in other's privacy) are manifested in the disordered behavior of the spatial elements of architecture and environmental gaps in this residence space, and the real drama originates from the people's struggle with the material and tangible elements. Moreover, according to the results obtained from the semiotics of the architectural space in "The Salesman", it can be understood that in this movie, given the story's subject and various limits in the direct conveyance of the meaning, conscious use of numerous signs in the paradigmatic and syntagmatic axes is visible. Hence, one cannot ignore these signs. In this movie,

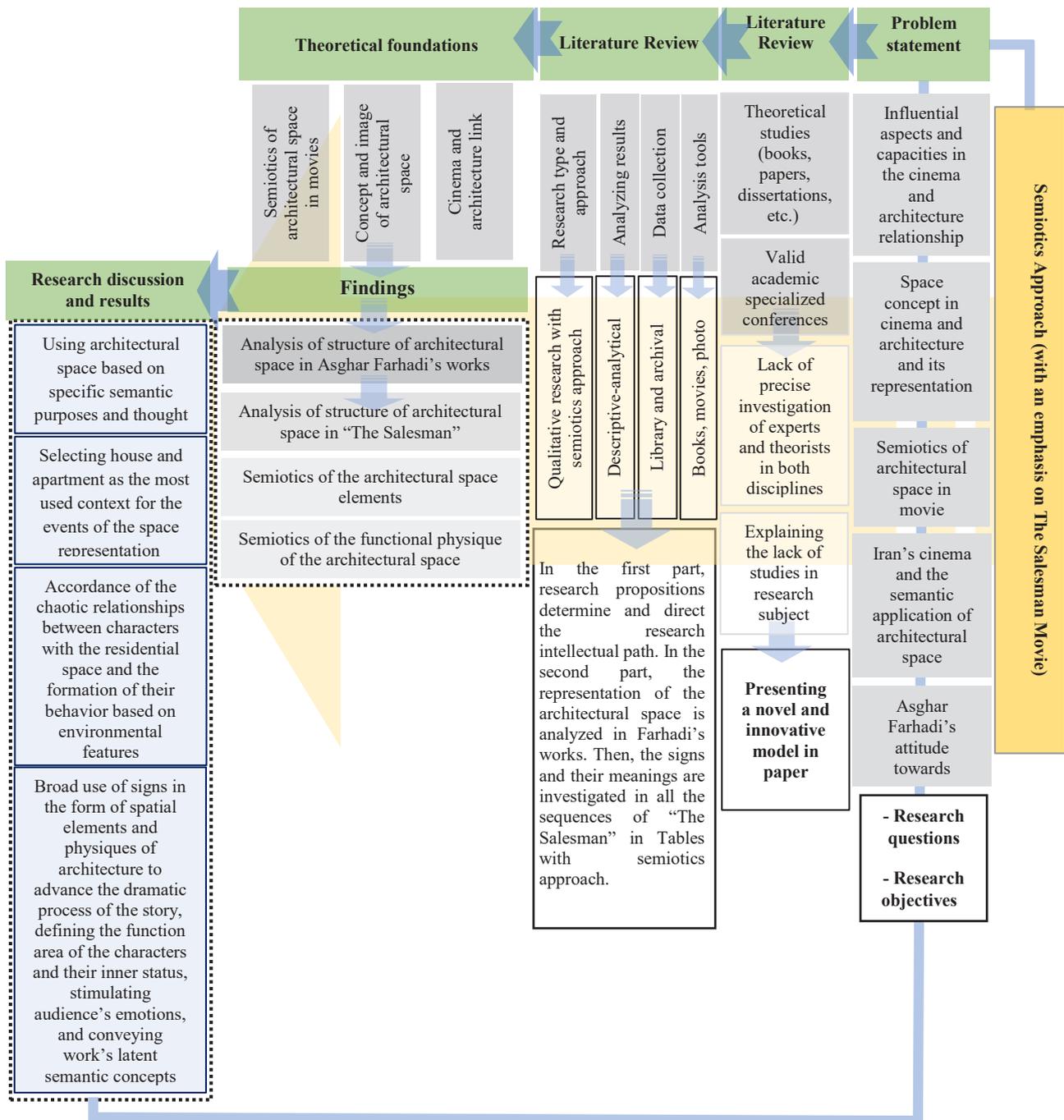


Fig. 4. Figurative abstract and framework of research general process. Source: authors.

various spatial elements of architecture are repeated frequently in some sequences; such as physique, texture, color, light, furniture, opening, location, etc. and in the form of signs, such as house, bed, red color, vertical bars, crack, chaos, etc. These signs are purposive and effective in expressing the

work’s latent meaning and concepts, the characters’ behavioral function, and forming the audience’s imaginations and feelings.

Finally, given the increasing link between cinema and architecture and conclusion of the meanings perceived from the analysis of architectural space in

Asghar Farhadi's selected works, it can be said that the capacities of cinema as a mainstream media, can be an effective representation medium for the transformation and enrichment of architecture. It can also be influential in transferring a part of the architectural works' meaning and affect their understanding and function. Also, semiotics can help visually organize the space of film events, inject thinking, characterization, and introduce the perceptual concepts of the story by accurate design and using appropriate architecture in cinema.

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