"DOGVILLE": THE HYBRID CINEMA SCENE WITHIN LINEAR SPACE MONTAGE

Ali Asgar ÇAKMAKCI

Department of Painting, Faculty of Fine Arts, Zonguldak Bülent Ecevit University, TÜRKEY.

aacakmakci@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This article examines the effects, decisiveness, and functions of the spaces, splitting the cultural codes, on human behaviour. The spaces are organized with the dialectical relation between human and space; each can create the other. These relations are also questioned. The structural analyses have been made in the context of the artistic interventions related to the spaces and the film 'Dogville', which was shot in the specific space setting, is taken as the ground for such analysis.

Keywords: Space, grotesque, art, cinema, 'Dogville'

HUMAN AND SPACE

In nature, every living being needs a space, which is the most basic requirement for existence. Space is dialectic because it is the product of a mutual relationship as both determinant and being determined. As an extension of human, we can see space as the product of a prosthetic approach. In this dialectical relationship with space, as the needs change, space also undergoes a change and transformation. Space becomes tame at the ratio of the socialization of human who creates it because there is no chance for a person to live outside of tamed nature. The person who created his own nature has created the value of his own life in the created spaces. While the person who creates the space to live, s/he is also to create the space that carries and protects the spiritual values. We can say that space is a paradigm of existence that constitutes a way of life that embraces human cultural norms.

> *The space that the human organizes for himself will reveal the values of the human about himself/herself and his/her relations with the environment in the sense of spaces' light, openness, closeness, loneliness, greatness and smallness (Erzen, 2006, p.80).*

A meaningful life requires the spaces where this meaning is produced because the spaces are the most meaningful carriers of life. In this way, every space serves the different functions of life. These functions become a sign of the social relations in which these functions are also produced. The people who organize the spaces cause us to see social and cultural representations not only as a collection of objects but as a field of abstraction in which significant emotions and considerations have meaningful relationships. The technical, economic and ideological organization of the spaces constitutes the most essential vital signs of the produced cultures. Every space tries to build its own model of human behaviours that it demands in a functional context. Especially, it is planned to reduce the intervention of the people living in authoritarian spaces. It changes and transforms their feelings and behaviours without noticing them. The main factor created by the authoritarian spaces is the feeling of alienation and untouchability. The feeling of alienation and untouchability can be transformed into cultural deterioration by reflecting on the relations between people. In

Copyright © 2018

authoritarian spaces, individuals subservient to authority, away from diversity and change, submit themselves to power. The reason for this is the conceptual dimension in the perceptual process of space, which shows for what reason space is designed. The walls separating the space from the other spaces contain the arrangements of vitality and objects trapped in the limited space. Because public space cannot belong to anyone in the framework of the terra nulliuus, people establish passive ties with these places. Because the passive and inactive nature of these spaces causes people to withdraw into their own private spaces, therefore the influence and strength of authoritarian spaces improve. All the signs in the space are politics in terms of reflecting the practices of a certain lifestyle. The dialogue that the space creates forms the network of relationships between inside and outside. The walls, doors and windows that separate the interior of the room from the outside form the cultural dynamics of the space. For example, the gates of a space are the boundary line between the outside and inside. Everything that forms the space is organized through the wholeness of the space. Separative, limiting and unifying elements take role in this spatial organization. The elements used in the design of the space give important clues in reading the cultural codes that guide human behaviour. Reading a space looks like the recognizing and describing a culture.

THE EXTENSION OF LIMITS WITHIN ART AND SPACE RELATIONSHIP

On the plane of human existence, art is not one of the vital needs of human beings. However, we can say that it is the most important activity of the human beings who questioned and realized his/her own existence emotionally/intellectually and distinguished himself/herself from other creatures. For this reason, artistic activities constitute the cultural values of life in a social structure.

> *If our reaction to the environment shape our social structures or/and our arts, our social affairs and our art provide a silent testimony to the quality of our reactions to the environment (Kepes, 1996, p. 177).*

The relation of the space with art is variable depending on time and place. In this natural process, sense of art and art objects re-examine their relations with space. Especially today's forms of art have the hybrid relationships with space in the sense of using different means. In this context, especially in relation to contemporary art with space, artists produce new meanings and values by changing the meaning of the space with interdisciplinary studies using the data of space. The artistic interventions made in the space cause a change in the meaning and value of the different functions of the space for people, such as accommodation, secretion, protection, closure, enriching the space by opening fictitious readings.

> *It can be difficult to determine whether people perceive space differently according to the cultures, but the arts of describing space in arts, such as architecture and painting, are indicators of how and where people see and evaluate themselves in certain cultures (Erzen. 2006, p.35).*

Each art discipline creates its own space on the level of its standpoint or it is incorporated into the spaces that created before it. The projection of the art in the spaces is a reflection of the identity value changes of the spaces designed only for the function.

> *On the expressive nature of forms, the new architectural patterns, multihued and textual values can be introduced with the cooperation of talented architects, painters, designers and sculptors. We have to learn to build each building not*

> *only in its material and structural principles, but also in the nature of the life it contributes (Kepes, 1996, p.180).*

Architects working with artists and designers of other fields can transform the environment and the architectural structures that make up this environment into an art object. The spaces created in this framework can open up more democratic, more constructive and more creative relationships.

THE RELATIONSHIP OF CINEMA WITH SPACE

As an art branch, cinema is a component of other art branches. In this sense, the power it holds is borrowed from painting, sculpture, music and literature. As other art branches, cinema enriches life by creating infinite number of imaginary realities, expanding the boundaries of already given perceptions and the limits of the world's reality. In a magical journey from known to not known, it creates experiences of monitoring, recognizing and meeting new meanings in the eyes of the other. In this regard, we can think of it as the sum of all forms of art because it is addressed by our multiple sensual organisms together with the forms of visualization, poetry and music.

> *In the cinema, the identities of person and decor are on shaky ground. That is the power of the cinema. Indeed, the reality of the work does not guarantee that these identities will continue outside the boundaries of the frame (Bonitzer, 2007, p.16).*

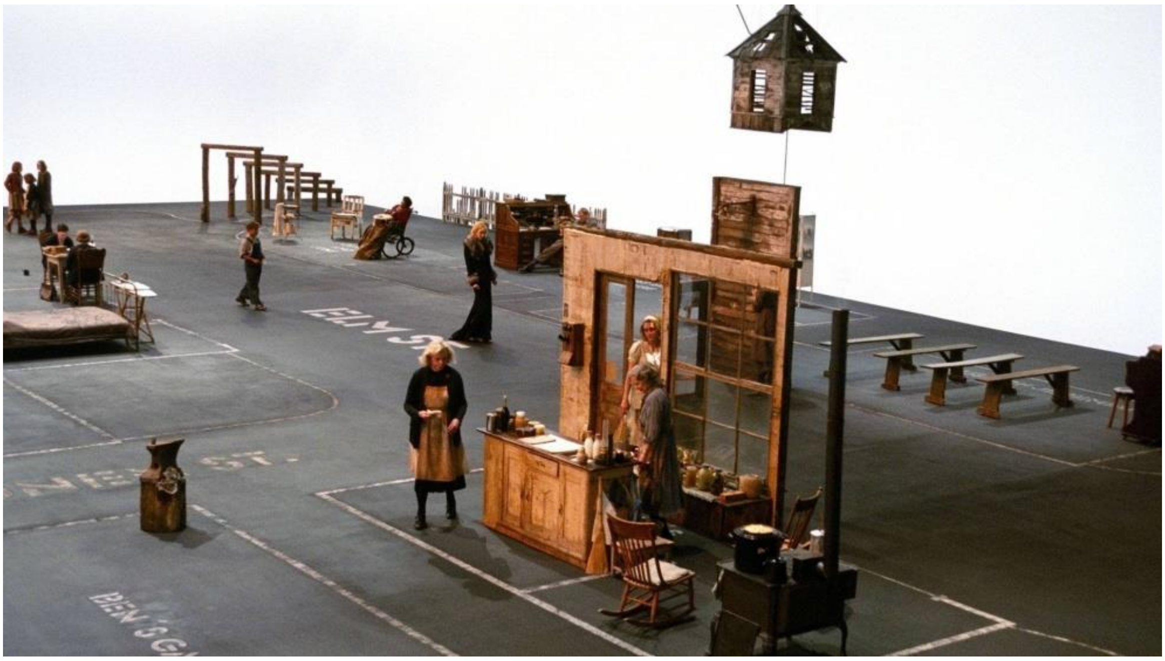
In cinema, the space is created as the imaginary space, generally designed by the screenwriter or director, in accordance with the theme. That is why every fiction in the cinema transfers its meaning through its own space. While the cinema uses the space in general, it creates a deception, causing the audience to change the perception of the real space and form a richer perspective. The viewers can identify with the story to be described emotionally in connection with these venues on the cinema stages and discover an outside world of their own culture. While designing venues in the cinema, human characters are designed in the background. The psychological perception of the space gives the hints of many relationships, which cannot describe with words, about the living people. Therefore,, spaces are the bearer of the most basic ideas and emotions in the designs of films. The originality of the films can be creative with the original space design of the script and the director.

LINEAR (HYBRID) SPACE

Like other art branches, cinema has the visual and intellectual contents from the ideological and aesthetic aspects. The screenplay, of course, reflects the cultural and ideological perspectives of the directors and artists working on this field in the selection of shooting techniques.

> *We know that the issue of viewpoint reflected by a film is politically an ideologically fundamental problem and often leading to intense debate (Bonitzer, 2007, p. 23).*

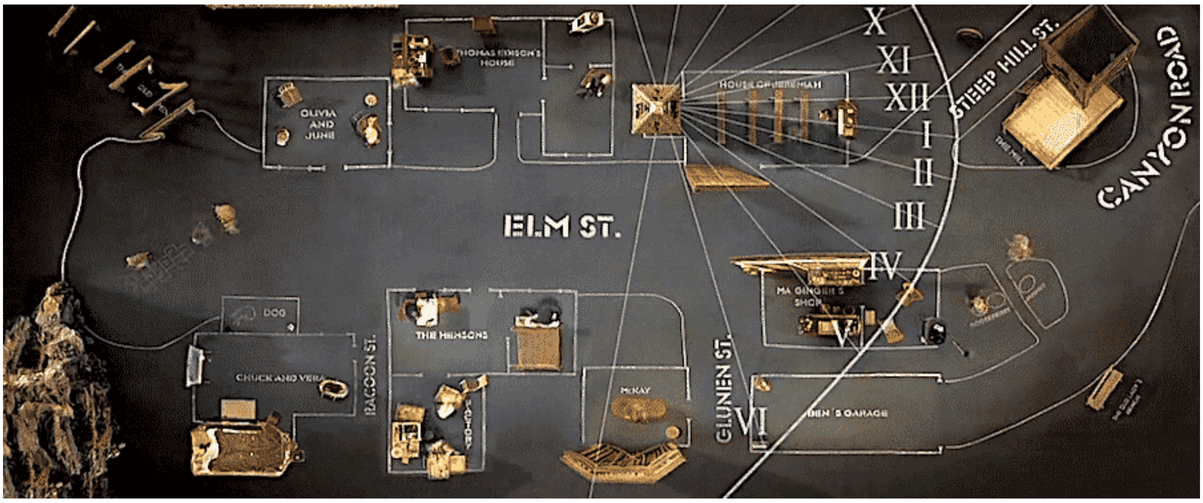
Lars Von Trier, known as an extraordinary director, is an original artist who reflects his political ideas on his films. Lars Von Trier's "Dogville," which was made in 2003 and the first of his American trilogy, was filmed with the hybrid space setup. The film 'Dogville' implicates the theatrical space horizon that we are not used to see in the movie scenes.


ELM ST.
ELM ST.
BEN'S G

(Image 1)

> *Cinema is not a theater. However, it has a relationship with the theater. The theater is the pushing back of the cinema: with its stylized décor and exaggerated gestures, the old closed Italian scene is where the cinema is in a certain form - a certain cinema in a certain way - assembled camera movements, an open infinite, an asymptotic space scene and an extra truth. Yet "The Secret Behind The Door" types films have an extra feature: the pushed back door communicates with the theater (Bonitzer, 2007, p. 90).*

'Dogville' is filmed in a form that adumbrates the theater stage, and the whole process of filmmaking takes place in one place. As a film on the theater stage, 'Dogville' could be the most important representation in the cinema of hybrid space design. This cinematic technique encourages us to concentrate more on the mimics and characters of the actresses with minimal decorations, costumes and close-up shooting techniques, and to read the film from this way.


THOMAS EDISON'S HOUSE
OLIVIA AND JUNE
HOUSE OF JEREMIAH
X
XI
XII
I
II
III
IV
V
VI
STEEP HILL ST.
THE MILL
CANYON ROAD
ELM ST.
MA GINGER'S SHOP
DOG
CHUCK AND VERA
RACOON ST.
THE HENSONS
FACTORY
McKAY
GLUNEN ST.
BEN'S GARAGE

(Image 2)

The film locales in a mountainous town called 'Dogville' in America. In the film, the spaces that are theatrically constructed through the architectural plan drawings are actually a sketch or a two-dimensional architecture. In the film, 'Dogville' does not have a cultural memory in the sense of the topographical decors of the place without trees, vegetation and nature depictions. Since the location does not being shaped geographically, it makes the spaces unidentified and refers to the film content with superficial and linear effects. The superficiality of the spaces seems to be infected with the characters of the people living in the spaces. The viewer perceives the spatial experience of the story in the film as two-dimensional and linear. In the perception of this linear space, the viewer is faced with the alienated reality in the face of the artificial space image and the screen. This point of view situates the intellectual activities of the spectator in front of the visuality.

These linearly created spaces turn into three-dimensional spaces in viewer's mind during the film watching process. Within the process, the spaces create a sense of reality and allow us to focus more intensely on the film story.

> *The achievement of reality is only possible with a basic rejection of the following continuous and homogeneous reality that constitutes the environment surrounding the work: the stage of material, heterogeneous and discontinuous reality, the stage of production of its work. This is also the scene, but a scene differentiates from a classical scenography in which the dulled film crew rush and a more or less heavy apparatus of technical assistance works (Bonitzer, 2007, p.17).*

Throughout the film, in our minds, the pre-existing real space image exchanges with the spaces that were created in the film. These linear spaces actually create incomplete or sketchy perceptions that allow the viewer to redesign them in their imaginations. The 'Dogville' town also has the possibility of opening the inside to the outside in a transparent space instead of the spaces formed by the walls. The space created by the décor has been removed from the walls that make up the image of the houses and the inside is opened to the outside. Also, in a sense, the private spaces are transformed into public spaces. There are social identities that interact with each other in the relation of spaces to people. The reflections of the cultural identity of the societies on the places also make up the identities of the individual's personalities. The forms of organization of spaces constitute the most accurate indicators of social conditions. Moreover, in the film, public spaces are transparent like private houses. The gloomy power of authority and the symbols of power are transformed into a transparent space. Since there is no specific space in the film, the viewer's attention is focused on not the space but on the characters of the people who create the space. We start to perceive the space when these characters are being resolved, or vice versa, and we can read things that they do not reflect on the behaviours of the characters. The linear spaces created in the 'Dogville' include a situation that overlaps with the content of the film: the linear spaces and the characters are tied to reality by taking the feelings of touching the space. Thus, spaces are simply converted into visual templates.

It seems that Trier argues there is nothing to hide in the installed clean are. The limitedness of décor opens the way for us to read symbols by offering different kinds of information about the characters. Also, through these symbols, the characters also give clues about what they hide. They never cross the boundaries of the lines that define space, because they are the boundaries of the perceptions of the actual habits.

(Image 3)

The lack of windows and doors in the film creates the alienation effect by abstracting the door and window images in the viewer's mind with the sounds of opening and closing. As a result of this alienation, the viewer perceives the space and the actresses/actors as if in theater stage, in discordance with the cinema scene. The private lives of 'Dogville' town turn into public with a planar and linear structure of it and this gives clues to the fact that everyone becomes similar with sharing their common knowledge of what they live in. The spaces we use as shelters in our lives are also the symbol of our social status and our economic power. These features, which bring people together or separate them, have been ignored in the film, but it has included the design of the perception of space in the viewer's mind. The spaces enrich the audience's perception in terms of dynamic and dialectical associations. The walls, gates and windows that symbolize the space were placed symbolically, and the main structure of the space was partially removed from the center and the different viewpoints were created. This makes think the methodology of deconstruction in the sense of the transforming of the perspective technique, used in the Renaissance, into a miniature painting technique, pointing out how objects should be seen, instead of what they look like. These conflicts in our perceptions present different possibilities through new meanings and designs. The decorations in the linear space get meaning with the attitudes and behaviours of the characters. Culturally, architectural elements are geography and time. Due to the lack of architectural elements and linear perception in the film, geographical bases and time elements were also wanted to be removed from this film. Therefore, it is possible to create different geographical and time associations that each viewer has in his/her mind. This allows viewers to have more emotional connection with the characters. These characters are as if the people I know in my neighbourhood or my district. This analogical point of view links every human being to the “human” characters in his / her cultural environment in terms of the perception of the film. In the film, the main characters function as if a melting pot in which there is no cultural difference. 'Dogville' represents a frozen time in which everything is the same and unchangeable. The change in space necessarily involves the change in time. The fact that there is no change in the spaces has also abolished the change of people over time. The director does not build on a story that has been edited in time and space, but in the inner world of the character. People want to go but they cannot go, because the film shows that there is no past nor future in this town. It seems to imply the impossibility of change. We can see this as the stable behaviours of the characters in the end of film. The reduction of the fundamental difference and individual similarities between the people of the town open up the possibility of a disidentification and corrupt society. The people, who show the basic features of their spaces, share the fate of sameness as they are in order not to be different from their environment. The processes of cultural and moral corruption of the ‘Dogville’ town have gained visibility with an outcomer and it also ends with this character. In this dimensionless town, everything that resists changing comes to the conclusion with its timeless and non-extended being. Also, this end analyses the closed societies which resist developing with being fictionalized on the impossibility of change.

> *Impossible is a ground of the stable objection that human society cannot get out of it without being uninsured and dangerous. It is the objection to the world of beneficiary and the dimensionless world. It appeals to the disintegration of the individuals who are slaughtered by totalitarian societies, who struggle to suppress all sorts of clustering societies before they appear. The objection to parasitism of all kinds of power (Besnier, 1996, p.262).*

This impossible society is the 'Dogville' town, which resists change, includes all kinds of moral degeneration and gives justification to its habits as a reason for existence. The fact that you do not change means you do not have a life or future. Another feature of using a space as theater stage is that the theater stage creates a closed space depiction. This outward closure gives clues that the end of the narration described at the beginning of the film will not change until the end of the film. The dystopian structure and the lack of depth in linear spaces also implicitly give information about the characters. While spaces and decorations introduces the knowledge about the characters and what the film is about, they also explode into living beings that show the dialectical information between man and space. Our senses determine our feelings; our feelings determine our reflections on spaces. In this sense, the reactionary differences of individuals, who are creators of private spaces, will inevitably include differences in public spaces.

> *The ideal, utopian society would be then a society in which the domains of "public" and "private" are clearly differentiated, a society making possible to every individual and community the free pursuit of "the different sorts of little things around which [they] center their fantasies and their lives," a society in which the role of social law is reduced to a set of neutral rules guarding this freedom of self-creation by protecting each individual from violent intrusions into his private space (Zizek, 2008, p. 202).*

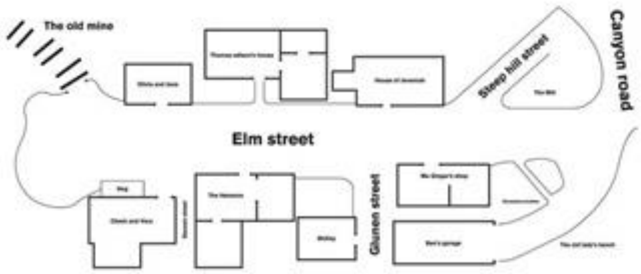
This dissolution at the borders of the 'Dogville' town indicates that the living individuals were different, but they became similar. The moral corruption of characters has created a social bond that connects them to each other. In the film, there is no three-dimensionality and deepness. It is these spaces that refer to the coexistence and identify the characters with space.

> *Any society needs strong moral sanctions to make people tolerate, much less experience positively, duality, incompleteness, and otherness. Those moral sanctions arose in Western civilization through the power of religion. Religious rituals bonded, in Peter Brown’s phrase, the body to the city. (Sennett, 2008, p. 336).*

The use of the light that creates the space adds the third dimension to the linear space, just as it is in the theater. In the film, the emotional response of people to certain colors is composed through light plays in the sense of using different light tones to increase tension in certain moments. This linearity in the design of space and decor gives the message that it is not always real, giving the feeling that we are in a theater play. Because all the events happen in an open space, it makes easier for the audience to focus on the story, and the audience's three-dimensional sense of space is obliterated. At the beginning of the film, we look at the town of Dogville as if we are looking at a plan on an architectural scale, which creates a viewpoint that is insulated from all other things that show the boundaries. It is actually an architectural look that directs the viewer's point of view to one thing. The living atmosphere created by the architect's view overlaps with the atmosphere created by the director in the cinema. The architect is a designer who designs spaces to live in and manages them on a human scale.

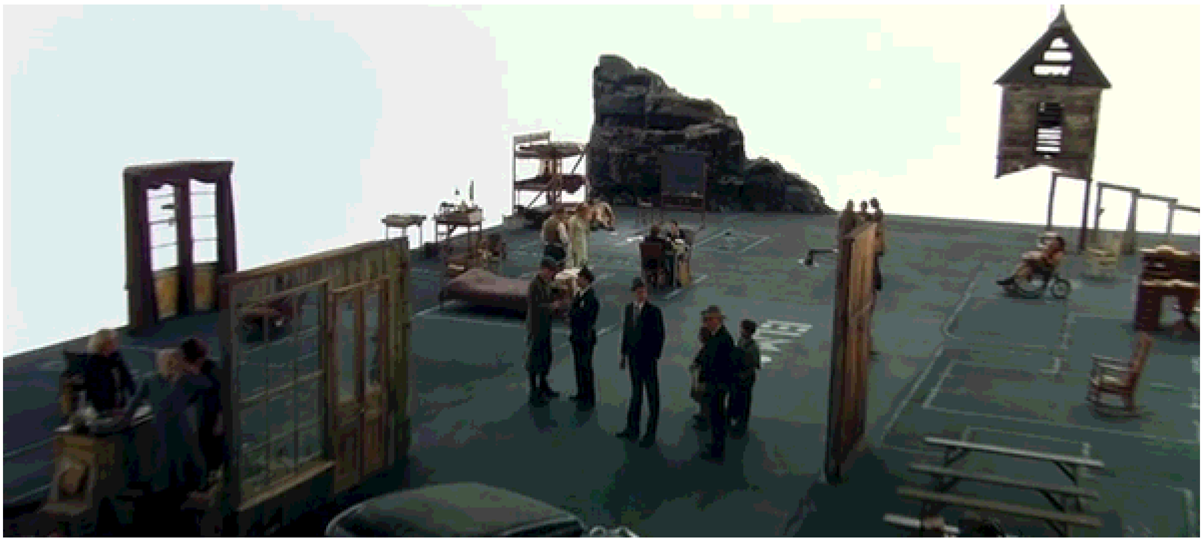
> *The architect shapes spaces so as to give them social utility as well as human and aesthetic/ symbolic meanings. The architect shapes and preserves longterm social memories and strives to give material form to the longings and desires of individuals and collectivities (Harvey, 2015, p.246).*

In a sense, the cultural life created by the cinema in the space is in parallel with the architect's point of view.



(Image 4)

In this sense, designing two-dimensional spaces, the director has also reduced people's lifestyles and characters to the surface. In the frame of the events taking place on the theatrical scene, the characters in the film and the audience actually face as if they are in a theater stage. The depth of different view and the grotesque approach to linear and surface spaces are the two main factors that constitute the film's success.



(Image 5)

By focusing on the characteristics of minimal decorations, the director's hybrid space design means the massless of the spaces and introduces the relations between the goods and the people. These linear spaces point to the public space that represents the opening of the windows. This new point of view includes abstract and different aspects. In this way, decorations contain clues to read the film's characters. The blind character, whose house is unique with having a window in the linearly created spaces, narrates what he imagine in his mind although he cannot see. This scene applies to the viewer as well as the blind character because the viewer recreates the 'Dogville' town in his/her imagination with a three-dimensional space in despite of linearly edited. Cinema has always needed a space editing to tell a story and we can see the 'Dogville' film as a philosophical and sociological rebellion to the space scene of the usual/standard films.

REFERENCES

[1] Besnier, J. M. (1996). *İmkânsızın politikası (La politique de I'impossible)*. İstanbul: Ayrıntı Publishing House.

[2] Bonitzer, P. (2007). *Bakış ve ses (Le regard et la voix).* İstanbul: Metis Publishing House.

[3] Erzen, J. (2006). *Çevre estetiği.* Ankara: ODTÜ Press.

[4] Harvey, D. (2015). *Umut Mekânları (Spaces of Hope)*. İstanbul: Metis Publishing House.

[5] Kepes, G. (1996). *Kent ölçeğinde dışavurum ve iletişim üzerine notlar* (*Notes on Expression and Communication in the Cityscape).* İstanbul: Yapıkredi Publishing House.

[6] Sennett. R. (2008). *Ten ve taş: Batı uygarlığında beden ve şehir (Flesh and Stone: The Body and the City in Western Civilization)*. İstanbul: Metis Publishing House.

[7] Zizek. S. (2008). *Yamuk bakmak: Popüler kültürden jacques lacan'a giriş (Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan Through Popular Culture).* İstanbul: Metis Publishing House.

Copyright © 2018