Space as a stage set in the negotiation of truth: the urban models of residential space in Greece in the 1950s and 1960s as projected by the Greek cinema

Dr. Constantine G. Deliyiannidis
Architect, Greece

Summary (1)

This essay is a presentation of the development of the model of a theoretical tool for the reading of real space through the ascription of meaning to and description of the organisation of the space of the home as a product of the dynamic co-existence of three variables: the containing shell, the furnishings contained, and the people who live in this whole. The variable 'man' is related to the variable 'space' through the cinema, a medium which imprints parameters of the human factor and credibly projects commonly accepted models of ideologies and approaches. Use has been made of this methodological tool with the interest of the research centred on the study of the manner of structuring and representing the space of the residence as a realised expression of the activities which the subjects engage in, by categories of social strata, and on how this spatial organisation expresses principles and ways of life. The fact that the expressions of representation of space at a given time by different directors who are concerned with the same type of space at roughly the same period appear to be the same or almost the same is a confirmation of the fact that these representations converge upon a true description of reality.

A first application of this methodological tool describes the dwelling-space in Greece in 1950-70, interprets the 'open' ground plan, decodes the use of the multi-purpose table in contrast with the settee, interprets the use of the corner in the domestic space, systematically maps the movements and the representational actions of the subjects, and introduces the concept of the inter-personal constant as a determining factor in architectural planning.

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The question which concerns us is how we can pronounce upon the relation of man with real space, and more particularly with the space of the house. On an initial hypothesis that the space is not understood merely as a totality of material structural elements, but as the product of the dynamic co-existence of three variables (the containing shell, the furnishings contained, and the people who live and move within this whole), the structuring of a theoretical tool for the reading of 'space in use' has been attempted. This methodological tool was first implemented in a description of the domestic space of the petit to middle bourgeois strata, in Greece in the period 1950-70.

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Taking it as given that the space is understood as the impress of human movements and representational actions, in order to study real space indirectly, a means was sought which would record actions. A means of research which is suitable *par excellence* and fulfils the above prerequisites is the cinema, which, though not providing any certainty that it is projecting the truth, nevertheless is a 'mirror' which credibly projects commonly accepted models of ideologies and approaches and makes use of codes recognisable and intelligible chiefly to the petit and middle bourgeois strata. Consequently, what films show are representations of patterns in accordance with the apprehension of the specific social stratum.

On these two hypotheses we undertook a study of cinema films, observing how the space of the home was structured and represented, as a realised imprint of activities which the subjects engage in, by categories of strata, and how this spatial organisation expresses principles and ways of life. If the expressions of representation of spaces at a particular time by different directors who are concerned with the same type of space, at roughly the same period, seem to be the same, or almost the same, this would be a verification of the fact that they are converging on a 'true' description of reality.

The corpus of the research material was assembled from cinema films with the shared characteristics that they are drawn from the Greek repertoire, and concern Greece, the plot takes place to a great extent in the space of the home, they deal with matters of human relationships in a socially fluid situation (because in these relationships typical situations are revealed which place emphasis on social gatherings) their date of production ranges from 1950 to approximately 1970, a period in which Greek society had started to recover from the catastrophic effects of the Second World War and which extends to a little before the military dictatorship, when a new period of defining 'rules' began, while at the same time, television made its appearance.

The style of the Greek cinema in the period 1950-70 belonged within the genre of social realism, influenced by trends which at that period were dominant chiefly in Italy and Britain. Consequently, what it represents is a realistic portrayal of the way of life and its conditions.

In order to interpret in the language of architecture what was projected by the cinema, two systems of parameters were used: the Conventions of the Tool of Representation (what does the cinema mean as a medium of expression, what is the role of the director, what is the role of the audience, what is the director's convention with the public?) and the Typology of Space (what does space mean and what is the typology of space?).

After a pilot examination of a number of cinema films, it was established that various kinds of organisations of spaces, furniture and behaviours are to be found in them, and that these are correlated. Furthermore, types of human character are identified with certain types of spaces and their behaviour varies in accordance with the kind of space in which their actions take place. This fact - that each change of character is connected with a change of space - gives a first indication that the space does not constitute a mere stage-set for the action of the characters, but a constituent of their identity itself.

One problem which had to be dealt with was the smooth transition from cinematic to objective reality. This bridging was achieved through the structuring of a classification of typical forms of the real space and of a second classification of forms of cinematic space.

By means of the pilot examination of films, two main cinematic types of houses were identified: the type with the sub-divided ground plan with 'closed' or 'open' rooms, and the type with an 'open' ground plan. The sub-divided ground plan with 'closed rooms' is characterised by spatial sub-division with a clear sense of the cohesion of the rooms. The sub-divided ground plan with 'open' rooms is typified by rooms with large doors or apertures, facilitates flexibility in the organisation of the space and behaviour, and makes possible visual linkage. The 'open' ground plan provides a purely functional utility: the user gains an arbitrariness controlled by himself. That is to say, while in a 'closed' plan everyone has to behave in accordance with the familiar codes, otherwise they are regarded as 'uncivilised', in the 'open', multi-functional, multi-focal plan, there is a consciously controlled arbitrariness in the air.

The codification of furniture, semantically bipolar, was achieved by reference to the kind of furnishing (heavy/light furniture), the homogeneity of style (one or more discrete styles per room), the organisation (in accordance with the shell or independent of it), the scale of the furniture, the tendency towards 'stage-setting' (centrifugal/centripetal), density, structure ('built-in' - incorporated into the shell/ discrete), flexibility (fixed, 'families' of furniture), and the use of the walls (overloaded / not overloaded).

The human body, as the third constituent factor in the composite entity 'space', is a vehicle of information, based on the unconscious constituents of behaviour, which makes use of the look, gestures, the posture of the body and all the non-verbal information. The dominant spatial bodily motifs of the films are a combination of postures, based, on the one hand, on 'geometrical' features (relative position, distance and angle of the axes of the body in company) and, on the other, on 'modal' characteristics (nature of stance of the body in company).

The structure of the analysis for each of the cinema films was divided into three parts:

1. Analysis of the narrative content of the film.

2. Analysis of the notional and symbolic content of the film: general observations, character traits of the two genders, type of shell of the house, references to the furniture, sitting-room, kitchen, bedrooms, open-air space, city, social gatherings - theatricality.

3. Reconstruction of the *mise-en-scène*.

3.1. Perceptive level of the use of the space:

3.1.1. Table of duration of projection of the architectural space (Table 01 /Diagram 01)

Title of film, Year of production			Type of residential space – Social stratum						
Readings of video recorder timer		Nature of space	Reception area	Corridor	Sitting-room	Dining-room	Kitchen	Bed-room	Miscella-neous
from	to		Duration of projection of architectural space.						
		Transfer from previous page	230	58	350	177	17	308	1,550
2,955	2,956	Sitting-room			1				
2,956	2,969	Architect's office							13
2,969	2,971	Sitting-room			2				
2,971	3,002	Architect's office							31
3,002	3,024	Kitchen					22		
3,024	3,050	Bedroom						26	
5,142	5,164	Nightclub							22
5,164	5,233	Sitting-room			69				
5,233	5,249	Courtyard							16
5,249	5,447	Sitting-room			198				
			262	61	1,000	177	52	347	1,851
			7%	2%	27%	5%	1%	9%	49%
			Total projection of visible architectural space				**51%**		

Table 01
Extract from **'Table of duration of projection of architectural space'.**

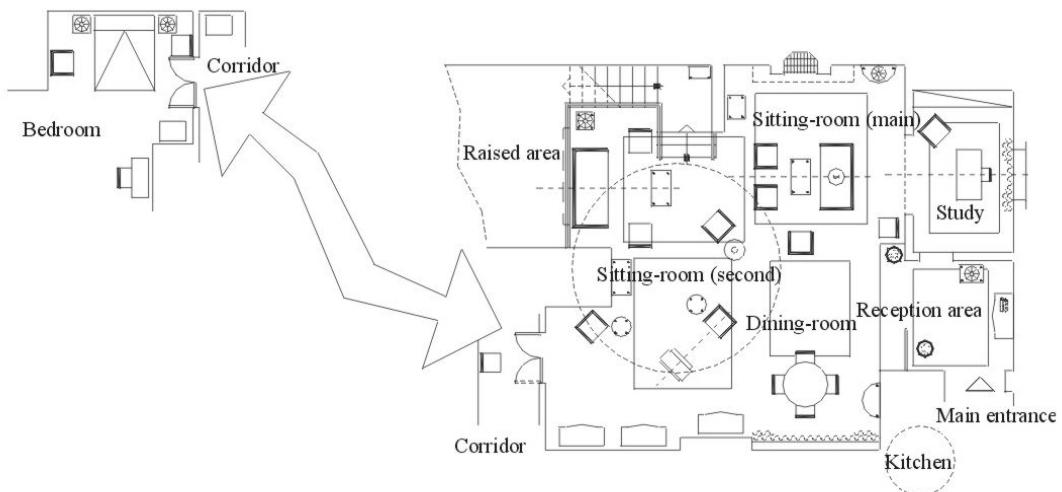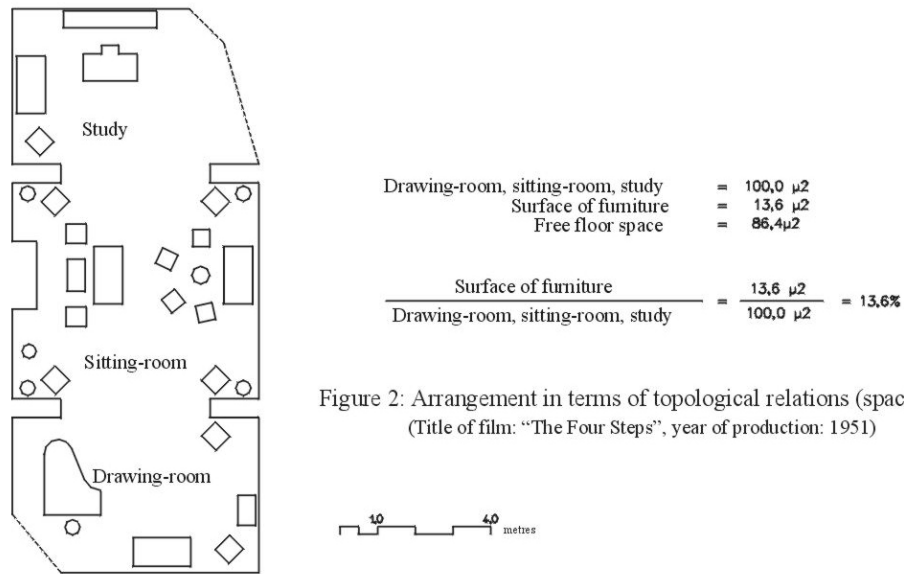3.1.2. Reconstruction of the space of the ground plan (Fig. 01):

Figure 1: Reconstruction of the 'stage' space of the ground floor
(Title of film: "The Lady-Killer", year of production: 1969)

3.1.3. Arrangement as to topological relations (spacing / concentration) (Fig. 02)

Drawing-room, sitting-room, study = 100,0 μ2
Surface of furniture = 13,6 μ2
Free floor space = 86,4μ2

$$\frac{\text{Surface of furniture}}{\text{Drawing-room, sitting-room, study}} = \frac{13,6\ μ2}{100,0\ μ2} = 13,6\%$$

Figure 2: Arrangement in terms of topological relations (spacing density)
(Title of film: "The Four Steps", year of production: 1951)

3.2. Ideological level of the use of the space:

3.2.1. Arrangement as to conventional organisation (typical / atypical ground plan) (Fig. 03)
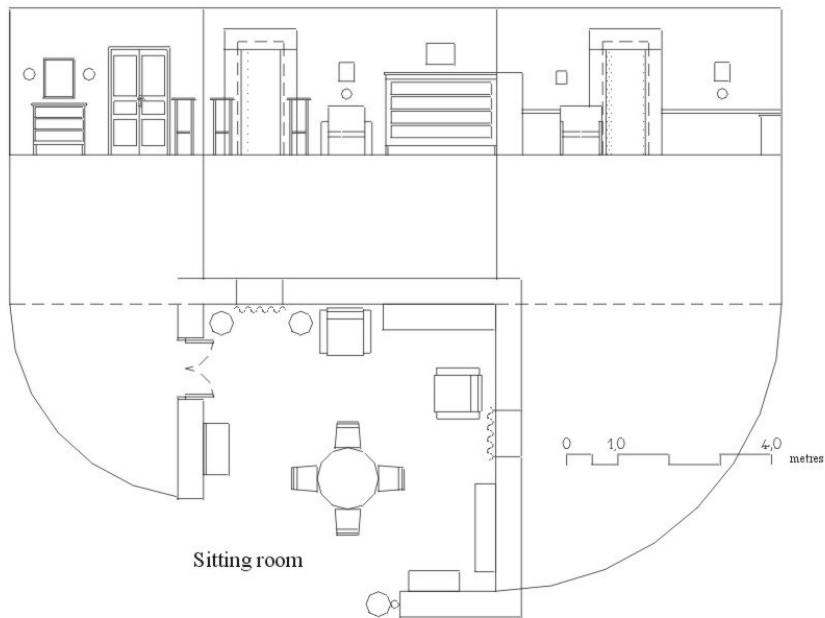

Figure 3: Arrangement in terms of conventional organisation (typical/atypical ground plan)
(Title of film: "The Woman Shall Fear the Man", year of production: 1965)

3.2.2. Arrangement as to homogeneity of style (multifariousness) (Fig. 04)

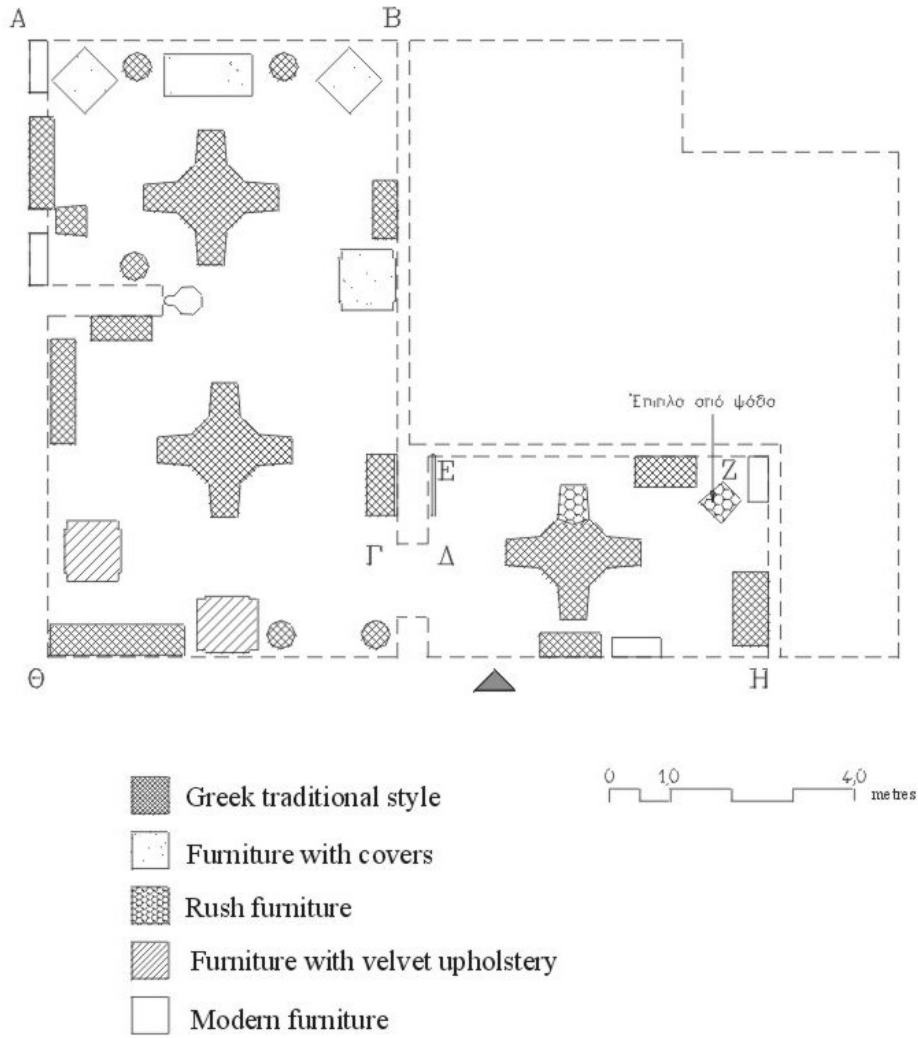
Figure 4: Arrangement in terms of homegeneity of style (multifariousness)
(Title of film: "The Woman Shall Fear the Man", year of production: 1965)

3.2.3. Arrangement of the spaces: diagram of overall views (ground plan) and individual photograph shots (Fig. 05)
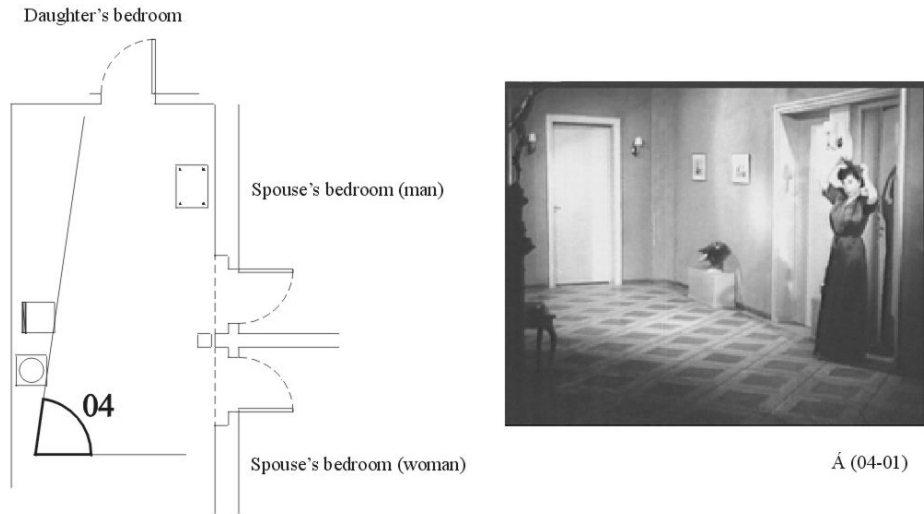

Figure 5: Construction of typology of organisation of thw spaces:
photography view of individual spaces and their correlations with the ground plan.
(Title of film: "The Four Steps", year of production: 1951)

3.3. Symbolic level of the use of the space: how people act and behave within the shell and among the furnishing

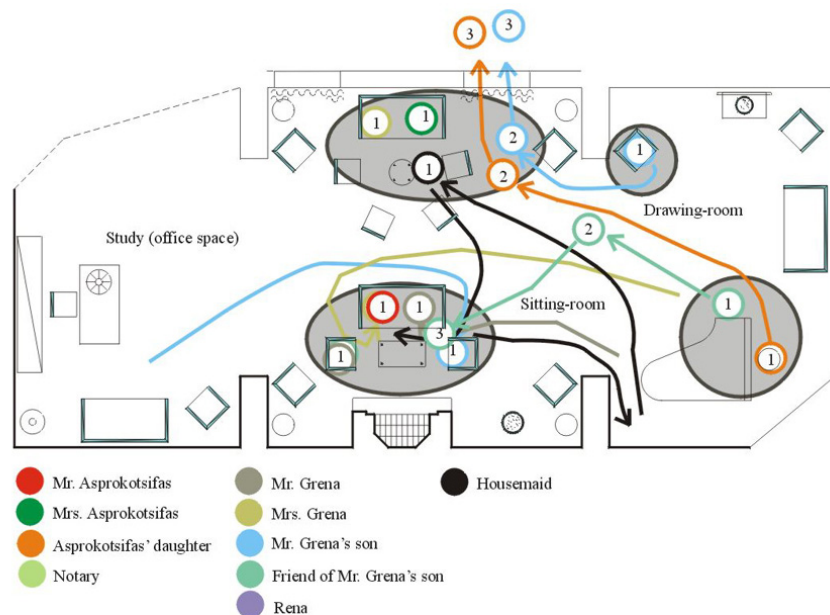### 3.3.1. Record of dynamic movements and behaviours (Fig. 06)

Figure 6: Record of dynamic movements and behaviours by scene
(Title of film: "The Four Steps", year of production: 1951)

3.3.2. Diagram of character development (Fig. 07).

Style

□   Four-square sense, positive, rationalist   ⬡   Emotional, Ideologue

Correlation with surroundings

Asserts himself   Vulnerable, easily influencec

Decisiveness

⟶ Knows what he wants, firm   ⟷ Irresolute, unstable

Social mobility - Economic standing

⎯⎯ Rich, successful   ⎯⎯ Poor, rising

Moral principles

◯ Knows what he bvelieves, firm,, with unwavering standards, honest   ◌ Without sure orientation, changeable, volatile, unreliable, with fluid standards

Example of human character

1) Four-square sense, positive, rationalist
2) Asserts himself
3) Knows what he wants, firm
4) Rich, successful
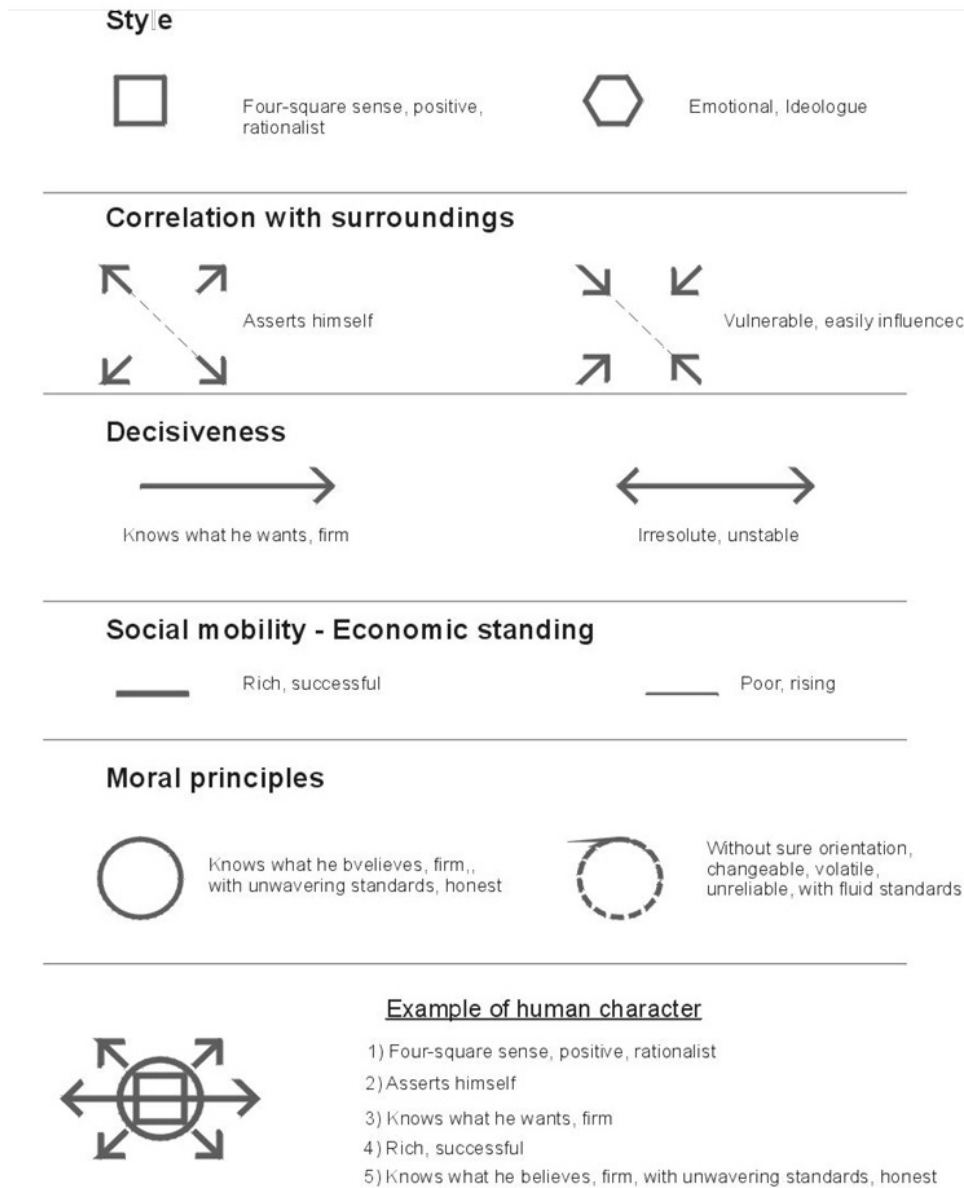5) Knows what he believes, firm, with unwavering standards, honest

Figure 07: Table of features of human character

The analytical processing of cinema films yielded a sum of data which were codified into four (4) semantic categories: way of life, relation between genders and ages, social class and negotiation of the truth.

This codification led to the discovery that there is a cohesion of concepts directly correlated with the function of the space: inter-personal constants, social mobility, penetration, depth, the dilemma, negotiation of identity, social recycling.

The Greek cinema in the period 1950-70 attempted to convey to its public certain commonly accepted rules as to behaviours, independent of social origins. This can be seen from the repetition of the same motif: people with differing life-styles whom the plot of the film requires to mix with one another and to negotiate finally come to know one another in depth. What is being put forward is the idea of human nature - which I term an 'inter-personal constant' - as a more profound shared background. The role of this 'constant' is a double one: it is the key to a multi-level approach to aesthetics, and it plays a part in the activation of social mobility. And because living in human society is a perpetual act of individual and collective creation, the individual in each social stratum is in search of new and better ways for that living to structure itself and function. Consequently, social mobility is a means of negotiation of social position, with a direct reference to space.

During the period under review, the quality of movement within the ground plan changed. First of all, the ground plan 'opened up', then it became multi-functional and multi-focal, and then the arrangement of the furniture was 'liberalised', and, finally, behaviour changed. The chief characteristics of the 'open' plan are related to questioning, mobility, instability, the lack of a feeling of familiarity with the space, with something volatile. The 'open' plan is a transitional state of affairs. The society to which we are referring was in the stage of its post-War reshaping, and therefore not culturally mature enough to assimilate and handle new ways of life. It accepted the new socio-spatial model and interpreted it by adulterating it. The idea that a member of the bourgeoisie lived in a house with an axial arrangement of spaces and that his/her behaviour was marked by a certain theatricality seems to have corresponded to Greek society. Up to now, movement had either been the movement of the self-assertion of the 'boss' or the nervous movement of the insecure, guilty or humble person.

Gradually, we have the free movement of the body as one of liberation. The boss becomes someone whose figure remains fixed. And finally, a direct and categorical linkage between movement and crisis is observable. When, within the logic of the screenplay, extreme plot situations are enacted, the behaviours tear apart the codes of established conduct. In these crises, theatricality increases and the 'spatial process' is one of an increase in mobility.

It is within this 'cinematic social process' that penetration into the personal space of the subjects with a view to the negotiation of truths is effected.

Often, in the cinematic domestic space, emphasis is placed on how unapproachable a certain individual is. The bipolarity 'depth - appearance' contains a reference to the indication of status. In the lower social strata, there is no 'depth': there is a succession of spaces. The audience indiscreetly penetrates a home of the poor, to see the suffering hero. In the higher social strata, access to the spaces of the house is selective.

The significance of 'depth' is related to the epicentre of social encounters which negotiate above all the identity of the subjects. All this, of course, presupposes a policy of behaviours, a kind of negotiation of a theatrical character, which takes place

in each type of architectural space, sometimes with a distinction between 'front stage' and 'off-stage', and sometimes without this.

In these films, we can undoubtedly discern features of the domestic space and features which fluctuate between the extremes of a scale - dilemmas. One of the central dilemmas as to space, as this is constituted through the eyes of the lower and middle bourgeois class, relates to the type of 'open' plan: is this a tool for decoding identities, things and behaviours, or is it perhaps a field for negotiation and theatre?

The petit bourgeois is accustomed to a model of absolutely tidy space in which everything has its proper place. He lives in spaces which are enclosed, symmetrical, ordered. This basic model is shattered when he attempts to imagine himself living in the 'open' plan, and he realises at the same time how his way of life differs from that of the rich. In his mind he fantasises about the 'open' plan and he looks for its meaning. Is it simply open? And it is precisely here that the rules which he has known up to now are overturned. In the 'open' ground plan, the rich man handles space in such a way as to show how he can control everything theatrically. Nothing has its own specific place. Everything is negotiable. This, for the petit bourgeois, is an upheaval. He does not seem to comprehend the new approach of everything being open to negotiation. He is confused. He seems adrift. The terms for dealing with the 'open' plan, a status symbol of the upper social strata, are unclear. It is a field of negotiation and theatre, where, as occasion demands, rules of 'visible' or 'invisible' pedagogy are applied. The poor function only with 'visible' pedagogy, and for that reason lose the game played with the rich. As we descend the social scale, the typology of the space tends towards the enclosed sub-divided ground plan.

Consequently, the 'inter-personal constant' serves in a functional character as the canvas on which the idea of 'socio-spatial recycling' is worked out.

In the light of the analysis as a whole, the observations have been grouped into three basic categories by subject.

The first category, the space of the house overall, is summarised in two sub-tables. The first sub-table has as its object a summary of the observations on apprehension and the nature of the ground plan of the space of the home. The second sub-table concerns the symmetry of the shell of the space of the house and the individual autonomous arrangements of the furnishings of the sitting-room.

The second category, concerning the sitting-room and dining-room, is formulated in three sub-tables. The first portrays the trend in and density of the arrangement of the furniture, the second the nature of the furnishings, and the morphological style and structure of the furniture, and the third the flexibility in moving the furniture, the use of the walls and the display of small ornamental objects. That is to say, the criteria for selection of use and the nature of the furnishings of these two domestic sub-spaces are clarified.

People function in those spaces which are truly functional. It is frequently the case that the 'formal' dining-room lags behind the 'everyday' eating-space from the point of view of the organisation of the space precisely because it is rarely used. In order to define the place of meeting and mixing, the units as a whole have been condensed on

to one level by film (Fig. 08: Mapping of movements and behaviours, use of focuses), and in this way the overall outline of activities has been formed. As we ascend the social stratifications, the focus of meeting is transposed from the multi-purpose table and the chairs around it to the settee and armchairs with the coffee-table in between them. The position of the table or the settee, as the case may be, has the best 'visual field'. With 'social class' as a variable, the correspondence between 'ground plan' and 'furniture' produces the two fixed poles of 'open plan - settee' for the upper social strata and 'closed plan - table' for the lower.
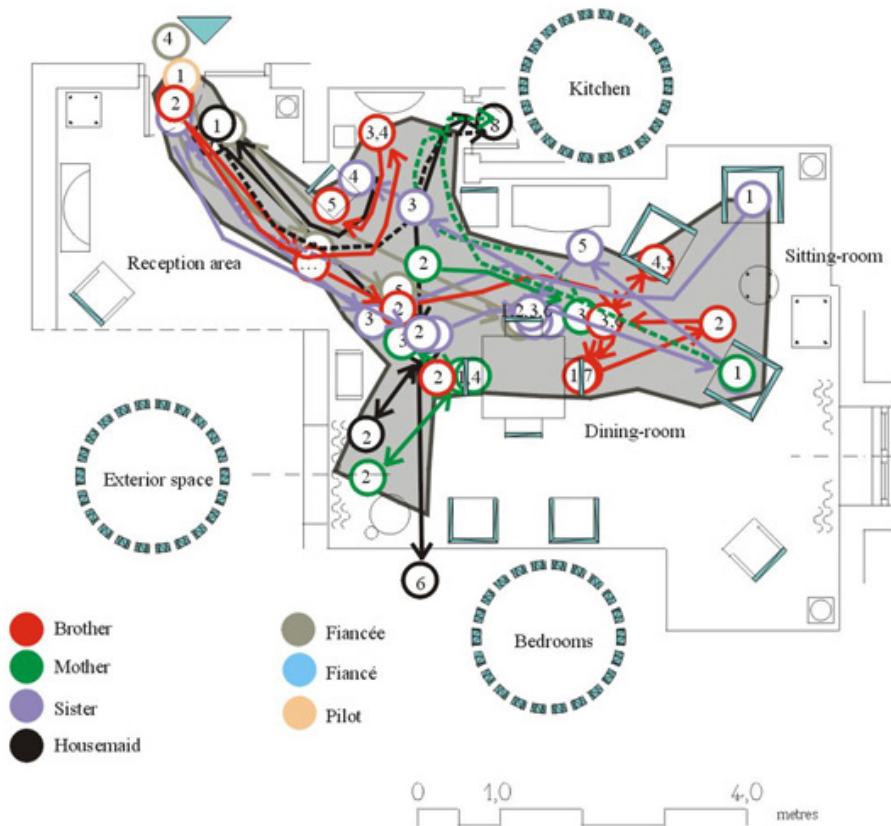

Figure 08: Mapping of dynamic movements and behaviours, and use of focuses
(Superimposition of all the dynamic movements in all the scenes per film)
(Title of film: "Thanassakis in Politics", year of production: 1954)

In the decade 1950-60 we are within a model of strict segregation of 'work' from 'home'. The main code for the positioning of the furniture in Greek houses in these films refers to social gatherings. The corner is not employed to create an individual space of voluntary isolation. The director seems to wish to emphasise an on-going feeling that the furniture is organised so that we can be 'together'. The empty corner is disturbing, so decorative rather than functional objects are as a rule put there. As we near the end of the 1960s, some functional item of furniture, even awkwardly, is located in the corners. The ornamental objects have been removed and an effort has been made by the director that the corner should not be stressed as an area.

Finally, the third category is concerned with the kitchen: the degree of visual penetration and the quality of the working conditions.

The observations from these three categories are summed up in a Table of Conclusions (Table 02) and the characteristics of the space of the house can be categorised by stratum as follows: the upper social stratum lives in an 'open' ground plan, it has as its basic pole of gathering the settee with the armchairs and the coffee-table, and strong '*classification*' (2) and strong '*framing*' are observed, while an invisible pedagogy is implemented. The middle class lives in a sub-divided ground plan with rooms opening on to the corridor, it has as its basic pole of gathering the settee with armchairs and the coffee-table, and adopts the customs of the higher class, persisting in these in a conservative manner. The lower social stratum lives in a sub-divided ground plan with enclosed rooms without a corridor, has the 'multi-purpose table' as its focus of gathering, while there is a weak '*classification*' and '*framing*' and visible pedagogy applies.

| Social stratum | Interior space of the house (overall) | | Kitchen | | |
	Apprehension	Nature of ground plan	Visual penetration	Orientation	Appropriation of space
Upper	Partial/selective apprehension	Sub-divided ground plan, 'open' rooms, without corridor	Closed cupboards	Sunny, airy	Use by the inhabitants - connotative stage-setting without penetration of the camera
Middle	Full apprehension	Sub-divided ground plan, 'open' rooms, with corridor	Open cupboards	Sunny, airy	Use by the inhabitants - connotative stage-setting without penetration of the camera
Bourgeois	Full apprehension	Sub-divided ground plan, 'closed' rooms, without corridor	Open cupboards	Sunless, non-airy	Use by the inhabitants - connotative stage-setting without penetration of the camera

| Social stratum | Sitting-room (use of space) | |
	Functionality	Multi-focal potentiality
Upper	Single-purpose	Multi-focal
Middle	Single-purpose	Multi-focal
Bourgeois	Multi-purpose	Single-focal

| Social stratum | Sitting-room (furnishing) | | | | |
	Trend	Density	Kind	Style	Structure
Upper	Διάχυτο	Spaced furniture	Heavy furniture	More discrete styles per room	Discreet
Middle	Centrifugal	Spaced furniture	Light furniture	One style	Discreet
Bourgeois	Centripetal	Concentrated furniture	Heavy furniture	More discrete styles per room	'Built-in' - inorporated into the shell

| Social stratum | Sitting-room (furnishing) | | |
	Flexibility	Use of walls	Visual penetration
Upper	Fixed, 'families'	Overloaded	Open cupboards - objects exposed on the shelves
Middle	Fixed, 'families'	Overloaded	Open cupboards - objects exposed on the shelves
Bourgeois	Movable, detachable	Overloaded	Closed cupboards - objects exposed on the shelves

Table 02
Conclusions

Because the behaviours and movements take place with reference to the furniture and around it, the question of how far the postures of the bodies are influenced or even determined by its presence is of interest. Various behaviours are enacted around an item of furniture: in some cases a relaxed and in others a tense relationship develops. The space which *par excellence* seems to be the recipient of the full scale of behaviours is the 'vital' space of the item of furniture. The films provide an opportunity to establish that in everyday practice, in which the presence of individuals is mixed in with the use of the furniture, the principles of design are circumvented and other principles, which at first sight would be regarded as 'unorthodox', are implemented. That is to say, other informal behaviours take place, which, though on a first level of interpretation are seen as exceeding the rule, at a second level are typical of 'real' life and the 'human' trend towards liberation from the restrictions and norms of the conventional rules of design.

To sum up, the present essay describes a methodological tool for the reading of real space in use. A first implementation of this tool deals with the space of the residence in Greece in the period 1950-70, with particular emphasis on the interpretation of the 'open' ground plan (with the aid of the semantic framework of Bernstein) not as liberation or an essay in greater control and in sharper criticism, but as a codified reading, depending upon social origins, it decodes the use of the multi-purpose table in contrast with the settee, observes the differentiations in the use of the 'corner' in the space of the home, systematically maps the movements and the representational actions of the subjects, and introduces the concept of the inter-personal constant as a determining factor in architectural planning.

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(1) This text is based on the research which I carried out while working on my doctoral thesis. Thinking on the correlation of space and the cinema (as a study of manners and customs in Greek life) is in essence non-existent at the level of an integrated bibliographical review. In order to bring out this correlation, I was forced to carry out primary work which is not marked by a wealth of bibliographical material. As to the theoretical approaches to the issue of the house as a vehicle of social relations (social logic of the household space), I have borrowed theories and viewpoints from Bill Hillier, Julienne Hanson, Yannis Peponis, Robin Evans, Mark Girouard and Basil Bernstein.

(2) Basil Bernstein employs the idea of 'visible pedagogy' for systems of pedagogy which explicitly manifest the rules of the process and 'invisible pedagogy' for systems of pedagogy in which the codes are deliberately disguised because the subjects are required to be aware of them through hints or indirect expressions.