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CONSTRUCTING A CINEMATIC WORLD:
THE ROLE OF ARCHITECTURE IN PARK CHAN WOOK'S FEATURE FILMS, 1992-2016

By
Minhae Shim Roth

A THESIS

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Park Chan Wook is one of South Korea’s foremost contemporary film directors. This thesis examines the evolving role of architecture in nine of Park’s feature-length films, beginning with his directorial debut in 1992 with *The Moon is…the Sun’s Dream* to his most recent work in 2016, *The Handmaiden*. Through the lens of auteur theory, the thesis draws connections between Park’s personal relationship to architecture and the representation and use of buildings and their spaces in his films. Analyzing the films in chronological order, the thesis documents how Park’s use of architecture changes throughout his oeuvre. The thesis weaves together biographical information and diegetic data to explore how Park’s architectural aesthetic develops throughout his directorial career.
DEDICATION

For Danny.

And indeed there will be time
........................................
Time for you and time for me,
And time yet for a hundred indecisions
And for a hundred visions and revisions

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I would first like to thank my advisor and chair of the thesis committee, Dr. Richard T. John, who has guided this thesis from its early stages. Throughout the entire research and writing process, he challenged me to achieve my highest potential. I am incredibly appreciative of his creativity, commitment, and accessibility. His mentorship has encouraged me to grow as an academic and a person and I will carry the valuable lessons he has taught me throughout my career.

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LIST OF CONVENTIONS

Foreign Languages

The English titles of the films given in the body of the thesis are those under which the movies have been marketed internationally. The source Korean language titles are provided in the footnotes for research and accessibility purposes.

English translations of written Korean sources are provided in the body of the document, while the source Korean is provided in the footnotes. While most of the Korean text is in Hangul, some older texts use Hanja, which are Chinese characters that have been incorporated into Korean language. The thesis also includes a few sources in other languages, like Japanese and French, which are treated in a similar manner.

There are several ways to transliterate Korean names. This thesis has elected to use the naming convention as shown in the writing of the director’s name here: Park Chan Wook, in which the Last/Family name is written first (as is done traditionally in Korean culture), followed by a separation of the first and second syllables of first name. Other naming conventions hyphenate the first and second syllables of the first name (i.e. Park Chan-wook), sometimes capitalizing the word after the hyphen. For this thesis, if a Korean name is published with a hyphen, that naming format appears in the citations and directly quoted material. However, if that person is referred to in other parts of the thesis, their name appears in the chosen convention described above for consistency.

In both the footnotes and bibliography, Korean names are written as Last name First name (without commas), unless explicitly presented in the source in Westernized form (First name Last name). In the latter case, the bibliographic citation has a comma between the Last and First name. Citations of Korean language texts follow the same
format as Western citations as dictated by the Chicago Manual of Style 17th edition. However, the source Korean text is provided next to the translated information.

Films & Images

As per convention in film studies, the first time a film is introduced, the date of release is noted in parenthesis. The names of a film’s production designer and/or art director are noted for each film; some films do not list a production designer, in which case the art director is named.

Most of the data about a film’s date of release, crew, cast, budget, locations, distribution, box office earnings, etc. are collected from the International Movie Database, IMDb, or its affiliated site, Box Office Mojo.

The film stills and other images in this thesis are the property of the film producers and distributors. They are reproduced here under the “fair-use” provision of the Copyright Act.
INTRODUCTION

Since his feature film debut in 1992, Park Chan Wook has established a reputation as South Korea’s most illustrious film director, earning him the appellation of the “representative ‘commercial auteur’ of Korea.”¹ As Park has developed a status as an iconoclastic director, his feature film oeuvre has changed and transformed over nearly a quarter of a century, from 1992 to 2016. This master’s thesis critically examines Park’s feature-length narrative films over this period, focusing on the evolving roles of architecture and its surrounding space in his films.

This thesis is undertaken at University of Miami’s School of Architecture as a written research project. Nevertheless, the work is interdisciplinary in nature and approach. Amalgamating the three disciplines of architectural, film, and cultural studies, the thesis analyzes architectural works in the films’ diegeses within the context of Park’s biography, South Korean history, film-specific production and distribution information, and other concomitant historical and cultural developments. Because any work of art or architecture cannot be divorced from its sociohistorical context without significant loss of meaning, this thesis considers the many factors that influence both a work of the moving image and of the architecture that it presents.

The body of the thesis begins with a biography of Park Chan Wook in Chapter 1. The remainder of the thesis, Chapters 2 to 10, investigates each of Park’s feature films as an individual artifact of study and analysis. The films covered in the thesis include all of Park’s feature film works, from his directorial debut, *The Moon is…the Sun’s Dream*

(1992) to his most recent work, *The Handmaiden* (2016), with the exception of Park’s second film, *Trio* (1997), which is no longer in public circulation.

Each chapter on a film begins with contextual information about the film and a synopsis, followed by an in-depth analysis of architecture and built space within the film’s diegesis. The contextual information consists of relevant research, including the film’s budget and box office sales, crew and cast information, interviews with the director, significant historical and cultural concepts that influenced the film’s production or meaning, set design and location scouting information, and a brief literature review for each film.

The second part of each chapter consists of the architectural analysis, which is informed by several theories and methodologies. First, the interpretation is undertaken with the assumption of auteur theory, the idea that a film’s director expresses their interests, obsessions, and preferences through their artistic medium, that of film. In 1948, French New Wave director and critic Alexandre Astruc, published “The Birth of a New Avant-Garde: La Camera-stylo,” an essay that contributed to auteur theory with respect to the evolving concept of the film director in the mid-twentieth century. He described cinema as a language that functions as a medium for individualistic expression:

> The cinema is quite simply becoming a means of expression, just as all the other arts have been before it...it is gradually becoming a language. By language, I mean a form in which and by which an artist can express his thoughts, however abstract they may be, or translate his obsessions exactly as he does in the contemporary essay or novel.²


Continuation of passage: “That is why I would like to call this new age of cinema the age of *camera-stylo* (camera-pen). This metaphor has a very precise sense. By it I mean that the cinema will gradually break free from the tyranny of what is visual, from the image for its own sake, from the immediate and
Astruc theorized about the identity of cinema in a climate where filmmaking was experiencing a re-evaluation and, as a result, juxtaposing its relationship to other arts, such as literature and painting. Later, in 1969, Michel Foucault delivered a lecture at La Société française de philosophie titled, “What is an Author?,” in which he declared the importance of the author, the auteur:

The coming into being the notion of ‘an author’ constitutes the privileged moment of individualization in the history of ideas, knowledge, literature, philosophy, and the sciences. Even today, when we reconstruct the history of a concept, literary genre, or school of philosophy, such categories seem relatively weak, secondary, and superimposed scansions in comparison with the solid and fundamental unit of the author and the work.3

Foucault acknowledged “the disappearance—or death—of the author some time ago” in criticism and philosophy.4 However, in the lecture, he re-examined the consequences of the theory that were overlooked. In a similar fashion, this thesis reclaims and resurrects auteur theory because artists draw on autobiographical elements to shape and define their work. Thus, the idea of cinema as a canvas for an artist to express their identity and merit their signature is applied to an analysis of the architecture in Park’s films.

The second theoretical underpinning of the architectural analysis of each of Park’s films lies in a remark that German film director, F.W. Murnau, made to then-neophyte director Alfred Hitchcock, “What you see on the set does not matter. All that matters is concrete demands of the narrative, to become a means of writing just as flexible and subtle as written language…It can tackle any subject, any genre. The most philosophical meditations on human production, psychology, metaphysics, ideas, and passions lie well within its province. I will even go so far as to say that contemporary ideas and philosophies of life are such that only the cinema can do justice to them.”


4 Ibid., 207.
what you see on the screen.”\textsuperscript{5} In analyzing the films, each chapter largely focuses on the architecture that is seen on screen. In the discipline of film analysis, the term “mise-en-scène,” literally translating from the French to “put in the scene,” refers to everything that appears in a film’s frame. This includes items of architectural interests, such as setting, décor, and props, but also involves costume and makeup, lighting, and staging.\textsuperscript{6} The term is used frequently in the thesis to refer to components that contribute to the depiction of architecture or a space in a film. While some chapters include information about process of set design and location scouting, the interpretation of the role of architecture is applied primarily to what is presented to the audience and, for the most part, not privileged information about the production process.

Finally, the analysis and interpretation of the role of architecture in the film is achieved through formal analysis of the architecture in the film and through a loose methodology of hermeneutical theory, as presented by Paul Ricoeur. In “Writing on film as art through Ricoeur’s Hermeneutics,” Ditte Friedman argued:

Despite the broad interest in film as an essential aspect of contemporary life, there is no generally accepted and theoretically rigorous method for film analysis suited to a broad range of scholars. The rich tradition of hermeneutics provides such a method…Using Paul Ricoeur’s theory to interpret film requires a structure anchored in five key themes. These five themes are (1) explanation and understanding, (2) symbol, (3) metaphor, (4) narrative, and (5) imagination.\textsuperscript{7}

The architectural analysis in this thesis thus engages not only in formal analysis and description of the visible aspects of architecture, but also undertakes an interpretation of


\textsuperscript{7} Ditte Friedman, “Writing on Film as Art through Ricoeur’s Hermeneutics,” Journal of Writing in Creative Practice 3, no. 2 (07, 2010): 161-162.
the meaning of the presented architecture through these five key themes.

Each film has been watched multiple times and methodically examined for significant locations that provide a deeper understanding of the role of architecture within the particular narrative. For comparative purposes, in films that show a place more than once in the narrative, the locations discussed in the chapter may not be presented in the same order as they appear in the film. To identify the different locations in the film, I have used screenwriting conventions for scene headings (“sluglines”) to identify whether the camera is placed within the interior or exterior of a location, an identification of the building, structure, or location, and whether the scene is set during the day or the evening. While the screenplay headings resemble those used in circulating screenplays, the ones used in the thesis are of my own invention and are not drawn directly from Park’s scripts.

Because the topic of this thesis is on a South Korean auteur, the research was conducted in both English and Korean. In addition, given the contemporary time period of the project, some of the sources are drawn from news media, film reviews, and blog posts, while others are from academic books and journals. The dialogue of the primary sources of the thesis, Park’s films, are mostly in Korean, with the exception of Stoker, which is fully in English, and The Handmaiden, which uses both Japanese and Korean.

Through undertaking this research, I produced observations and conclusions on auteur Park Chan Wook’s development of the use of architecture throughout his oeuvre, which are presented in the subsequent chapters.
Chapter 1 : BIOGRAPHY

Perspective

In his monograph on Park Chan Wook, Kim Young Jin, a film critic and professor at Myongji University, recounted an encounter with Park when he was an undergraduate student studying philosophy at Sogang University in Seoul, South Korea. Kim overheard Park declare his respect for Alfred Hitchcock, saying that repeated viewings of Hitchcock’s *Vertigo* at Sogang’s student film club educated him on “what really drove directorial talent for creating screen images…Falling in love with the film, he saw it several times and felt that he too had to become a director”\(^8\) Kim explained that Park has a reputation for voraciously watching, reading about, and writing about films, naming him, “The proverbial ‘guy who’s seen too many movies,’ one who has steadily maintained a passion for film from youth to the present. He is one of those artists whose

\(^8\) Kim, *Park Chan-wook*, 3, 131.
desire to watch movies is as strong as an appetite for food or sex." However, Park does not only consume works from the discipline of film, but also from many of the arts. Kim documented:

[Park] is an educated man who likes movies, culture, the fine arts, and music, and he is the kind of director who reconstructs his stories based on imaginative power gained from other artworks…The background he grew up in was very proper. Even now, as he enters middle age…he passes his days as a sincere scholarly type that lives with a book under his arm.¹⁰

This existing biographical information brands Park as an “academic,”¹¹ which leads to the conclusion that Park has been immersed in encounters with and conversations about the arts and the humanities, architecture included, throughout his life. Kim even described that Park’s directorial creativity is derived from independent study of other works of art.

In addition to acknowledging the existing biographical information documented by Kim and others, this chapter presents a series of details about Park’s personal relationship to architecture that have been, to an extent, previously unacknowledged that support the claim that Park’s use of architecture in his directorial career is influenced by his personal history. This chapter discusses Park’s relationship with architecture by examining his family history and the design and construction of his personal residence in South Korea. In addition, the chapter suggests how these experiences correlate with the representation and use of architecture in his body of work.

¹⁰ Ibid., 4.
¹¹ Ibid.
The Park Family

Park Chan Wook was born in Seoul, South Korea in 1963. Various sources of biographical information, including Kim’s monograph, state that Park was raised in an artistic environment with a university professor father.\(^{12}\) However, almost all existing biographical accounts seem to have overlooked important details about his parents’ professions. Park’s father, Park Don Seo, is a professor emeritus of architecture at Ajou University. In 1996, professor Park published the book *Color of Architecture, Color of Cities*,\(^{13}\) which documented and explored the role of color in architecture and urban design in South Korea and around the globe. In addition, he has published many journal articles on architectural color design, such as: “Urban Surrounding and Color Planning for Building” (1987),\(^{14}\) “The Practice and Attitude of Architect’s Color Planning for Building Exteriors” (1987),\(^{15}\) and “Research on the Psychological Effect of Color on Korean Primary School Children: A Basic Study on the Effect of Color of School Architecture” (1983).\(^{16}\) Park Don Seo has researched the relationships between color,

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\(^{13}\) Park Don Seo 박돈서, *Color of Architecture, Color of Cities* 건축의 색 도시의 색(Seoul: Gimundang 기문당, 1996).


\(^{16}\) Park Don Seo 朴暾鎬, “Research on the Psychological Effect of Color on Korean Primary School Children: A Basic Study on the Effect of Color of School Architecture 우리나라 국민학교아동의
design, psychology, and architectural practice throughout his academic career. In Park Chan Wook’s films, architectural color design is extremely prominent, suggesting the director’s familiarity with his father’s work: at most, an understanding of his father’s research paradigm and methods, and, at least, a basic visual and verbal vocabulary to understand the use of color in the built environment.

The remaining members of the Park family are also engaged in the arts. According to biographical sources, Park’s mother is a poet17 and Park Chan Wook’s younger brother, Park Chan Kyong, is a visual artist, practicing primarily in the fields of photography and experimental film. He earned a Master of Fine Arts (MFA) in Photography at the California Institute of the Arts and has participated in solo and group exhibitions in Asia, Europe, and the United States.

The Park brothers have also collaborated frequently. Park Chan Kyong worked as the art director for Park Chan Wook’s debut film, The Moon is…the Sun’s Dream (1992).18 In 2000, Park Chan Kyong made a 15-minute short film titled Sets,19 which juxtaposed 35 mm slide projections of images of three types of “sets”: the film set of Park Chan Wook’s third feature film, JSA: Joint Security Area, sets constructed to resemble Seoul at the Korean Film Studio in North Korea, and set constructions for war

17 Kim, Park Chan-wook, 4.


19 Korean title: 셋트.
simulations in South Korean army bases. Since 2011, the two brothers have collaborated in creating documentaries, short films, and a music video under the title “PARKing CHANce.” In an interview, Park described his artistic relationship with his brother:

When my brother went to America to study the arts, I tried to convince him to go to film school. And back then I was talking to my brother, “you go to film school and once you’re finished we can direct like the Coen brothers, co-direct films.” Because [with] the Coen brothers, one brother went to a film school and the other brother went to study philosophy, just like how I went to study philosophy, and if my younger brother had just listened to me and went to film school, we would be exactly the same as the Coen brothers [laughs].

But my little brother said, “no, I’m going to study fine arts.” But after having returned to Korea and establishing himself as a media artist in Korea, now he’s started to become interested in filmmaking. And that’s one of the reasons why I started working with my little brother to co-direct these short films. So far we’ve been keeping our collaborations to a small scale. I think it’s an interesting way to collaborate, and interesting projects to do as the brother team. I think it would be fun to do more experimental work under this brother brand of PARKing CHANce, and do stuff like documentaries or even TV commercials maybe, and more music videos (which we’ve recently done). We are agile about how we work, and we’re able to work on smaller budgets as well, very much guerilla-style. That’s why we named the brother brand PARKing CHANce. If we see an opportunity to park the car we’ll get right on in there.

As Park mentioned in his interview, he was not trained as a filmmaker, but learned about the art through independent study and professional experience in the industry. Although he was initially interested in studying aesthetics as an undergraduate, he lost interest in the department because of its focus on Western analytical philosophy. Kim writes that the

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director joined a photography and film club, where he experimented with image-making and film theory. Later, he worked as an assistant director on Kwak Jae Young’s debut film, *A Watercolor Painting on a Rainy Day* (1989), but left the job due to difficult working conditions. Thus, while Park was not formally trained as a filmmaker, the personal and academic environment in which he developed proved supportive for an education in architecture and the visual arts.

**Overview of Park’s Career**


In an interview, Park reflects on his career as a film critic:

That work is something that can be very important and can be fun. But for me, the work was the one I did to put bread on the table for my family. So I only have memories of it being a burden and a lot of work. You see the predicament: I want to be making my films, but here I am spending all my time watching other people’s films and analyzing them.

In 1992, Park presented his directorial debut, an independent film titled, *The Moon is...the Sun’s Dream*, which received little critical attention. In an interview, Park admits that because no official critic was interested in writing a review of the film, he

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23 Kwak Jae Young went on to direct *My Sassy Girl* (2001), a romantic comedy that was the highest grossing comedy of the year of its release. The film was turned into an American remake in 2008.


25 A compilation of Park’s film criticism is published in a two-volume set, titled *Park Chan Wook Montage and Homage*: 박찬욱의 몽타주 오마주 세트.

wrote one himself and submitted it under a pseudonym.\textsuperscript{27} Park’s second film, \textit{Trio} (1997),\textsuperscript{28} was neither a commercial nor critical success. Then, in 2000, Park directed and wrote \textit{JSA: Joint Security Area},\textsuperscript{29} a commercial thriller about a violent incident that occurs between North and South Korean soldiers at the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ). The film was deemed a blockbuster, ranking first in the box office in 2000 with nearly 2.5 million admissions in Seoul.\textsuperscript{30} After \textit{JSA}’s success, Park abandoned this commercial and formulaic mode of filmmaking that had catalyzed his recognition, but continued to receive acclaim with his “Vengeance Trilogy,” which includes \textit{Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance} (2001), \textit{Oldboy} (2003), and \textit{Lady Vengeance} (2005). \textit{Oldboy} was awarded the Grand Prix at the Cannes Film Festival by a jury headed by Quentin Tarantino in 2004, which cemented his success as an internationally-recognized auteur.

\textsuperscript{27} Kim, \textit{Park Chan-wook}, 75.

\textsuperscript{28} Korean title: \textit{3 인 조}.

\textsuperscript{29} Korean title: \textit{공동경비구역 JSA}.

\textsuperscript{30} Jinhee Choi, \textit{The South Korean Film Renaissance: Local Hitmakers, Global Provocateurs} (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2010), 203.
The Jahajae Residence

In the early 2000s, when Park began to experience commercial and critical success as a filmmaker, he also started working with an architect to design a duplex for his family, the Jahajae residence. The residence is located in the Heyri Art Valley in the city of Paju in South Korea. Nestled in the mountainous Gyeonggi province about twenty miles north of Seoul, Heyri was conceived and formed as an arts community in 1997. The name “Heyri” is taken from a traditional farming song from Paju, titled “The

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31 “Jahajae” is a reference to Park Don Seo’s pen name, 자하제.

32 Korean name: 헤이리 예술마을.

Song of Heyri.” This experiment in town planning was originally designed as a “book village,” which would connect to the Paju Book City, a community dedicated to the production, preservation, publication, and distribution of books. However, the Heyri Art Valley, also referred to as the Heyri Art Village, expanded from a book village to an arts village when artists, writers, architects, filmmakers, and musicians moved to the area and began creating their own spaces—studios, residences, museums, and galleries—as the city developed. The master plan for Heyri stated that the community’s priorities are to create a creative, economical, and environmentally responsible city complex. Currently, Heyri is a global tourist attraction due to its unique architecture, cultural programming with daily performances, and marketplace for artistic goods. For the Parks, given their scholarly and artistic inclinations, the Heyri Art Village reflects, nurtures, and cultivates their interests in the arts and humanities.

34 Ibid.

35 Korean name: 파주출판도시.


The architect of the Jahajae residence is Kim Young Joon, the principal of yo2 Architects, who was professor Park’s former student. The house was designed from 2002 to 2003 and built from 2003 to 2005, during the period when Park was working on the Vengeance Trilogy. Fittingly, professor Park’s 1982 publication, “The Harmony of Rationality with Emotion in House Design,” articulates many components of the house that he came to live in about two decades later. In it, he writes, “Physically and mentally,

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the core of human activity is the house.” Indeed, the Jahajae residence, accommodates the mental and physical needs of the Park family though remarkable design and geographic location.

The house design has received local and international accolades, claiming the Korean Institute of Architects Award and the Special Award for Korean Architecture Culture in 2005. In addition, a model of the residence was exhibited in a collection at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City in 2010.

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Korean text: “인간생활의 물리적, 정신적 핵이 주택이며.”
Jahajae is a duplex that houses two families: Park Chan Wook and his wife,\textsuperscript{41} and Park Don Seo and his wife. Located on a square lot, the house is organized by a nine-
square grid with three projecting rectangular volumes on the horizontal axis. The residence, which is built of materials like exposed concrete blocks, steel, and glass, has one basement level and two stories above ground. Upon approach, the visitor is met with a two-car garage and invited into the residence by two ground-floor entrances that flank the garage. A mountain rises in the landscape and the front of the house is decorated with native vegetation, such as green shrubbery and Gingko trees.
Labyrinthine in circulation, the house is loosely based on the Alhambra in Granada, Spain. Designed as a garden partitioned by walls that create twenty-three different spaces, the lower level contains a series of small gardens planted with Italian balsam, flowering grass, birch trees, and peonies. Nearly fifty percent of the lower level has no roof, so umbrella-like coverings are utilized when it rains. Original renderings of the house show trees peeking up to the open air between the walls of the house. The house has four roof gardens on the second level, which are enclosed by metal railings around the perimeter of the block.

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While unique in design, the house can only be imagined as asserting a constant presence on its inhabitants with its narrow, maze-like hallways, limited storage space, and openings that expose the residents to the elements. The design of the house forces the residents to interact intimately with the constraints of the space, requiring them to reckon with the dichotomies between interior and exterior; absence and presence; the seen and unseen; the natural and the unnatural; confinement and freedom; reality and fantasy; safety and exposure. While these dichotomies are experienced by anyone when they step inside a building, the residents of Jahajae must cope with a significant mental and physical shift when they leave the natural landscape of Paju and navigate through the constraints of the architecture. Engaging with and living in this type of residence requires strategic choreography and constant spatial awareness. Park’s intimate experience with architecture and the other fine arts throughout his education and his professional and personal life provides a cogent justification for the examination of architecture in his films. The subsequent chapters will analyze the role of architecture in each of Park’s available feature-length films.

Context

Park Chan Wook began his directorial career in 1992 with a feature-length film, *The Moon is…the Sun’s Dream.*\(^{44}\) Park had worked for several years as part of the production team for M & R Film, the company that produced the movie, with the promise to be able to direct his first film with the company. During those years, Park assisted in distributing and publicizing low-budget foreign films in South Korea.\(^{45}\) After he dedicated sufficient effort and time to the company, Park was given the opportunity to embark on his first project as an auteur by both writing and directing *The Moon is…the Sun’s Dream.*

To secure the success of the movie, M & R Film cast a South Korean pop star in the lead role. The actor was Lee Seung Chul, who was a famed musician in the late 1980s. Nevertheless, the star power did little to secure a box office success. In an interview with Kim Young Jin, Park recounted his naive confusion between Lee’s popularity and the success of his film:

On the day of a premiere, there was a swarm of LEE Seung-chul’s teenage fans in the theater, but that was because he was signing autographs. I didn’t know about that, and I thought my debut was a hit. Once the weekend was over, you couldn’t find anyone in the theater. Basically, it bombed.\(^{46}\)

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\(^{44}\) Korean title: 달은... 해가 꾸는 꿈. The literal translation is, “The Moon is What the Sun Dreams of.”

\(^{45}\) Kim, *Park Chan-wook,* 75-76.

\(^{46}\) Ibid.
Financially, the film was a failure, as noted by Park. The film had a limited run in South Korea. Curiously, the film also had a release in Turkey, under the translation, *Ay Günesin Rüyasıdır.* However, it is difficult to find circulating copies of the film because Park has essentially disowned it.\(^{47}\) In addition to Park’s personal dissatisfaction with his debut film, reviewers have been highly critical. In *Fifty Contemporary Film Directors*, one critic wrote, “The film…is marred by an incoherent narrative, the male protagonist’s awkward performance (Lee Seung-Chul, a Korean pop idol at the time), and exaggerated theatrical narration.”\(^{48}\)

The film’s cinematographer was Park Seung Bae, an experienced director of photography who began his career in the early 1960s in South Korea.\(^{49}\) The art directors of the film were Do Yong Yu and Park Chan Kyong, the director’s brother. The film was made with a shoestring budget of 160 million won ($150,000).\(^{50}\) The film’s earnings are not readily available, though it can be assumed that they were paltry. In fact, information about the film’s production, including details about location and set design, is scarce.

In South Korea, the 1980s and early 1990s were a turbulent political period filled with violence and corruption.\(^{51}\) In 1980, South Korea reeled from the consequences of the Gwangju Uprising, in which students from Chonnam University who were protesting the


\(^{48}\) *Ibid.*


\(^{50}\) Kim, *Park Chan-wook*, 76.

government under Chun Doo Hwan were fired upon and killed by the Korean military. Chun Doo Hwan had risen to leadership by staging a military coup in South Korea after the previous president, Park Chung Hee, was assassinated in 1979 by his own intelligence chief. Korean university students and budding filmmakers were mobilized by this political unrest. In his book, New Korean Cinema, Darcy Paquet documented:

As these dramatic political developments were playing out on the streets, a group of socially conscious young directors were injecting a new vitality into the mainstream film industry. The Korean New Wave, as it was dubbed at the time by foreign film critics…[was] a generational shift, as students and activists who got their start in film clubs began to make feature-length work…it would last more or less until the mid 1990s when the next generation of directors emerged.\(^{52}\)

Released in 1992, The Moon is…the Sun's Dream straddles the time period of The Korean New Wave and its subsequent film movement, New Korean Cinema. Park is generally regarded as a central figure in New Korean Cinema and the global hanryu, translated as the “Korean Wave.”\(^{53}\)

While the film may not have been critically recognized or financially successful, it does demonstrate a burgeoning proficiency in developing mise-en-scène and the use of architecture. The film showcases Park’s sensitivity to built space and ultimately, the role of architecture in punctuating narrative. Thus, the film is valuable because it provides an opportunity to observe Park’s initial utilization of architecture in film.

The primary location of the film is a dual-purpose space that combines a photography studio and an apartment. This chapter will discuss the room in depth by observing how the architectural character of the space changes throughout the film. In

\(^{52}\) Ibid., 21.

\(^{53}\) Tasker, Fifty Contemporary Film Directors, 322-323.
The Moon…is the Sun’s Dream, Park presents a domestic and professional space to communicate the career, interests, and spiritual decline of one of the protagonists in the film, the photographer Ha Young.

Synopsis

The film follows the relationship among Mu Hoon,54 a junior gangster from Busan; Ha Young,55 a successful photographer; and Eun Ju,56 Mu Hoon’s girlfriend who becomes a successful model and actress at the film’s culmination. Eun Ju is originally the girlfriend of the mob boss, but she falls in love with Mu Hoon, and they run away with money stolen from the mob. The couple is caught and Eun Ju disappears. Mu Hoon eventually discovers her whereabouts based on a photograph hanging in Ha Young’s darkroom. The three individuals unite and live together in Ha Young’s studio.57 Ha Young encourages Eun Ju to become a model, despite a scar on her face; later, she undergoes plastic surgery to have the scar removed. Eventually, the gang finds Mu Hoon and Eun Ju by torturing Ha Young in his studio. The gang agrees to leave Eun Ju unharmed in exchange for Mu Hoon’s assassination of a mob target. However, Mu Hoon realizes that the target is his friend Man Su, and he abandons the mission. As Mu Hoon flees, he is shot and killed by the police. A year later, Ha Young dejectedly abandons his profession and the studio that the three of them shared. The film concludes as Ha Young watches a film starring Eun Ju at the movie theater.

54 Played by Lee Seung Chul.
55 Played by Song Seung Whan.
56 Played by Na Hyeon Hee.
Architectural Analysis

INT. HA YOUNG’S STUDIO - DAY/NIGHT

Introductory Scene

Figure 2-1

Figure 2-2
The audience is introduced to Ha Young after the opening scene that depicts his brother, Mu Hoon, being accosted by a mob after stealing the gang leader’s girlfriend and the organization’s money. After the title of the film flashes in neon lights behind a fish tank, the film cuts to a red-filtered freeze-frame with Ha Young, the photographer, grasping the walls with his hands and looking towards the camera. Ha Young’s intimate interaction with the wall signals the significance of architecture in his life, which becomes evident as the film progresses. The red filter is removed and the scene propels into action. Ha Young coaches a model into enticing poses as he shoots a series of photographs. In voiceover, the photographer says, “I am a camera.” This reference to photography and visuality is a narrative motif visited throughout the film, which is echoed in the set dressing of the primary location in the film.
In *Fifty Contemporary Directors*, Anne Cieko and Hunju Lee write about the nascent and promising use of mise-en-scène in the film: *“The Moon is...the Sun’s Dream* features the type of meticulous mise-en-scène displayed in Park’s later films.” While the writers fail to elaborate how or why Park utilizes mise-en-scène to achieve a particular narrative or visual goal, it is clear throughout the film that the mise-en-scène, achieved primarily by set dressing and interior decoration, serves to communicate personal details about the characters and the director himself.

The studio is large and cluttered with books, movie posters, a large science-fiction mural on the far wall, and photography equipment. One half of the room is dedicated to a wide white photography back-drop, lighting equipment, and props for the model. Two large leather Chesterfield sofas occupy the center of the room. A poster, propped up by the ground, reads, “1991 Tokyo International Film Festival.” A poster for the 1988 film,
Gran Bleu\textsuperscript{58}, hangs on the opposite wall. In one scene, Ha Young walks around the room with the book, *The History of Photography* by Beaumont Newhall,\textsuperscript{59} under his arm. The interior decoration of the studio communicates information about Ha Young’s character, but also references the director, who was familiar with foreign films and the film festival circuit as a result of his production experience at M & R Film.

As noted in the biographical chapter of this thesis, Park was raised in a culturally literate environment. Park’s collaboration with the film’s art directors, especially his brother Park Chan Kyong who, as detailed earlier, has a degree in photography, results in decisions to reflect his personal familiarity with the arts through the mise-en-scène established within the architecture.

One of Park’s directorial inspirations, Alfred Hitchcock, also approached set design with meticulous and autobiographical detail. Hitchcock was known as an art lover and art collector.\textsuperscript{60} In *The Wrong House: The Architecture of Alfred Hitchcock*, Steven Jacobs presented a memorandum from Hitchcock to his production designer and art director for *The Birds* (1963), in which the director articulated every component of the set for the Brenner House, including artworks and furniture:

Now we come to the thought as to how the main downstairs interior of the Brenner farm should be dressed. The first consideration should be that the Brenners are reasonably educated and literate people. Whether they had any taste in paintings, for example, would depend largely on their economic status. We

\textsuperscript{58} *Le Grand Bleu*, “The Big Blue,” is an English language film about free diving champions directed by French director Luc Besson in 1988. The film was deemed “one of the most significant cult movies of the 1980s” by French Cinema historian Rémi Lanzoni. It was screened at 1988 the Cannes Film Festival.

\textsuperscript{59} The book was first published in 1937 and is regarded as a classic photographic history textbook. Beaumont Newhall became the first curator of the Museum of Modern Art’s photography director in 1940.

could assume though, however, that she might possess a couple of small gouaches by perhaps, Urtillo or Vlaminck, but they should be quite small and not at all pretentious. The furnishings, in fact, would be divided between the original farm furnishings and choice pieces that she would have brought from San Francisco…There is a piano. Depending upon our research, we have to decide whether this is a small boudoir grand or a small upright. The boudoir grand would obviously have been brought from the apartment at San Francisco. On the other hand, if the piano had already been there, even when it was a weekend home, it would obviously be an upright.\(^61\)

Jacobs then analyzed the memorandum:

[It] convincingly demonstrates that each component of the set is significant. Pieces of furniture and objects reflect the financial possibilities and social position of the inhabitants...The role artworks play in the interior is striking. In the first place, they have to support the profile of the characters.\(^62\)

While no such communication between Park and his crew is publicly available, it can be inferred that Park operates in a similar way to Hitchcock. The artifacts in Ha Young’s apartment—the books, equipment, posters, mural, Chesterfield sofas—reveal the character and director’s propensities. The interior decoration of the studio communicates Ha Young’s commitment to his craft, his expertise, and his priorities. The architecture of the scene functions to expose diegetic characterization and autobiographical details.

\(^61\) *Ibid.*, 146.

Revealing of Work/Live Space

Figure 2-5

Figure 2-6
The introductory scene to Ha Young’s studio reveals only the work component of the space. In a later scene, Mu Hoon and Soo Mi, the model that Ha Young had directed earlier, arrive at the studio intoxicated. The scene reveals that the space is not only the photographer’s studio, but also his residence. In a deep shot from the entrance of the studio, the audience can see the square column, book cases, and camera equipment in the blurred background. As the drunk characters arrive, Ha Young leads them through the entrance hallway, where a pink door to the bathroom is placed on the right wall. Beyond the wall with the pink door is a small office space with a desk with monitors, two bookcases, and more posters and photographs on display. On the perpendicular wall, a bright green door with a red light above it is visible, which is the photographer’s in-house darkroom.

The initial scene was framed in a way that communicated the spaciousness of a photographic studio; in the shots, the actors’ entire bodies were shown. In this scene, the shots are tighter, only showing the actors’ bodies from the shoulders to the head. The
studio appears in two contrasting ways—wide and then tight—taking on two disparate spatial identities. This dual professional and domestic nature of the space also echoes the duality of Ha Young’s life that is shown in the film: the personal and professional. When Ha Young plays the role of friend and brother, the scene is framed so that the space feels intimate. In fact, when the actors move from the entrance hallway to the common space, the interaction with the space is directed and choreographed; the domestic side of the studio can be argued as feeling labyrinthine. The professional, photographic studio side of the room is not visible in the tightly framed shots that focus on the furniture, doors, and faces of the actors. The colors of this section of the room are vibrant and comforting with pale lavender walls and kitschy pink and green doors, which contrast the blank white of the photo backdrop that dominates the work space of the studio.

The exterior of the building is only revealed at the very end of the film and is not shown consistently. However, what those later shots do show is that the studio is located within a rectangular residential building in Seoul, accessible by a wide, empty road, and surrounded by bare trees.
Cohabitation

Figure 2-9

Figure 2-10
After Mu Hoon discovers a photo of Eun Ju in Ha Young’s darkroom, the brothers go on a quest to find Eun Ju, who is working as a night club singer. After the couple is reunited, Ha Young invites them to live in his apartment. In the initial scene in Ha Young’s studio, a corner of the room peeks out under densely patterned curtains, revealing a shallow space cluttered with books on shelves. The couple moves a bed into the area and it becomes the lovers’ sanctuary. The trio co-habit the studio space together, eating dinners at a small round-table near the curtained room. This side of the room had primarily been used as Ha Young’s work space and the other side of the room as a personal space. Now, with the cohabitation, the photographic side of the room has merged with the personal.

This personalization of the studio space is echoed by the cinematographic framing in the cohabitation scenes. Compared to the initial scene in the studio, the shots in the dinner scene are medium shots that show only the upper bodies of the actors. One scene begins with the camera above the actors, but it slowly moves towards them, revealing less
of their bodies and more of their faces. The melding together of the personal and professional partitions of the architecture of Ha Young’s studio echoes the symbolic transformation of the relationships among the three people. Their worlds become intertwined and self-contained. As the architecture transforms, so do the people that it houses.

*Destruction of the Studio*

*Figure 2-12*

*Figure 2-13*
Later, when the mob boss discovers that Mu Hoon has reunited with Eun Ju, the gang targets Ha Young and physically and emotionally violates his personal space. The gang scars the colorful apartment with graffiti and throws the furnishings into ruins, destroying all of the order and comfort of Ha Young’s space. In addition, the gang inflicts injury on Ha Young by assaulting the walls and by using his photography equipment as weapons. One gang member throws debris at the wall near the darkroom and the gang leader uses a tripod to break Ha Young’s leg.

Park utilizes the architecture in this film to signal a transformation, a descent into chaos. As Ha Young’s space is destroyed, so is his identity and spirit. Park established the connection between the photographer’s identity and relationships and his studio earlier in the film. The space has become defined as an intricate piece of his identity. Therefore, when the gang assaults the space, they also assault the people who occupy the space.

_Abandonment of the Studio_
After Mu Hoon is killed and Eun Ju becomes a famous actress and model, Ha Young is shown isolated in his apartment, which is packed up into boxes. “I quit photography,” he says in voiceover, echoing that in the beginning of the film when he declared, “I am a camera.” In contrast to the dinner scene in which the camera moves in closer from the high angle, the camera in the final scene in the apartment begins as a close shot and moves higher and further away. Instead of the space becoming more intimate, it becomes isolating: at the end of the shot, Ha Young is shown dwarfed within a vacant studio. Throughout the film, the architecture undergoes significant transformations, echoing the arc of Ha Young’s narrative. In the last scene in the studio, Ha Young has been rendered powerless, stripped of his profession, his family, and his home.

INT. MOVIE THEATER - DAY/NIGHT
Park finishes the film with a scene in a movie theater. Dejected and abandoned, Ha Young watches a movie that stars Eun Ju. He wanders to the screen and clutches it. The film ends with a freeze frame of Ha Young looking backwards, his arms released, no longer making contact with the wall. The initial scene in the studio suggested Ha Young’s physical and emotional connection with the space and confidence in his identity. In contrast, in this final scene, he looks back towards the audience, but he is no longer touching the wall, no longer connected to the space that anchored his identity. He is disconnected, without a home, a profession, or a family. Park reiterates the photographer’s intimate connection to architecture by beginning and ending the film with his interaction with a wall.
Conclusion

Park’s symbolic use of architecture in his films is established in *The Moon is…the Sun’s Dream*. While the scale and variety of architecture in the film is modest and the typology quite simple, architecture is used to communicate narrative progression and its concomitant character development. The primary space in the film is Ha Young’s live and work studio, which transforms into a home for the three main characters. The way in which Park frames and represents the architecture in the establishing scene changes as the relationships become more intimate and later, divided. The closer shots that show the inhabitants experiencing the architecture comfortably are juxtaposed with wider and higher shots that communicate a sense of isolation. In addition, components of the mise-en-scène, including the walls, furniture, and décor, are used to communicate the personal qualities of the characters and the director. In Park’s feature film debut, architecture reflects a character’s interests, vulnerabilities, priorities, and his transformation.

Context

Park received tepid, if not discouraging, reviews and little validation for his directorial potential with his first two feature films. Reflecting on his career in 2000, Park Chan Wook admitted:

It was the truth that up until then, not many people had watched my films, so I thought, if that’s the case, why don’t I make a polished, commercial movie that many people can watch? That wasn’t all that difficult. I wanted to show that if I wanted to, I could make a commercial movie.63

Subverting expectations that he was a cult and B-movie director, Park created what became South Korea’s top-grossing blockbuster that year, JSA: Joint Security Area (2000),64 a film adaptation of Park Sang Yun’s 1997 novel, DMZ.65 The year after its release, JSA was awarded “Best Film” at two prestigious South Korean film competitions: Blue Dragon Film Awards66 and the Grand Bell Awards.67 The film was so successful that fourteen years later, it was adapted into a musical, JSA: The

63 Kim, Park Chan-wook, 79.

64 Korean title: 군동경비 구역.

65 Tasker, Fifty Contemporary Film Directors, 321.

Park Sang Yun also contributed to the screenplay.


The Grand Bell Awards are popularly known as the “Korean Oscars.”
Musical, and was slated to become an eight-part television drama series produced by the Korean Broadcasting System (KBS). As noted earlier, Park Chan Wook’s brother, Park Chan Kyong, created an art installation based on JSA’s production design, titled, Sets.

Park’s third film was produced by Myung Film, a production company formed in 1995 that had a reputation for manufacturing blockbuster films, such as Chang Yoon Hyun’s The Contact (1997), which was the second largest-grossing film of that year. Mobilizing the resources of a well-financed production company, Park constructed a film set specific to the geographical parameters necessary for the film’s story. The crew members who contributed to the framing and visualization of the architecture were cinematographer Kim Sung Bok and art director Kim Sang Man. The construction of the set was especially important for this film because the narrative, which takes place entirely at the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), hinges on the physical tensions between North and South Korea in that location. Thus, the use and presentation of architecture and other aspects of the built environment are crucial to the film’s successful storytelling.

The historical relationship between North and South Korea is troubled and controversial. However, the successful string of blockbusters that deal with North-South

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Though there was coverage about the upcoming production, there is no evidence that the TV series premiered.

70 Choi, The South Korean Film Renaissance, 54-55.
relations that premiered around the time of *JSA*, such as *Shiri* (1999), *Double Agent* (2003), *Silmido* (2003), and *Taegukgi* (2004), demonstrate that the subject matter is rife with commercial potential. In *The South Korean Film Renaissance*, Jinhee Choi writes about the relationship between politics, commercial success, and history.

Why have North-South issues become such a popular topic for successful Korean blockbuster films? One may find an answer by linking the subject matter of these films directly to the specificity of South Korea as a nation-state. During the cold-war era, South Koreans were led to believe that North Koreans were untrustworthy enemies. But if anything, during the post-cold war era the popular conception of North Korea has become that of an invisible counterpart rather than a threat. Although North-South issues resurface from time to time, these usually occur only before or after a presidential election...The theatrical release of *JSA*, in fact, was preceded by a summit conference between the North Korean leader Kim Jung-Il and then-South Korean president Kim Dae-jung, held in the summer of 2000.\(^71\)

Choi attributes the popularity of films about the North and South Korean divide to Koreans’ vested interest in their past and current relationship with their counterparts. Park’s film depicts Northerners as “people with whom South Koreans can possibly fall in love or build friendships.”\(^72\) The relationship between North and South Korea is quite emotional, both in the past and present, so Park uses psychological devices in the film to express these culturally traumatic relations. Choi writes that although *JSA* is marketed as a crime-investigation story, it becomes a psychologically driven drama through the use of an extended flashback that shows the blossoming of a forbidden relationship.\(^73\)

\(^71\) Choi, *The South Korean Film Renaissance*, 35-37.

\(^72\) Ibid., 36.

\(^73\) Ibid., 43.
In an essay in *The Cinema of Japan and Korea*, French writer and journalist Adrien Gombeaud analyzed the compositions of selected shots and scenes in *JSA* and explained how they support a theory of the “centre”:

The success and singular quality of *Joint Security Area* resides in its very precise organisation of space. The director bases his compositions and direction on a simple architectural reality as described by Rudolph Arnheim; the place of division, the centre, is also a place of brief yet possible encounter between two sides.\(^74\)

Gombeaud used the term “architectural” but only tangentially touched on the film’s architecture in the essay; rather, he is referring to geometrical concepts like symmetry. However, Park introduced “architectonic” practices novel to his oeuvre in this film. In the introduction to *The Wrong House*, Jacobs defined the term:

The art of framing characters within diegetic architecture, cinema also creates architecture through the camera. In the process of creating cinematic space, phenomena such as lighting, sound, editing, camera positions, and camera movements can and should be interpreted as architectonic practices.\(^75\)

Jacobs referred to general uses of *mise-en-scène* and cinematographic maneuvers as “architectonic practices.” However, Park expanded on them by using architectural components, such as windows, as anchor points for shot compositions and camera movements to articulate dramatic moments in the narrative.

This chapter on Park’s *JSA* will examine the geography and implications of the DMZ, the set design for the film, and the significance of architecture in the opening scene at the “Bridge of No Return,” the interrogation scene at the House of Freedom, and a scene at the Military Demarcation Line.

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\(^{75}\) Jacobs, *The Wrong House*, 11.
Synopsis

*JSA* recounts a fictional story of a friendship that blooms between North and South Korean soldiers guarding the DMZ. The investigative genre film begins when two North Korean soldiers, Jung Woo Jin\(^{76}\) and Sargent Oh Kyeong Pil\(^{77}\) are injured by gunshots. South Korean soldiers, Sargent Lee Soo Hyeok\(^{78}\) and Private Nam Sun Shik\(^{79}\) are suspects in the shooting. The Neutral Nations Supervisory Committee hires Major Sophie E. Jean,\(^{80}\) a Swiss citizen of Korean descent, to investigate the incident. Major Sophie probes the situation, but the North and South Korean soldiers give contradictory accounts. A flashback in the film shows that the two sides had developed an illicit friendship, which places their allegiances and physical safety at risk. Later, Major Sophie is removed from the case because her father had ties to North Korea during the Korean War. At the end of the film, Sargent Lee Soo Hyeok commits suicide out of guilt.

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\(^{76}\) Played by Shin Ha Kyun.

\(^{77}\) Played by Kang Song Ho.

\(^{78}\) Played by Lee Byung Hun.

\(^{79}\) Played by Kim Tae Woo.

\(^{80}\) Played by Lee Young Ae.
Architectural Analysis

Geographical Background

Figure 3-1 Courtesy of qsl.net

Figure 3-2 Courtesy of www.vosizneias.com
Located approximately fifty miles North of Seoul, the Joint Security Area, also known as Panmunjeom in Korean, is a highly contentious area. The conference area of the site, which measures half a mile in diameter, is a highly publicized and visited area that surrounds the military demarcation line, where North and South Korean soldiers stand face-to-face, each guarding their respective sides. The diminutive blue vernacular structures are partitioned into two sides within the interior according to the route of the line. The demarcation line has become a symbol of the tensions between the two countries. It is the location of the documented peace talks and military negotiations between the two Koreas.

Set Design

Figure 3-3

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For obvious reasons, Park could not film at the actual DMZ, so he constructed a replica at an outdoor set at the Namyangju Studios in Gyeonggi-do. Gyeonggi-do is also the province in which Park built his Jahajae residence, which he began designing two years later in 2002. Building a large-scale set allowed Park a high degree of control in visualizing and utilizing architecture in the story. By virtue of designing a set, Park chose the components of the buildings in Panmunjeom that he wanted to represent in the film. The replica built for the film set is divided into three main buildings in Panmunjeom: the South Korean House of Freedom, the North Korean building (Panmungak), and the

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The original House of Freedom, which is replicated in the film, was built in 1965. A new building was designed and erected in 1998.
conference area that consists of small blue buildings that straddle the line between North and South Korea. The set of JSA is still intact and functions as a tourist attraction. The set alone cost 900 million won (approximately $900,000, based on exchange rates) out of its total budget of $3 million. Derek Elly, film critic for Variety, reported the realism of the set design in JSA:

Production design is outstanding in its realism, with the famous Panmunjeom truce-negotiation village totally re-created in an outdoor set (at $1 million, claimed to be the largest and most expensive in Korean pic history), and the wild mountainous regions of the DMZ evocatively suggested in d.p. Kim’s impressive compositions.

The combination of realistic set design and skilled cinematography in JSA creates a film that utilizes architecture in inventive ways to progress the narrative.

EXT. DMZ - NIGHT
The film’s location is established in a nighttime opening scene by a recognizable structure, “The Bridge of No Return.” The bridge, which is bisected by the Military Demarcation Line, cuts diagonally across the frame from the lower left and extends two-thirds across the screen to white kiosk and a lonely lamp post with weak, miniscule orbs of light. The political division between North and South Korea is reinforced by the shot’s composition as the bridge cuts through the frame. This division is further supported by the bold tree trunk that sits in the middle of the frame, dividing the composition from left and right. Here, Park communicates the symbolic and physical division between the two countries by simple geometric devices within the film’s composition.

The quiet ambient noise of pattering raindrops is punctuated by a gun shot. The film cuts to a midnight blue surface, where a bullet hole blazes in the center of the screen. A weak, narrow light shines out through the puncture. The camera hovers closely to the exterior of a concrete building, inching towards the focal point on the rectangular

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87 Kim, *Park Chan-wook*, 146.
window. The camera veers towards the hole and into the light, where the shot explodes into a burst of light that transitions to the title, *JSA, Joint Security Area*.

Park’s initial nighttime presentation of the location is symbolic of human culpability in the tensions between North and South Korea. First, the opening scene shows no human figures, only manmade structures, which are cast in black-blue light: the ground, a sign, a bridge, a window, a wall. The dark, bare mise-en-scène and absence of people convey a sense of isolation and emptiness within the architecture itself. The darkness is only interrupted by the suggestion of human action when a bullet pierces the window and allows in a stream of light. Thus, the transition from dark to light is suggestive of the tensions between North and South Korea, for the land itself is only charged because of the political unrest between the two countries. The architecture and land on which it sits are themselves neutral, but the politics of the people who occupy the space cast a violent and tense light on the architecture.

**INT./EXT. INTERROGATION ROOM - HOUSE OF FREEDOM (SOUTH) - NIGHT**

In the scene at the South Korean House of Freedom, Park mobilizes a unique technique by using architecture to convey information about diegetic time and continuity. This spatio-temporal manipulation supports Arnold Hauser’s theory in the fundamental text, *Film: A Montage of Theories*, where he contributed an essay about the relationship between space and time in film. He described:

> The most fundamental difference between the film and other arts is that, in its world-picture, the boundaries of space and time are fluid—space has a quasi-temporal, time, to some extent, a spatial character…space loses its static quality, its serene passivity and now becomes dynamic; it comes into being as it were before our eyes. It is fluid, unlimited, unfinished, an element with its own history,
its own scheme and process of development. Homogeneous physical space here assumes the characteristics of heterogeneously composed historical time.  

Two sequences in Park’s House of Freedom scene demonstrate the ways in which architecture can be used to manipulate, distort, and recalibrate the relationship between space and time in the film.

*Interrogation*


In a tense interrogation scene, Major Sophie questions Sargent Lee Soo Hyeok about the gun used for the shot that appears in the opening scene of the film. Concurrently, Nam Sung Shik is being interrogated in the room directly above in the same building. The camera moves vertically up the wall. In this scene, Park uses the camera’s navigation through architecture to demonstrate a parallel temporality, to indicate that the two interrogations are happening synchronously.

The camera moves from the interior of the room with Major Sophie to the exterior, where it pauses outside of the window. Within a span of fifteen seconds, the
camera navigates through the architecture by traveling vertically outside the window, past the blinds, past a nondescript dark wall, and in front of the window of the room located directly above it, where soldier Nam Sung Shik is being interrogated.

In this sequence, the camera’s movement is used as a transitional tool between two rooms and also as a visual device to indicate the continuity of time in place of traditional parallel editing. Park utilizes the plan of a building as a temporal and spatial organizational device when he situates the rooms directly above each other. Cleverly, Park avoids visual confusion by altering the composition between the two exterior window shots. First, he alters the positioning of the interrogator and interrogated: in the lower level room, Major Sophie stands on the right, and Sargent Lee sits to the left; in the upper level room, solider Nam sits on the right and the interrogators sit opposite the table to the left. In addition, the tables are oriented differently in the two rooms: the lower room’s table sits horizontally across the frame, while the upper room’s table lies perpendicularly. In this scene, the architecture and its interiors function as temporal and spatial tools in constructing a coherent and legible narrative.

*Suicide Attempt*
In addition to the vertical camera transition, where movement through architecture is used as a replacement for parallel editing, Park manipulates time and space further in this scene through a suicide attempt. Soldier Nam pulls a gun when he is asked to perform a polygraph test. He puts the gun in his mouth and pulls the trigger, but it is unloaded. The scene cuts back to the room where Major Sophie and Sargent Lee sit. The viewers hear a window break as the camera zooms into an extreme close-up of Sargent
Lee’s shocked eyes. The film cuts to a stylized shot of shards of glass flying upwards in slow-motion against a pitch-black background. Soldier Nam’s head appears and floats upwards towards the top edge of the frame. The camera slowly rotates clockwise until Nam’s head is upside down. Then, the scene resumes in real time and he plummets to the ground.

The attempted suicide scene simultaneously manipulates time and space. As soldier Nam jumps from the building, his head appears through a window in reversed directionality: while he is falling from North to South, the positioning and movement of his head in the frame make it appear as if he is rising from South to North. This reversed directionality is accompanied by a retardation of time. Soldier Nam’s figure is presumably seen through the window by Sargent Lee. Translucent fragments of glass linger in the planes in front of and to the sides of his face. The combination of reversed directionality, slow-motion, and mise-en-scène forms a surreal moment in the film. The suicide attempt segment shows a suspension of both spatial and temporal logic. When solider Nam’s head rotates clockwise to reorient his body to the laws of gravity, the architecture possesses and enforces these rules. As solider Nam falls, Park cuts to the interior of Sargent Lee’s interrogation room, and then to an exterior shot showing Nam sprawled on the ground. The surreal slow-motion scene is interrupted and thrust back into reality by tectonic laws. In the suicide attempt sequence, architecture enforces the rules of gravity through a suspension in time and space. Architectural realities dictate both the interrogation and suicide attempt sequences in the House of Freedom scene.

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89 One could argue that this changing relationship between the directions of North and South in the scene comment on the relations between the countries.
INT./ EXT. MILITARY DEMARCATION LINE - CONFERENCE CENTER - DAY

Figure 3-20

Figure 3-21

Figure 3-22
In a daytime scene during the flashback, North Korean Sargent Oh Kyeong Pil and South Korean Sargent Lee Soo Hyeok stand head-to-head at the demarcation line that separates the blue vernacular structures at the conference center. Sargent Oh peeks down at the line on the ground and says, “Your shadow is over the line. So back off.” The camera moves to an interior shot into a completely dark space except for two bulging windows situated symmetrically in the frame. At the first, the two soldiers stand equidistant from the central void. Then, Sargent Lee steps backwards, his figure moving horizontally across both the film’s frame and the frame of the window. Sargent Oh smiles knowingly, acknowledging their secret friendship.

During this surreptitious scene that conceals the friendship between the North and South Koreans, the framing of the exterior and interior shots serves to reinforce the mandated separation between the two countries. The exterior shot shows an iconic and typical image of the adversarial relations. However, after the conventional shot, the camera moves to the interior and forms an intricate composition. The interior of the blue houses remains completely dark with only the unusually-shaped windows lit. The window shapes are inaccurate, based on exterior views of the rectangular windows, which communicates to the viewers that perhaps the emotional connection between the two soldiers are expressed through subjective geometrical points of view. The viewer of the film, then, recognizes the discrepancy of the architecture and becomes a participant in the secret.

While the horizontal movement of separation through the windows shows a superficial hostility, the geometry of the window signals a comic subjectivity. Thus, the bulging windows and creative framing of the solid and voids of the wall belie the
friendship between the two soldiers. The physical movement reinforces a typical relationship, but the architecture is complicit in the secret by morphing and mutating to accommodate an alternative frame of reference.

Conclusion

*JSA* is an extremely significant work in Park’s feature film oeuvre because of its massive success and popularity. The film rocketed Park Chan Wook’s name to recognition and set a public expectation for the scale and appeal of his future films. *JSA* was especially notable for its representation of the architecture of Panmunjeom through a studio-made replica, which was noted for its realism and accuracy. However, Park not only mimicked the architecture, but used its components, especially the window in the suicide attempt scene, to manipulate space and time. Further, a distortion of a window signaled a subjectivity between the characters to the viewers of the film. Therefore, in *JSA*, architecture was not only represented, but also manipulated as a stylistic and communicative device.
Chapter 4: SYMPATHY FOR MR. VENGEANCE (2001)

Context

In 2001, Park premiered the first film of his Vengeance Trilogy, Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance. Film critic Richard Peña states in a DVD commentary that the three films in the Vengeance Trilogy were not originally intended as a series, but became grouped due to style and theme. The first film in the trilogy is a return to Park’s independent film aesthetic that he established before his blockbuster, JSA. Thus, the film lacks a tightly structured, commercial narrative in exchange for a tortuous story with complex characterization and visual experimentation. In an interview about the film, Park described:

I didn’t want to make an artistic film, but I wanted to express the theme and the characters’ emotions with the most basic elements of cinematic composition. Even without explaining everything in detail, even without one word, there is an aspect of making the audience second-guess the character’s mind…Normal commercial films draw out the characters’ emotions clearly in POV shots, like in Hitchcock’s films, but with the POV shots in Mr. Vengeance there was an effect of infusing a considerable amount of concentration in an ordinary shot.

Compositional density and strong visual communication are essential to the film because the protagonist, Ryu, is a deaf and mute factory worker. Due to Ryu’s limited interaction with the world as a result of his aural and verbal disability, the film expresses his emotional and narrative arc through visual, tactile, and spatial experiences. When Ryu

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90 Korean name: 복수 삼부작.

91 Korean title: 복수는 나의 것, which literally translates to “Vengeance is Mine.”


93 Kim, Park Chan-wook, 84.
does communicate in sign language, the words are transcribed into Korean text in inserted frames. Thus, filmic space, the two-dimensional space created within the frame of a film, becomes a crucial part of the viewers’ understanding of the narrative world.\textsuperscript{94} The crew that contributed to the film’s visual aesthetics are director of photography Kim Byeong Il, production designer Choe Jung Hwa, and art directors Oh Jaewon and Oh Sang Man.\textsuperscript{95}

The film was produced by CJ Entertainment,\textsuperscript{96} which is the largest entertainment company in South Korea. Mr. Vengeance, which is Park’s fourth directed feature, was also written by Park, along with screenwriters Lee Jae Sun, Lee Jong Yong, and Lee Mu Yeong. The budget for the film is estimated to have been $4 million and the film grossed only about $2 million worldwide,\textsuperscript{97} making it a box office failure. Kim Young Jin explained that, “Audiences were infuriated that the director who had given them the powerful emotions of a sleek, mass-market film with Joint Security Area was once again showing the uncompromising sensibility of a B-movie director.”\textsuperscript{98} Despite the financial shortcomings and the public’s negative response, Park’s colleagues and film critics praised the film for its rich visuals and production design. Variety critic Derek Elley


\textsuperscript{96} The company has recently been renamed as CJ E&M Film Division.


\textsuperscript{98} Kim, Park Chan-wook, 6.
explained, “The look of the film is always interesting, with d.p. Kim Byung-il’s setups full of incidental detail but never overcrowded; production design in interiors (Ryu and Yeong-mi’s apartments, the organ trafficker’s basement).”99 Kim Young Jin also commended the visual complexity of the film:

Harboring secret ambitions toward making a pure film and directed at a life interspersed with absurdity and irony, PARK placed a density of images on the screen, colliding through the simplest compositional antithesis of transposition and opposition, which was something that had never been reached before in Korean film...the film has a particular rhythm that indicates the most complicated interior with the simplest exterior.100

*Mr. Vengeance* displays a compelling visual work rife with tension and contrast, which is achieved partly through the representation of architecture and its interiors.

The film’s narrative is branded by intense depictions of violence and its concomitant emotional pain. The film follows characters’ arcs as they cope with disability, illness, poverty, suicide, physical and emotional trauma, and violence. Thus, the characters’ psychologies are of great importance in any analysis of the film. The emotional trauma depicted in the film embodies the Korean cultural concept of *han*, which is described by Steve Choe in *Sovereign Violence: Ethics and South Korean Cinema in the New Millennium*:

This concept, sometimes characterized as uniquely Korean, encompasses a number of subjective meanings, including ‘resentment,’ ‘unresolved suffering,’ and the ‘feeling of inferiority’...*Han* is a historical term that gained political legitimacy through *minjung* theology and historiography to consolidate the feelings of Koreans who have been victimized and made to feel inferior by feudal, colonial, patriarchal, foreign, or authoritarian values. *Han* is often described as

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Derek Elley also wrote the review for *JSA* in *Variety*, cited in the previous chapter.

100 Kim, *Park Chan-wook*, 44.
accumulating, this is making way for the possibility of a violent lashing out...when resentment accumulates and explodes, violence ensues.\textsuperscript{101}

While Choe does qualify the generalization of \textit{han} to the Korean people later in his chapter, \textit{han} is a widely accepted colloquial construct in historical and contemporary Korean society. The Korean medical community has coined a term for an illness that is the result of \textit{han}, known as “Hwa-byung,” which literally translates to “an illness of fire.” Hwa-byung has been categorized as a Korean culture-bound syndrome in the fourth edition of the \textit{Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders}.\textsuperscript{102} Researcher Park Young Joo elaborated on the medical implications of \textit{han}: “

[Hwa-byung is] an illness that results from the suppression of anger, or \textit{hwa}, or the projection of anger into the body due to certain repressive aspects of Korean culture...the dynamic cause of HB is the suppression or repression of anger, and its typical symptoms are a sensation of epigastric mass, somatization, panic, and depression...HB might be thought to be \textit{hahn}...an indigenous form of lamentation. In the Korean cultural context, suffering individuals are not allowed to directly and outwardly vent their anger and frustration since such behavior could disrupt social harmony. They are forced to internalize their raw emotions. Thus, \textit{hahn} can be the root of \textit{hwa}, which refers to a simmering, cumulating discontent.\textsuperscript{103}

\textit{Han} is a cultural construct that has serious consequences and accounts for much suffering in Korean society. Sources of \textit{han} are attributed to political, social, historical, and economic conditions. Non-Koreans also recognize this type of cultural trauma and its resulting angst: Elley even writes in his review that the film exhibits “claustrophobic

\textsuperscript{101} Steve Choe, \textit{Sovereign Violence: Ethics and South Korean Cinema in the New Millennium}, (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016), 73-75.


\textsuperscript{103} Ibid.
Korean fatalism." His identification is an important one because this chapter observes how the devastating emotions of han are expressed through architecture in Mr. Vengeance. The way in which people interact with and inhabit architecture is a product of their cultural and personal histories. The characters in the film are confined, stifled, and trapped by the architecture, which is symbolic of the paralyzing mechanism of Korean han.

Jinhee Choi also contributes to the cultural reading of the film by elaborating on the film’s economic commentary. She writes:

Although Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance is about personal revenge, the film indirectly references the economic conditions of South Korea at the time…Ryu’s girlfriend critiques capitalism throughout the film and insists that Ryu’s kidnapping of the former boss’s daughter is justified behavior resulting from the country’s lack of proper health care. The girlfriend also distributes flyers on the street that read, ‘dismantle conglomerates’ and ‘Drive out the U.S. troops.’ Overtones of anticapitalism and anti-Americanism are present, although the rendering of such criticisms is oblique and rather comical.

Mr. Vengeance is a film aware of its sociohistorical conditions, but refuses to engage in pedantry. Thus, in the film, Park emphasizes Ryu’s isolation and desperation, a result of his disability, socioeconomic status, and personal tragedies, through the visual representation of architecture.

This chapter will examine five locations, including domestic, landscape, and industrial spaces, that express the escalation and explosion of anguish in the film: the apartments of Ryu and Park Dong Jin, the metal factory where Ryu works, the empty parking lot where Ryu is physically violated, and the rural and built elements of lakeside.


105 Choi, The South Korean Film Renaissance, 175-176.
Synopsis

*Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance* is a tragedy about family, loss, death, miscommunication, and vengeance, as the title suggests. The film focuses on four key characters: Ryu, a deaf and mute factory worker; Ryu’s sister, who is terminally ill with kidney disease; Ryu’s girlfriend, Cha Young Mi, who is part of an anarchist organization; and Park Dong Jin, a businessman who owns the factory where Ryu works. The story begins as Ryu is laid off as a metal worker at a factory. Desperate to find a kidney donation and pay for the surgery for his sister, he contacts a black-market organ harvester to exchange his own kidney for one that would be a match for his sister. While he is under anesthesia in an empty parking lot, the organ harvesters steal his kidney and money and abandon him. Ironically, a few weeks later, his sister’s doctor contacts Ryu with news that an official kidney match has been made for his sister, but he is no longer able to afford the operation. Desperate to help his sister, Ryu and his girlfriend, Cha Young Mi, decide to kidnap the young daughter of a wealthy friend of the owner of the factory in exchange for ransom, which would be used to pay for the surgery. The criminal act is uncharacteristic of Ryu’s kind and caring nature, which is reiterated through his compassionate actions throughout the film. During the little girl’s captivity at Ryu and his sister’s apartment, the sister discovers the plan and commits suicide in the bathroom of their apartment. Ryu takes his sister’s body to a lakeside to bury her. The

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106 Played by Shin Ha Kyun.
107 Played by Lim Ji Eun.
108 Played by Bae Doona.
109 Played by Song Kang Ho.
little girl accompanies them on the trip. Tragically, while Ryu has his back turned, the little girl falls off a bridge and drowns because he was unable to hear her calling for help.

After the drowning, about halfway through the film, the narrative point of view shifts from that of Ryu to his victim, Park Dong Jin. Park Dong Jin seeks revenge for his daughter’s death and electrocutes Cha Young Mi and exsanguinates Ryu in front of the bridge at the lake by slicing his Achilles tendons. In the culminating scene of the film, members of Cha Young Mi’s anarchist organization stab Park Dong Jin to death as retribution for the death of the anarchist, Chan Young Mi.

Architectural Analysis

**EXT. ROOF OF APARTMENT BUILDING - SUNSET**

![Figure 4-1](image)

In the beginning of the film, a radio announcer reads a letter that Ryu wrote to his sister, since Ryu is unable to speak. The siblings listen to the radio piece on the bright green roof of a residential apartment building in Seoul. The green color echoes that of Ryu’s dyed hair. Park says,

Ryu’s hair color was designed to show his strong desire for self-expression. I wanted a very strong color, and SHIN Ha-Kyun dyed his hair with an unusual
color called ‘grass green.’…His strongly dyed hair helped give this film a bit of fantastic and surreal atmosphere.\(^{110}\)

Park says Ryu is a creative individual, but his ability for expression is limited by his disability. Park reuses the green shade of Ryu’s hair in the mise-en-scène to reflect his identity and individuality onto the spaces in the city that he inhabits. In visual contrast to the strong green hue, a line of white laundry blows on the roof and a pastel sunset fills the frame. The composition and editing suggest an idyllic and beautiful life.

In *Color of Architecture, Color of Cities*, professor Park Don Seo displayed a series of photographs in which he demonstrated the factors involved in choosing the color of a piece of architecture.

\(^{110}\) Kim, *Park Chan-wook*, 94.
In the caption for the first image, he explained: “When planning the color of architecture, compose the palette using the colors of the surrounding environment.”  

He continued the line of thought in the caption of the next image: “In the existing environment, there is not only nature but also artifacts, so the color of existing buildings or facilities should be reflected in the color palette.”  

Professor Park emphasized the importance of integrating the colors of the surrounding environment into the palette of a building under design. In a similar way, his son, the director Park Chan Wook, has composed the color palette of Mr. Vengeance’s opening shots on the roof of the apartment building by incorporating hues from the surrounding environment: the natural green from the mountains and the potted plants and the artificial green of Ryu’s dyed hair.


Immediately after the initial shot of the siblings on the roof, the film cuts to a wide shot with a canted angle that shows the roof interrupted by the corner of an adjacent white and green building with neon signage. Park Don Seo’s theory about the integration of the colors of buildings and the cityscape is also supported in this shot. A train track with colors below that echo the green of the roof, a mountain scape, and other residential buildings loom in the distance. The alternate framing shows more of the roof and its context within the cityscape, revealing that the environment is cluttered and the green roof dirty.
Later in his book, Park Don Seo displayed a photo of a building in Seoul and critiqued the urban cityscape of South Korea: “The cityscape of our country lacks elegance and dignity and makes one dizzy.”113 The director’s use of a canted angle and a wide shot reinforces the busy and vertiginous identity of the city. The director revealed his intention of using the wider shot in an interview:

“The bird’s eye view is an angle that I like…It makes people look like dwarves. Even if it doesn’t call to mind the perspective of God looking down, it makes humans look like insects. It has the effect of making people and objects objectively unfamiliar.”114

113 Ibid., 41.

Korean text:

“우리 나라 도시경관을 품위 없고 여지럽게 하고 있다.”

114 Kim, Park Chan-wook, 95.
While the relationship between the siblings is safe and sheltered, their lives are dwarfed by the city around them, which reflects their socioeconomic disadvantage. In both shots, the color palette of architecture echoes the hues of the characters and the surrounding environment. In this scene, Park contrasts two different versions of Ryu’s reality: the first shot shows an idealized view of his life, while the second shows the stark reality. The ideal life is interrupted by the siblings’ context within the built urban environment.

**INT./EXT. FACTORY - DAY**

![Figure 4-6](image)

Ryu works as a manual laborer in a welding company, shoveling coal into fiery ovens, which further establishes his economic status. Park introduces the factory with close-up shots of mechanical elements, such as heavy turning metal wheels that spit fire and ovens that eject burning metal pellets into a bucket. The sound is overwhelming and industrial, but Ryu is undisturbed by the cacophony.

An overhead shot with a symmetrical composition shows the layout of the factory: three parallel rows of square and circular machines are partitioned by yellow lines, creating aisles where factory workers circulate. The shot composition and camera
angle is reminiscent of an establishing shot at the electronics factory in Park’s later film, *I’m a Cyborg, But That’s OK* (2006).

![Factory workers](image)

*Figure 4-7*

The mise-en-scène expresses the trite, laborious, and mechanical routine of the workers in the factory, who function as human extensions of the factory’s machinery, dehumanizing them. The scene in the factory is notably extended, with several minutes of the film committed to *temps mort*, showing Ryu’s routine of shoveling, wiping his dirtied face, taking a break, and returning to work. The combination of the extended screen time, repetitive motions, and high shots that dwarf the workers reinforce the dehumanization.

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115 The term translates to “dead time,” which is a technique that shows actions of the everyday.
After the work shift is complete, Ryu, along with his fellow workers, file into a single line and open the sliding door to exit the factory. The door slides open and a bright light shines into the workers’ faces, overexposing the shot. Some workers shield their eyes, but Ryu is too tired to even lift his arms. As his eyes loll, Ryu stumbles into the daylight. The transition between the interior and exterior exposes an expectation and the rescinding of that expectation in the scene. Park establishes the difficult workaday situation in the factory, which suggests that the transition to the exterior will grant freedom. However, in this scene, Ryu is overwhelmed by the light and fatigue as he exits the factory. For Ryu, relief is elusive as a result of the restrictive nature of his disability and socioeconomic limitations.
INT./EXT. RYU’S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Establishing the Space

Figure 4-9

Figure 4-10

Figure 4-11
The audience is introduced to Ryu’s apartment through a series of interior shots of three of the walls of his apartment and one shot of the ceiling with a hanging light fixture.
The final shot in the sequence shows Ryu lying awake on the floor in his apartment, his sister next to him.\textsuperscript{116} The modest rectangular apartment is colorful and eclectic. Bags, decorative boxes, clothes, and memorabilia line the room. The wallpaper is kitschy with pink, blue, and yellow floral patterns. The room is cozy, but not disorganized. Park articulated his intentions for the apartment’s decor:

> With scenes showing the life of the working class, it’s easy to fall into the cliché of showing it as gloomy and drab. It’s not actually the case. There are also houses with various and sundry items and strong use of color. Realism would be nice as well, but inside there is needed a distinctive beauty. My opinions agreed well with those of CHOE Jiangshan from the art direction team. His hobby is going around country marketplaces and collecting strange plastic wares. I made good use of CHOE’s talent.\textsuperscript{117, 118}

In a later shot in the film during the daytime, Park shows an exterior of the building. The coldness of the dilapidated, mottled concrete building contrasts to the warmth of the interior.

As Park visually establishes the domestic beauty of the living space with shots of furniture, wall decorations, and light fixtures, he includes noises coming from other

\textsuperscript{116} In Korea, it is customary to sleep on padded blankets and mats on the floor.

\textsuperscript{117} Kim, \textit{Park Chan-wook}, 94.


Excerpt from an interview of Park Chan Wook by Aryong Choi:

> “Choi: I found that your characters often stray from the norm. Even though they are brought up in poverty or extremely limited economic conditions, they often have extraordinary skills, like painting or cooking.

Park: Ah, yes, you can also see that in Ryu decorating his house in Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance. Often, there are mistakes in depicting the poor and poverty. I’m extremely bothered by this type of stereotyping. In every country, including Korea, you can find a visually astonishing and unique beauty in slums and poorer communities. This beauty is not created by professors and world-renowned architects, but cobbled together out of mismatched furniture or wall paper as time goes on. It’s easy to overlook. It’s also true of the characters. Not being well-educated is one thing, having a unique manual ability is another. Everyone has a unique personality and ability, so I ‘m doing my best not to simplify this fact.”
surrounding apartments in the building that are inaudible to Ryu: couples screaming and having sex, televisions blaring, footsteps thumping. In an intertitle, Ryu expresses, “The man who introduced me to this apartment said it was okay because I was deaf.”

However, his sister hears the noise and is unable to sleep. As he watches his sister pulling up the blankets, Ryu communicates in a subsequent intertitle, “Because sister can’t sleep, I can’t sleep either,” communicating the close bond between the siblings. Park subverts expectations about architectural conditions of the working class through the homely and meticulous décor, thereby using art direction to communicate complexities about the characters.

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119 Korean text: “이 집을 소개해 준 복덕방 아저씨는 내가 귀머거리라서 괜찮을 거라고 생각했나 보다.”

120 Korean text: “누나가 못 자니깐 나도 못 잡다.”
In the next shot, unable to sleep because of pain, Ryu’s sister moans and rolls around the floor. The film cuts to a shot of the room next to Ryu’s apartment, where four men young men masturbate in a human chain to Ryu’s sister moans, their ears pressed up against the colorful polka-dotted wall. The camera moves behind them to a wide shot, showing a narrow room, about a third of the size of Ryu’s adjacent space. Like that of Ryu’s apartment, the decoration of this room also reflects the inhabitants and their socioeconomic statuses. Dressers and storage bins of different colors line the right wall, opposite from a simple desk and a mattress. Old bottles, cans, magazines, and a basketball litter the floor. Posters of celebrities and athletes hover crookedly on the walls. The young men are messy and virile, single students or young adults. In a skillful maneuver, the camera moves horizontally through the wall partition that separates the men’s apartment from Ryu’s apartment, indicating the proximity and lack of privacy in this apartment building. As the camera settles back in Ryu’s room, his sister cries and

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121 A similar camera movement is seen in Darren Aronofsky’s Requiem for a Dream (2000). In Aronofsky’s audio commentary on the DVD, he explains the difficult and time-consuming nature of this particular type of shot.
thrashes around the floor in pain in the background. In the foreground, Ryu, unable to hear his sister, slurps ramen noodles from a bowl.

In showing Ryu and his sister’s apartment, Park problematizes common depictions of socioeconomic status with architecture. In two interviews mentioned previously, Park articulated the typical depictions of poor and working-class residences: as stereotypically “gloomy” and “drab.” He asserted that he made the decision to contradict this cliché by imparting the interiors of Ryu and his sister’s apartment with “beauty” by decorating the room with eclectic personal objects and vivid colors. Therefore, Ryu is characterized as a complex person, instead of typecast as the typical indigent. Park’s sophisticated treatment of the character is especially important for the revenge narrative: Park uses the decoration of the interiors to humanize Ryu at this point because, later in the film, Ryu struggles with ethical dilemmas and violates several legal and moral laws. Through dressing the interiors in the establishing shot of the apartment, Park communicates a political statement about class and establishes a characterization that is essential for the unfolding of the narrative.

INT. ABANDONED PARKING LOT - DAY

Figure 4-17
After he contacts the black-market organ dealer to find a kidney for his sister, Ryu is driven to an abandoned construction area and led up a vast concrete parking lot. In this series of successive shots, Park situates a frame within a frame, where the staircase cuts diagonally across the filmic space, a barren and industrial landscape visible in the background. In the subsequent shots, the footsteps continue, but the camera is placed further back. The men continue to climb, and in the final shot, the lit rectangle occupies only an eighth of the frame.

The progressive reframing and backwards movement of the camera forms a simultaneously intensifying and enervating effect, which both contribute to the drama and symbolism of the scene. The viewers experience trepidation and tension for Ryu as he
climbs. This symbolic interpretation is supported by the subjectivity of the shot compositions: the stairs float precariously without any railings or support, rendering the visualization an architectural impossibility and thus a surreal construct. The reductive geometric composition, established by the silhouettes, expresses the symbolic contradiction between the upward movement on the stairs and the decline of hope. Ultimately, when Ryu does arrive to the organ harvesting headquarters, the architecture is blank, cold, and brute; his kidney and his money are stolen and he is abandoned, naked and shivering.

Figure 4-20
INT. RYU’S APARTMENT - DAY

Suicide Scene

After Ryu and his girlfriend kidnap the daughter of Park Dong Jin, they take care of the girl in Ryu’s apartment, where they play board games, make jewelry with plastic beads and seashells, play with dolls, and watch cartoons. Reinforcing the theme of socioeconomic divide, the little girl innocently asks the siblings, “Why did my father hire babysitters that are so poor?” Ryu’s sister also believes that the little girl’s father has hired the siblings as babysitters. While doing laundry, she discovers that Ryu was fired from his factory job and discovers the kidnapping plan.

Ryu returns to his apartment after acquiring the ransom from Park Dong Jin. Holding a leather briefcase filled with cash, he sits down next to the little girl, who watches cartoon animals on television. The girl motions to Ryu that his sister is taking a shower. The continuous sound of running water is heard over the scene. After arguing over the remote, the girl sits on top of Ryu and hands him a letter. The film cuts to a series of close-up shots of a suicide note: “I love you. Goodbye.” Ryu jumps up and runs into the bathroom.
The camera hovers closely above the water, where the cord of a shower head is wrapped around his sister’s wrist: a horizontal slit is filled with coagulated blood. The viewer sees Ryu’s shocked reflection on the red water. The camera moves to a shot of the narrow and dirty white-tiled bathroom, which shows his sister’s foreshortened, blurred arm pointing at the audience, her head outstretched behind her, and a sink in the background. Ryu grabs his sisters head in his hands and shrieks as the water continues to run.
The suicide scene is the only time the apartment’s bathroom is revealed. In a residence where privacy is extremely limited, the bathroom provides a solitary space of respite. While Ryu exists in a private world because of his disability, his sister cannot leave the premises and is stripped of her privacy and agency. By showing Ryu’s apartment as a public and private place that functions as a home, a holding place for the kidnapped girl, and a voyeuristic hub for its neighbors, Park reinforces the idea of violated privacy. A domestic residence is intended to be a place of solace, but for the sister, it is a place of objectification and confinement. Ultimately, she can only find peace and solitude in the sequestered bathroom, through death.

EXT./INT. PARK DONG JIN’S APARTMENT - NIGHT

As articulated in the synopsis, halfway through the film, Park shifts the narrative point of view from Ryu to Park Dong Jin, the father of the kidnapped girl. The audience is introduced to Park Dong Jin’s apartment when he receives a ransom note, a staged
photograph of his daughter crying, and her abused doll from the kidnappers. The director juxtaposes the apartment of the working-class Ryu to the upper-middle class Park:

For SONG Kang-ho’s house…I tried to show the house of the kind of rich man who has no wife, and no refined sense himself, and whose growth environment is far from refined. There are traces of the luxurious and the expensive, but it’s a household with a drab atmosphere.\textsuperscript{122}

In this scene, Park’s apartment is framed from the exterior. The frame of the four-paned window is green, evoking the hue of Ryu’s hair and that of the cityscape as shown in the early rooftop scene. The visual thread of the green serves to show a connection between the kidnapper and the father of the kidnapped: while their positions of power and socioeconomic statuses differ, they are ultimately both victims of the situation. While only a section of the apartment is visible in the shots, the ribbon window indicates that the style of the house is modern. The architectural style of the residence suggests the character’s taste and financial status.

In stark contrast to the colorful wallpaper of Ryu’s apartment, Park’s walls are white. There are no colorful paintings or photographs on the wall, no record of memories or personality. The only pops of color in the otherwise muted palette of the apartment are in the green window panes and a small red toolbox on the window sill.

\textsuperscript{122} Kim, \textit{Park Chan-wook}, 94.
Later in the film, Park cremates his daughter, and returns to his apartment, laying belly down on the sofa, face blankly looking at the television. The film shifts into a fantasy grounded in spatial reality as his drowned daughter arrives dripping with water and mud. The mise-en-scène is arranged so that the daughter’s arm and bright orange dress peek out from screen left. With the exception of the green window panes, her dress is the only color in the room, suggesting that Park’s daughter was one of the only joys in
his otherwise drab life. In the film, the color of architecture and objects serve as opportunities for symbolism and interpretation.

The scene then cuts to the same exact composition of the earlier scene in Park’s apartment in which the camera sits outside of the window, looking in. The dead daughter is on the left of the screen and Park crosses horizontally across the room to embrace her. The fantasy is subtly indicated by the absence of the lamp in the right corner of the windowsill, which was in the earlier presentation of the apartment. Despite the hallucination, the apartment remains largely the same. The static nature of the architecture in this fantasy indicates the character’s inability to become unfettered from his grave reality. In the scene, architecture functions as a stoic reminder of the inescapable nature of the characters’ lives. Even as the character is transported to fantasy, architecture does not change and morph. While Park Dong Jin differs from Ryu and his sister because of his socioeconomic mobility and able body, he, too, is bound to his space.

**EXT. RIVER - DAY**

*Childhood Scene*
The riverside location appears several times in *Mr. Vengeance*. The first scene, a flashback to childhood, shows only the natural landscape without any built structures, which contrasts the later scenes in the same location. Ryu and his older sister play in a rocky riverside. A bird’s eye shot shows deep divots in the stone filled with muddy water, where the children frolic. They sit at a stone riverbank and point at the sky as the camera submerges in the green water and the image of the children disappears. The scene showcases the natural landscape and avoids revealing any manmade structures. The children found joy and freedom at the riverside. As they became adults, this innocence slipped away as socioeconomic, political, and physical realities restricted and bound the siblings through domestic and institutional pieces of architecture.
Sister’s Burial

After Ryu’s sister dies by suicide, he drives her corpse and the crying young girl out of the city and to the lake. In a striking composition, Park frames the manmade bridge of unfinished wood running horizontally across the river and the screen. A quiet fog clouds the sky in the upper half of the composition and the river glimmers on the bottom half of the frame. The wide shot shows Ryu carrying both the bodies of his deceased sister and the little girl on his back as he makes his way across the rickety bridge.
The director draws parallels between the past and present scenes in the riverside by showing Ryu traipse across the stone divots and using an identical bird’s eye shot from the beginning of the film. However, Ryu and his sister are no longer children who are oblivious to life’s hardships; the characters have become victims to the confining iniquities of life. Instead of burying his sister in the land, Ryu builds a tomb for her with rocks. Ryu places her in an indentation in the land and builds a shroud made of large stones. He places the rocks on her legs, her abdomen, and then, heartrendingly, on her face.

The scene evokes devastating emotions of sadness, longing, and grief in both the characters and the audience. The viewer can vividly feel the characters’ pain of an unjust life limited by class and disability: these strong emotions can be described as the Korean concept of han, as defined earlier in the chapter. In the scenes in the riverside, the feeling of han is accompanied by introduction of manmade structures: the appearance of the bridge and the method of Ryu’s sister’s burial.

*Death of Girl*
In addition to the bridge functioning as a means of circulation when Ryu crosses it to bury his sister, the structure also plays an active role in a new death. While Ryu builds the rock tomb for his sister, the kidnapped girl wakes from a nap and begins to cross the bridge to find Ryu. She calls for him while jumping excitedly on the bridge, but she falls into the river. She screams and desperately attempts to swim to Ryu, but he is oblivious to the noise. After he finishes burying his sister, Ryu sees the girl’s lifeless body halfway immersed in the water, a visual echo of the opening scene when the camera drowns in the river. The bridge is essentially responsible for the girl’s death. The structure functions as a signal of suffering and loss: the only manmade object in the riverside supports a burial and causes an accidental death.
Death of Ryu

Later in the film, the kidnapped girl’s father, Park Don Jin, captures Ryu and takes him to where his daughter drowned. The shot is framed in a similar composition to the scene in which Ryu carries his sister and the girl on his back across the bridge: the bridge cuts horizontally across the entire frame of the film. However, Ryu is no longer on the bridge, but rather thrashing around in front of it as his Achilles tendons are sliced. He bleeds out in the water, as his sister did in her suicide in the bathroom. In contrast to the natural landscape shown in the childhood flashback, the present location contains a bridge, a manmade structure, which is the setting for a burial and two deaths. The connection between bridges and death is explored further by Park in his next film, Oldboy.

Conclusion

Mr. Vengeance follows a tragic unfolding of events for its characters. While the title implies that the film is about vengeance, the film is ultimately about victimization. All the characters in the film are victims of various conditions in the film’s world, which are reflected through the built environment. Ryu and his sister are confined by poverty
and disability, which is shown through the apartment, factory, and parking lot. Park Dong Jin is haunted by memories of his drowned daughter in his apartment. Finally, the bridge at the river is involved in two characters’ deaths. Architecture plays a role in marginalizing and victimizing the characters in the film’s world.

Context

In 2003, *Oldboy*, the second installment of Park’s Vengeance Trilogy, was released. Park had established a reputation in Korea, especially after his blockbuster, *JSA*, but *Oldboy* rocketed the director to international acclaim. The film entered into competition at the 2004 Festival de Cannes and was awarded the Grand Prix, the second most prestigious prize at the festival, by a jury headed by Quentin Tarantino. The film was based on a Japanese manga of the same title by Nobuaki Minegishi and Garon Tsuchiya, which was released in the serial magazine, *Weekly Manga Action*, from 1996 to 1998. Park’s cinematic interpretation of *Oldboy* achieved cult status after its release. In fact, ten years later in 2013, Spike Lee made an American version of the film.

In an interview, Park articulated the difference in the narrative motifs between *Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance* and *Oldboy*:

[Oldboy] is a heroic story, and I’d like it if people saw it as something close to a prototype containing mythology, ancient stories or old fairy tales. It has a content with similar feeling to a story like that of Pandora’s box. That’s how it is with the ‘eye for an eye’ method of revenge or rite of passage that the hero goes through. If the main character in *Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance* had a personality representative of his class, here the story that the main character goes through is

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123 Korean title: 올드 보이.

124 Japanese title: オールド・ボーイ.

125 Steven Spielberg had initially planned to adapt Park’s film into an American remake starring Will Smith, but he abandoned the project. Spike Lee later pursued the film. Critic Ben Kendrick writes of Lee’s remake, “The Oldboy remake is second-fiddle in nearly every way to its South Korean inspiration.”


close to a symbolic archetype. The film is fantasy to a certain extent...I don’t know what point of contact I meet society at, but I think it’s a success if I touched upon the archetypes that people store in their unconscious.126

Park described that while Mr. Vengeance showed a character’s fate limited by his socioeconomic class, Oldboy’s narrative is bound by the abstract concept of “symbolic archetypes.” Nevertheless, Oldboy subverts the expectations of a quixotic hero.

The film was budgeted at an estimated $3 million and earned nearly $15 million worldwide after the film had a theatrical release in 2005.127 Park had secured international and domestic distribution for Oldboy, ensuring the film’s budget would be recouped. However, because of the public’s rejection of Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance, Park did not have high expectations for the critical success of Oldboy. Prior to filming, Park had a conversation with Choi Min Sik, who became the lead actor in Oldboy. Choi had recently returned from Cannes, where he was the lead actor for Im Kwon Taek’s Chihwaseon (2002), which had been in competition at the festival. Park said to Choi, “But you do realize that Old Boy is a commercial film that could never go somewhere as glorious as the Cannes Film Festival, don’t you?”128 Park exceeded his own expectations and Oldboy’s combined commercial and critical success, Kim says, “elevated PARK’s status from that of an East Asian cult director who made movies with extreme tastes to that of a representative ‘commercial auteur’ of Korea.”129

126 Kim, Park Chan-wook, 107.
128 Kim, Park Chan-wook, 7.
129 Ibid., 8.
In addition to directing the film, Park co-wrote the screenplay with Lim Chun Hyeong and Hwang Jo Yun. The cinematographer of the film was Chung Chung Hoon. During the production of *Oldboy*, Park and Chung developed a strong working relationship; Chung has worked as the cinematographer for all of Park’s features after this film. Ryu Seong Hui served as both production designer and art director. The film’s narrative takes place in Seoul, South Korea, and according to production and travel blogs and IMDb, *Oldboy* was shot on location in Seoul and Busan.

While *Mr. Vengeance* commented directly on Korean cultural history, Jinhee Choi stated that *Oldboy* explicitly abrogates historical commentary:

> Park’s *Oldboy*…depicts a prevalence of violence and cruelty, along with primal sexual politics, all notable for being devoid of historical specificity concerning Korean society. Dae-su, either conveniently or inconveniently, is locked up for fifteen years, and thus the period when Korea underwent drastic changes in both its politics and economy is skipped entirely…the priority of *Oldboy* is more towards aesthetic refinement and experiment, rather than the portrayal of the “Korean” experience. By ignoring Korean politics, Choi argued that *Oldboy* is able to foray into visual experimentation. She observed how Park “adopts modernist aesthetics that foreground flat space instead of depth…[through the] overt use of symmetric shot compositions

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133 Choi, *The South Korean Film Renaissance*, 176-177.
and... unmotivated camera movements." Oldboy was an opportunity for Park to continue developing his signature visual style.

Because Oldboy achieved international cult status, the film has generated an abundance of academic and popular research. A review of the literature revealed scholarship that focused on psychoanalytic symbolism, genre studies, aesthetics, and cultural and economic history. One particular Korean language essay by Kim Gyung Ae, a professor of literature and film studies at Youngsan University, writes about six emerging themes in Oldboy: water, the color purple, a grid pattern, the Panopticon, mirrors, and the phallus. Much of Kim’s analysis is psychoanalytic in nature. While this thesis does discuss psychology, it does so in terms of abnormal symptomology and cognition, only briefly discussing Freudian or Jungian psychoanalytic constructs. Rather, the points of interest in Kim’s paper which will be used in this chapter are the sections on

134 Ibid., 177.


Jinhee Choi, The South Korean Film Renaissance: Local Hitmakers, Global Provocateurs (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2010).

water, the grid pattern, and the Panopticon to corroborate observations on the role of architecture in the film.

The architecture of the film contributes strongly to the film’s premise and momentum. This chapter will discuss the significance, symbolism, and role of architecture in several significant locations in Oldboy: the room in which the protagonist had been imprisoned, a rooftop of an apartment building in Seoul, a restaurant, the interior of a different apartment, a room and a dam at a high school, and the villain’s penthouse.

Synopsis

The film follows three primary characters: the protagonist, Oh Dae Soo;140 Mi Do,141 who is Oh’s lover; and Lee Woo Jin,142 the antagonist who is Oh’s captor. Set initially in the late 1980s, the film introduces Oh as a belligerent drunk who is held at a police station for unruly behavior before he can go home to his wife and young daughter. However, after he is released from the station, he disappears near a phone booth. He then lives in solitary captivity in an unknown room for fifteen years, which establishes the narrative motivation for the rest of the film. After Oh is released from his immuration, he dines at a sushi restaurant, where he meets Mi Do, a sushi chef. After Oh faints at the restaurant, Mi Do takes him to her apartment and nurses him back to health. Eventually, they become lovers.

140 Played by Choi Min Sik.
141 Played by Kang Hye Jung.
142 Played by Yoo Ji Tae.
Through phone calls and disguised rendezvous, Lee Woo Jin reveals himself as Oh’s captor and presents an ultimatum: Oh must discover why Lee imprisoned him within five days, or Lee will kill Mi Do. However, if Oh uncovers the reason for the incarceration, Lee will kill himself. Through online research, Oh recalls that he went to Evergreen High School with Lee and his sister, where he witnessed the siblings engaging in incestuous activity and inadvertently spread a rumor throughout the school. The rumors pushed Lee’s sister to suicide.

After Oh discovers Lee’s motive for the incarceration, he seeks revenge at his penthouse apartment. In the climactic scene, the villain reveals that Mi Do, who has become Oh’s lover, is actually Oh’s daughter, who he did not recognize because he was imprisoned when she was an infant. As retribution for the rumor about Lee and his sister, Lee had manufactured Oh and Mi Do to fall in love and commit incest. Oh begs Lee to keep this fact a secret from Mi Do, begging him on his knees and ultimately cutting out his own tongue with a pair of scissors.

Lee then boards the elevator, recalls the events of his sister’s suicide, and shoots himself in the head, fulfilling his end of the deal with Oh. The film ends with a denouement in a snowy hillside, where Oh has hired a hypnotist to erase his memory so that he can continue a romantic relationship with his daughter.
Architectural Analysis

INT. PRISON ROOM - DAY/NIGHT

The room in which Oh is imprisoned for fifteen years utilizes the small space’s scarce architectural elements, such as pipes, windows, and furniture, to signal the passing of time, emotional volatility, and psychological development. The viewers are introduced to the protagonist’s imprisonment when he peeks his head out from a slot at the bottom of an industrial metal door, an acute sense of confinement permeating the tight mise-en-scène. Desperate and confused, Oh asks the guard how long he will be sequestered. Met with silence, Oh becomes angry, cursing at the guard and then apologizing. The guard forces Oh’s face back into the slot using his boot. Oh is trapped and silenced: the steel door confines his person and his mind. The shot is framed so the slot functions as a frame within the frame of the film. Seeing Oh’s face and hand peeking out the door, the viewer is reminded of a scene in the Walt Disney animation *Alice in Wonderland* (1951), in which Alice eats a cookie and grows larger than the house, her face peeking out from the windows.
The animation and the scene in *Oldboy* suggest feelings of estrangement, otherness, and bodily discomfort. The proportion of Oh’s head to the frame of the slot is unbalanced, compared to the typical proportion of a body to a window or a door. The slot at the bottom of the door functions as Oh’s only circulation with the outside world, but he is unable to fit through the opening, reinforcing his incarceration. Further, this scene in Oh’s room of imprisonment introduces the theme of surveillance in the film. While Oh is refused contact with others, he is always being monitored from a distance. The theme of surveillance is reinforced later in the film with the suggestion of the “Panopticon” at the villain’s apartment.
The next shot reveals the layout of the room, where Oh is trapped. The camera is situated in the center of the rectangular room. A white-tiled open bathroom with hanging grey towels is visible on screen left. The walls sport a seventies-style geometric wallpaper of interlocking rounded-corner bricks in taupe, olive green, and brown. The bathroom is diagonally situated from the bed, where a wrinkled taupe bedspread sits. The colors of the domestic items—the towels, the bedspread, the wallpaper—are muted. Park’s bleak color palette of the room’s décor suggests Oh’s opaque, greyed understanding of his reality. Further, the patterned wallpaper and the tiles of the bathroom form grided patterns. In her article on *Oldboy*, Kim Gyung Ae posited:

The design concept [that] Lee Woo Jin [applies to Oh’s room] is “imprisoned,” “obsessed” and “oppressed.” It symbolizes the closing fear and suffocating routine that Oh Dae Soo must endure for 15 years. Also, it symbolizes the echoing sound of Lee Woo Jin’s dried and isolated soul through his lifelong obsession with past memories, implying the closed nature of his mind…The memories are trapped in a grid pattern and the whole world is a myriad of small [prison] cells. It is an image showing his psychological state of confinement. Together, the grid patterns of the wallpaper and bathroom tiles are visually representative of the theme of confinement, suggesting the image of incarcerating devices like prison bars. Kim later suggests that the grid and interlocking patterns symbolize the static and immutable nature of both Oh and Lee’s destinies.

143 Kim, “The Six Images in *Old Boy,*” 11-12.
The scene continues as the camera moves inside of the bathroom, showing white tiles smeared with grout. The bed is visible in the left corner of the room, where its edge is pressed up against a wall. A fake window with a lit landscape of a windmill glares tediously. In voiceover, Oh explains that when music plays, valium gas—which he discovers is the same gas that the Russians used on Chechen terrorists—is released from a pipe near the bathroom, and he falls asleep. Park reveals a close-up of the pipe as it spits mist. The camera moves to a vent on the ceiling looking down at Oh, who is collapsed on the floor. The bed is no longer against the wall, but awkwardly pulled out into the middle of the room.
In this shot, Park highlights mechanical and architectural components, such as the pipe, vent, and window, to elevate a sense of surveillance, confinement, and control. Oh is not only imprisoned by walls of the small room; he is also tracked and surveilled by its mechanical and plumbing equipment. The pipe serves to regulate Oh’s cycles of consciousness. The ceiling grate casts bars on the image of an unconscious Oh on the floor, which further reinforces the grid motif. The false window teases Oh with a sense of freedom, suggesting the presence of an exterior world that Oh is unable to access. In place of people, the architecture and its technology serve as Oh’s company. The architecture plays an active role by enforcing his incarceration.

Time passes and Oh watches television. The news reports a story that Oh has murdered his wife. Unable to cope, Oh hallucinates: ants crawl out of his forearm and cover his face, an allusion to a shot in Luis Buñuel’s Dadaist film, *Le Chien Andalou* (1929). Anchored in the center of the room, the camera spins, showing Oh’s shadows on the walls of the dark and frenetically lit room. Oh convulses in the middle, his face

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covered in ants, suggesting the twisted infestation of his mind. The camera reflects the character’s physical and emotional chaos. The roving shadows on the walls disorient the viewers, forcing them to experience the confined confusion of the character. In the spinning shot, the bed has moved to the right corner of the room and new tables and desks have appeared. Feeling trapped and overwhelmed by anger, Oh breaks a mirror on the wall and uses the glass to slice his wrists in an attempt at suicide. The gas is released and Oh falls asleep. The guards drag Oh out as his wrists bleed onto the beige carpet.

The shot of the hallucination and spinning room suggests the chaotic psychological effects of solitary confinement. Oh is driven to insanity as a result of his confinement in the room. He uses a decorative device that hangs on a wall, the mirror, to attempt suicide; by shattering the mirror, he is literally breaking an image of his self. The architecture enables and foments his psychological unraveling.

As the scene continues, it becomes clear that the furniture in the room is constantly moving. Throughout fifteen years of confinement, Oh re-arranges the furniture in an attempt to ward off boredom and insanity, attempting to form a logic through design and maintain a sense of control in a powerless situation. While the furniture shifts, the
locations of the bathroom, window, light sconces, and paintings remain fixed, which function as anchoring points for spatial analysis.

While the re-arrangement of the furniture has been subtle, in the next shot, Oh pushes a desk and his bed to one side of the room. This movement exposes a large area of the wall, where he draws an outline of a human figure, and uses it as target practice. His anger and rage is taken out physically on the wall. As Oh attacks the architecture, he gains physical strength and mental focus. Park symbolically shows that the walls, which once weakened and confined his body and mind, now strengthen him. As Oh punches the wall, the soundtrack changes and the music becomes a low electronic pulse. The milieu is filled with a sense of focused anger, determination, and vengeance.
Oh finds an extra chopstick in his meal package and uses it to dig himself out of his room over fifteen years. He finds pleasure and relief in deconstructing the architecture: the destruction of this place means mental and physical freedom from wrongful imprisonment. The shot composition where Oh’s face is shown through a void in the brick wall is analogous to the introductory shot to the room, where Oh looks out through a slot in the door. However, in this shot, a maniacal look of glee occupies Oh’s face. As he continues to dig his way through the bricks, the camera refrains from displaying the room layout: the shots become solid and stationary, focusing on Oh’s face and physical actions. His bed remains in the same place, as he needs it to be situated there to hide the hole in the wall. When Oh digs deep enough to reach the outside, Park shows a nighttime exterior shot of an urban building. The shot is reminiscent of the opening scene in *JSA* in which the camera moves towards a small stream of light in the window caused by a bullet.

The director establishes the room in which Oh is imprisoned through the presentation and manipulation of various architectural components. The room itself is simple, but Park employs close-up shots of pipes, windows, and grates, and inventive
camera movements that anthropomorphize the space, making it dynamic and alive. In this scene in *Oldboy*, Park makes the statement that architecture is not to be *seen*, but to be *used*; architecture plays an active, rather than passive, role in communicating a character’s psychological and temporal arc. Architecture plays the character of a guard or enforcer that is complicit in Oh’s incarceration.

**EXT. ROOFTOP IN SEOUL - DAY**

*Oh’s Escape*

![Figure 5-11](image)

The rooftop of a residential building, an architectural motif in *Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance*, also appears in *Oldboy*. Here, Park uses the appearance of the rooftop as a method of visual trickery. After Oh passes out from a gas attack, a hypnotist approaches him in the prison room and rings a bell. Lying in the bed, he turns his head to screen right and the scene transitions to the outdoors in what appears to be a grassy field. The frame is composed by a background of unruly grass with red trunk sitting near the center of the frame. The trunk falls and bursts open and Oh stumbles out from the box dressed in a Parisian suit and falls haphazardly onto the grass. It appears as if he has found freedom.
However, in a maneuver of visual irony, a sort of *trompe-l’oeil* for the moving image, Park cuts the film to a wide shot that shows that Oh is not in a grassy field, but on the neglected, overgrown roof of a concrete high-rise building, where grass has sprouted from the floor. Spinning turbines and concrete blocks litter the mise-en-scène. Oh is situated in a cityscape of vague, exposed concrete buildings under construction. The cluttered urban landscape recalls Park Don Seo’s statement in *Color of Architecture, Color of Cities*, which was quoted in the chapter on *Mr. Vengeance*: “The cityscape of our country lacks elegance and dignity and makes one dizzy.”

Oh experiences vertigo and is overstimulated from being exposed to sunlight and the overwhelming scale and density of the urban fabric that he has not seen in fifteen years. The audience anticipates Oh’s freedom after fifteen years of confinement, but he is still trapped. Instead of interior imprisonment in a rectangular room, Oh is restricted by the vertical height of the architecture and the unrelenting cityscape. His confinement has followed him out of the room and into the city. Architecture continues to entrap him.

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In this sequence on the roof, Park makes several suave match-cuts to maintain both aesthetic and symbolic continuity from the previous scene. The color of the trunk matches the red tones in the room where Oh resided for fifteen years. The geometry and tones of the room are analogous to the shape and color of the box. Oh’s birth from the trunk is symbolic of his release into perceived freedom, though Park leaves the audience dissatisfied by widening the shot and revealing the cluttered and unkempt building within the context of a brutal city.

_Suicide_

_Figure 5-13_

_Figure 5-14_
After Oh orients himself to his surroundings, he encounters a man propped up against the concrete edge of the roof with a small white puppy in his arms. Contemplating suicide, the man sobs, “Even though I’m no better than a beast, don’t I have the right to live?” Oh repeats the line back to the man. As he sobs, the man begins to fall backwards and Oh grabs him by his tie. The camera moves to a wide shot perpendicular to the building, showing the small figures of Oh and the man dwarfed by stained slabs of concrete that compose the balconies and the surrounding rectangular residential buildings. The characters’ diminutive size within the frames emphasizes both of their isolated experiences in the city: Oh was a solitary prisoner for fifteen years, and the man felt so alone in his grief as to consider suicide. The shots emphasize the vertical height of the buildings and heighten the characters’ dramatic tensions.

As he grabs the man’s tie, Oh says, “I want to tell you my story. Die later.” Oh sits the man down and recounts his experience, but then abandons him before the man has a chance to articulate his suicidal intentions. As Oh walks out the elevator and into the street, the man from the roof crashes down onto a car.

Park chooses to depict suicide from a height because it supports the proposal of architecture as a place of violence. Park utilizes a wide shot of a tall building and its surrounding urban landscape to heighten the audience’s feelings of fear and danger. The building is the means of the man’s suicide: the height and the scale of the surrounding buildings dwarf his body and his acute sense of distress. By using architecture as the backdrop of a suicide scene, Park communicates the dangerous role of architecture in Oldboy. Whether the characters are inside or outside, at home, in a restaurant, or in a prison, they are never safe. Architecture refuses to be a refuge in this film.
INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

After Oh leaves the roof of the building, he arrives to a sushi restaurant, where he meets Mi Do. His face is filtered through the glass of a tank where fish swim languidly within the confines of the box. This type of shot also appeared in *The Moon is...the Sun’s Dream* when the title credits appeared behind a fish tank. As Oh squats in front of the tank, a stranger hands him a wallet full of cash and a cell phone and then mysteriously disappears.
In the sushi restaurant, Oh tells Mi Do, the young female sushi chef, “I want to eat something alive.” Mi Do serves him a live octopus and he eats it as it wriggles in his mouth. The tentacles stick to his nose as he chews vigorously, nearly swallowing it whole.

Park makes a symbolic comparison between the fish in the tank and the octopus in Oh’s stomach: like the sea creatures confined in a cage or a body, Oh is also trapped. In the suicide scene on the roof, the man had said, “Even though I’m no better than a beast, don’t I have the right to live?” The connection between animal and man is reinforced by the scene in the restaurant. Park compares the caged quality of the sea creatures to Oh’s physical and psychological entrapment. For Oh, the gustatory experience is raw and animalistic, a reflection of how he has evolved after being caged like an animal for fifteen years. At the same time, he is still a slave to his captor, who continues to taunt him through calls and encounters.
Like those in his earlier films, the domestic spaces in *Oldboy* serve to express traits of the characters, but also to reiterate visual and symbolic motifs. After Oh faints at the sushi restaurant, Mi Do takes him to her apartment and cares for him. Oh wakes up in a maroon-toned apartment, reminiscent of the color of his room of imprisonment and that of the trunk in which he escaped. Other interior elements of the room and the people in it reflect the extended design scheme: the wallpaper is comprised of geometric designs of squares in the same color palette; Oh covers himself in a light pink and brown tie-dyed blanket with brown and maroon pillows; Mi Do wears a red shirt and a patchwork skirt with maroon floral patterns; the carpet of the room, too, echoes the maroon palate.

Park uses the color scheme of Mi Do’s apartment to create visual and spatial continuity between the various spaces in the film, from the prison room, to the box from which he emerges, to the apartment of his nurturer. As Kim Gyung Ae described in her essay, the interlocking grid patterns signify a psychological and physical confinement. In the film, architecture is the consistent messenger of the theme of imprisonment.
Despite Oh’s location, the feeling of incarceration follows him everywhere. This idea is supported by an online conversation between Mi Do and Oh with an anonymous chat partner. When Mi Do’s chat partner sees him in the video, he mockingly types, “How’s life in a bigger prison, Oh Dae Soo?” When asked his identity, the chat partner responds, “The lonely prince in the high tower.” This dialogue between Oh and his imprisoner reiterates the theme of imprisonment and alludes to the idea of the Panopticon, a concept applied to the film by Kim Gyung Ae, which will be discussed in the following section.

INT. LEE WOO JIN’S PENTHOUSE APARTMENT - NIGHT

Architecture and Water

Living up to his self-given title of “the lonely prince in the high tower,” the villain, Lee Woo Jin, lives in the penthouse apartment of a luxurious residential high-rise building in the city. Kim Gyung Ae interpreted an analogy between Lee Woo Jin’s penthouse apartment and Jeremy Bentham’s 18th century Panopticon. She hypothesized:

His penthouse on top of a 64-story downtown building is similar to Bentham’s Panopticon with windows all over through which you can see the whole city at a glance. Concrete pillars hold up the room decorated with minimal furniture and huge waves swirl through the concrete walls. The living room, which is dimly lit, has a cold black channel. The structures represent Lee Woo Jin’s state of mental confinement or imprisonment. The film’s gaze is that of Lee Woo Jin, his Panopticon is a 21st century surveillance mechanism. He uses [media] to view and monitor Oh Dae Soo, to control him...Oh Dae Soo exists only within the meta-gaze of Lee Woo Jin and the mechanism of surveillance.”

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Korean text:

“도심빌딩의 꼭대기에 있는 그의 64층 범죄하우스는 범담의 광대한과 비슷한 구조물로 도시 전체를 한눈에 굽어볼 수 있도록 사방이 유리창으로 되어 있다. 오대 수의 갑급방처럼 어둡고 황량한 빌딩 외벽의 실루엣은 그의 집가의 개방성과 의료용 점을 배치한 실내를 콘크리트기둥이
In her analysis of the Panopticon, Kim briefly quoted from Michel Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish* (1975). However, further examination of Foucault’s text provides a clearer description of the implications and consequences of Panopticism. Foucault asserted:

Bentham’s Panopticon is the architectural figure of this composition. We know the principle on which it was based: at the periphery, an annular building; at the centre, a tower… All that is needed, then, is to place a supervisor in a central tower and to shut up in each cell a madman, a patient, a condemned man, a worker or a schoolboy… The panoptic mechanism arranges spatial unities that make it possible to see constantly and to recognize immediately. In short, it reverses the principle of the dungeon; or rather of its three functions - to enclose, to deprive of light and to hide - it preserves only the first and eliminates the other two. Full lighting and the eye of a supervisor capture better than darkness, which ultimately protected. Visibility is a trap…Thanks to its mechanisms of observation, it gains in efficiency and in the ability to penetrate into men’s behavior.147

Given Kim’s interpretation, one can certainly draw parallels between Bentham’s concept of the Panopticon, Foucault’s theory of Panopticism, and the role of architecture in *Oldboy*. While Oh’s prison was not physically in view from Lee Woo Jin’s tower, it was controlled remotely by Lee’s machination. In an urban and contemporary setting, the supervisor and the watched can exist in separate locations, but they are bound by modern devices of control. Even after Oh is released from the prison room, he is constantly surveilled by Lee through wiretaps, video cameras, phones, and the internet. When the...

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film introduces Lee Woo Jin’s penthouse apartment, the “high tower” in which the “lonely prince” resides, the visual identity of the Panopticon is evoked.

The entrance of the lobby of Lee’s apartment is elevated on a plinth and the vast floor is striped with sleek and shiny grey, white, and black marble. The shot shows a single colossal metal column on the left of the frame. The pattern of thin lines echoes the height of the tower. The elevator in the lobby leads directly to Lee’s penthouse suite.

Inside Lee’s apartment, his white-haired crony stands at the edge of the room, looking out at the view through the large glass window. Tall, polished, and well-lit buildings
surround the penthouse. He observes the surrounding urban landscape, embodying Foucault’s articulation of the “supervisor in the central tower.”

This view of the cityscape is the second in the film. The first view of the urban environment occurs after Oh escapes from the prison. In that scene, the cranes hovered above unfinished concrete buildings. Here, at Lee’s tower, the buildings are complete and polished. The views are vastly different. Through the juxtaposition of the qualities of the two very different buildings and view of cityscapes, Park contrasts the power dynamics between Oh and Lee.
In the same scene, Park cuts to a deep shot showing the penthouse apartment, which reveals a brutalist interior composed primarily of raw concrete. The large rectangular room is divided into three sections by two rows of heavy square columns made of the same raw concrete as the walls. Near the entrance, two L-shaped decorative water features frame the path to the elevator. The color palette is cold and grey. Lee emerges nude from a freestanding glass shower located on the left side of the room. A shot later in the film shows a view from the coffee table located in the center of the room looking towards the window where Lee practices yoga.

Park inserts the small pools and glass shower in Lee’s apartment to reference the significance of water in his life. Kim proposed the following interpretation:

The water flowing through the living room of Lee Woo Jin reminds him of his traumatic experience. His memory is constantly returning to the past and he is forever lost [without] Soo Ah, who embodies his mother, lover, and sister. As the water in his penthouse [became] trapped in the confined track, his frustrated elemental desire returns as a traumatic [memory]. Standing water suggests his stagnant life when he stopped growing. It is also the image of a mother’s amniotic fluid in her womb, the source of life, and at the same time, it symbolizes his sister’s death in the water. It implies the dark inner side of Lee Woo Jin playing a dangerous game of revenge on the border between life and death, reality and fantasy, and normality and abnormality.148

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Korean text:

“이우진의 거실을 가로지르며 흘고 있는 물은 그의 트라우마적 경험을 끝임없이 상 기시키는 내적 구조물이다. 그의 기억은 끝임없이 과거로 홀귀하며 그가 영원히 상실 해버린 어머니, 언인이었던 누이 수아에게로 향한다. 그러나 물이 그의 펜트하우스 수로에 갇혀있듯이, 그의 좌절된 근원적 욕망은 다시 내면의 트라우마로 고여 온다. 고여있는 물은 성경이 멈춰진 이우진의 정체된 심을 압시해주고 있다. 또한, 생명의 근원인 어머니의 자궁(양수) 이미지이며, 동시에 그의 누이 수아를 삼킨 저수지의 물을 연상시키는 죽음의 이미지기도 하다. 결국 살과 죽음, 리얼리티와 환상, 정상과 비정상의 경계 위에서 위태로운 복수의 게임을 벌이는 이우진의 어두운 내면을 압시해주는 것이다.”
Kim applied a psychoanalytic framework to the significance of water through references to the uterus. This interpretation is validated by dialogue at the end of the film, when Lee tells Oh that the rumors of the siblings’ incest morphed into those about pregnancy. After hearing the gossip, Lee’s sister developed pseudocyesis, a condition also known as false pregnancy or phantom pregnancy, which is a medical disorder in which a woman believes that she is pregnant and begins experiencing symptoms, though she is not carrying a child. Lee’s sister died by jumping into a dam after rumors of her pregnancy spread relentlessly through the school.

For Lee, water symbolizes both life and death and has a significant role in his memory. In addition, the significance of water in the film is reinforced by Oh’s dialogue about Lee’s vindictive nature. Oh says, “Whether it be a grain of sand or a rock, in water they both sink alike. That’s Lee Woo Jin’s thought.” The significant presence of water in the apartment, the L-shaped pools and prominent glass shower, symbolizes the villain’s traumatic loss of his sister.

**INT./EXT. EVERGREEN HIGH SCHOOL - DAY**

*Window*
When Oh discovers that Lee captured and detained him in the prison room because of the rumors of incest, the film transitions into a flashback of the men’s high school years. Through a hole in a broken window, Oh witnesses Lee and his sister, Soo Ah, engage in incestuous behavior. Footage of Oh as a teenager is intercut with shots of Oh in present time rediscovering the memory. As seen in the film stills, the shots are very similar in composition. The time gap is visually resolved by the window, which provides a link between the past and the present. The director uses architecture to signal a parallelism between the film’s “then” and “now.”

**Suicide**
After rumors spread about the incest and pregnancy, Soo Ah perches herself on the fence at the edge of a dam. She attempts to fall backwards, but her brother catches her. The composition of Lee holding his sister’s hand as she dangles off the edge recalls the scene at the rooftop in the beginning of the film when Oh grasps the suicidal man’s tie to prevent him from falling. At her request, Lee releases his sister’s hand and she falls into the water. Like in the earlier scene with Oh and the man, architecture serves as a method of suicide. Architecture, with its height and stability, is a means of last resort for these individuals.

Park introduced the theme of the bridge previously in *Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance*, where the structure caused a little girl’s drowning and served as the backdrop
for Ryu’s murder. In *Oldboy*, Park presents a bridge and dam, which Soo Ah uses to commit suicide. In the films, Park uses a structure suspended above water as a vehicle for death and suffering.

The association between bridges and death is well-established in the general population in South Korea. As discussed previously, the prevalence of depression as a result of *han* is high in the country. Bridge suicides are commonplace: in 2004, the year after *Oldboy* was released, 60 people attempted suicide by jumping off the Han River bridges.\(^{149}\) The problem has grown significantly worse in the 2010s: 1,400 people attempted suicide by jumping from the same bridges from 2012 to 2016 (an average of 350 attempts per year).\(^{150}\) The association between bridges, suicide, and death is part of South Korea’s cultural understanding, which provides an explanation for Park’s frequent use of bridges and dams as settings for death in his films.

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The article covers the subway suicide problem in South Korea in 2004, but also describes that bridge suicides are a significant issue.

\(^{150}\) “Suicide attempts at Han River on the rise,” *Yonhap News Agency*, last modified September 20, 2016, http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/news/2016/09/20/0200000000AEN20160920002000315.html?did=2106m
INT. LEE WOO JIN’S PENTHOUSE APARTMENT - NIGHT

Climax

The film’s climactic scene occurs in Lee’s penthouse at night. When Lee reveals that Oh has unknowingly committed incest with his daughter, Oh is possessed by rage. He is thrown at the window and it cracks, the wind whistling through it. He hurls his body at the walls and furniture. Through the destruction of the architecture, Oh expresses his grief, anger, and shock. Because one’s home is an extension of one’s person, Oh attempts to harm Lee by annihilating the architecture. During his fit, Oh destroys symbols of surveillance by shattering the window and a case full of photographic equipment.
When Lee amusedly threatens to tell Oh’s daughter, Mi Do, about the incestuous relationship, Oh desperately shows contrition for his actions: he severs his tongue with a pair of scissors. Earlier in the film, Lee had said to Oh, “Your tongue got my sister pregnant,” in reference to the rumor that he began.

After Oh cuts out his tongue, Lee abandons him, bleeding and emasculated, on the floor of the apartment. Lee enters the elevator in the penthouse and his mind is transported to a memory of him grasping his sister as she attempts to jump into the dam. Soo Ah’s death motivated Lee’s incarceration and surveillance of Oh. Foucault described the fate of the director of the Panopticon by quoting Bentham:
In any case, enclosed as he is in the middle of this architectural mechanism, is not the director’s own fate entirely bound up with it?... “By every tie I could devise”, said the master of the Panopticon, “my own fate had been bound up by me with theirs” (Bentham, 177).\(^{151}\)

The fate of the director is as connected to the Panopticon as that of the prisoner. After the imprisonment and surveillance are completed and Oh has repented by mutilating himself, the vengeance is complete. Lee is now left alone with his memories; he has dominated Oh but is left with no purpose. The architecture is both destroyed and defunct as a mechanism of surveillance. The Panopticon is no longer functional, and neither is the director, whose fate is tied to it. On his way out of the penthouse, Lee fulfills his promise to Oh and shoots himself in the elevator.

**Conclusion**

In *Oldboy*, architecture serves as an enforcer of control and renders people powerless. The prison room where Oh spent fifteen years restrains him both physically and mentally. After Oh escapes from the room and encounters the suicidal man on the rooftop, architecture serves as a means of death. Similarly, in the high school flashback scene, the dam serves as location for Soo Ah’s suicide. In a parallel to the concept of the Panopticon, Lee’s penthouse represents power and control. However, the penthouse also functions to control its owner by reminding him of his loss of his sister through the water elements. The film’s narrative and visual style shocked audiences and earned Park the reputation of a director who “wishes to shoot a spectacle of destruction.”\(^{152}\) The buildings in the film serve as locations of devastation.

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\(^{151}\) Foucault, “Panopticism,” 195-228.

\(^{152}\) Kim, *Park Chan-wook*, 52.
Chapter 6 : LADY VENGEANCE (2005)

Context

After the international and domestic success of *Oldboy*, Park released the final installment of the Vengeance Trilogy, his sixth feature film, *Lady Vengeance* (2005). Park co-wrote the screenplay with Park See Kyung and worked with cinematographer Chung Chung Hoon and production designer and art director Jo Hwa Sung. According to the 2005 Korean Cinema Yearbook, the film was budgeted at $6 million. It grossed $3.6 million in South Korea, where it opened in 127 theaters, making it the most widely distributed film that year. Worldwide, the film grossed $23.8 million. The film was produced by Moho Film, Park’s production company, and distributed by CJ Entertainment. In 2012, several entertainment magazines, such as *Variety*, *The Hollywood Reporter*, and *Deadline Hollywood*, among others, reported that Charlize Theron would star in an American remake of the film.

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153 Korean title: 친절한 금자씨, which literally translates to “Sincere Geum Ja.” The film has also been marketed under the title, *Sympathy for Lady Vengeance*.


However, no further development of the film has been released since the initial announcements.\textsuperscript{157}

The film was shot on location in several places in Busan, South Korea. Yang Seong Yeong, a member of the location support team for the Busan Film Commission documented the process of location scouting for the film on the Korean Film Biz Zone blog. He stated that the movie was filmed at Gwangan branch of Busan Park, Maryknoll Medical Center, a tunnel by the Busan docks, and in front of Jurye Girls’ High School.\textsuperscript{158}

Another source reports that the film’s prison scenes were shot in Gunsan prison.\textsuperscript{159}

According to Yang’s account, Park had spotted the location in front of the high school while scouting for \textit{Oldboy} and asked his \textit{Lady Vengeance} location team to capture footage of it during pre-production. Yang confessed:

\begin{quote}
Working with a director of Park’s status brought maximum thrills and maximum stress. It was a breakneck, horrendous, utterly exhausting job, yet as satisfying once it was complete as it had been painful to get through. Let’s see if you end up
\end{quote}


feeling any Sympathy for Mr. Busan Film Commission Location Manager once he’s told you more about the shoot.\textsuperscript{160}

Yang describes the difficulties associated with location scouting, which primarily lies in obtaining permission. He described the challenges in location scouting for \textit{Lady Vengeance}:

Providing support for preparing filming locations is never an easy job, from start to finish, but obtaining permission is the most difficult and time-consuming task among those involved. You have to create a comfortable and appropriate environment to allow the production team to get just what it wants, while also ensuring that use of the location causes minimal disruption to the local area, thereby eliminating any chance of complaints being made.\textsuperscript{161}

While building a set has its obvious difficulties associated with design, materials acquisition, and manual labor, location scouting has its own challenges of travel, research, and permitting. Thus, set design, location scouting, and cinematographic framing are all components of constructing a cinematic world.

The film stars a popular Korean actress, Lee Young Ae, who was previously cast in Park’s \textit{JSA}. Before \textit{Lady Vengeance}, Lee had established a reputation as a commercial model and actress, which was reflected in her role in \textit{JSA} as the professional investigator, Major Sophie E. Jean. In his monograph on Park, Kim Young Jin writes that Lee’s depiction in \textit{Lady Vengeance} “isn’t one of the goddess who perfectly controls her happy life as emphasized in her ads…The public wondered what would be the effect of joining this time’s television star and commercial queen with a provocative art film director.”\textsuperscript{162}

\begin{flushright}
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\textsuperscript{161}Ibid.
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\textsuperscript{162}Kim, Park Chan-wook, 52.
\end{flushright}
Like the other two films in the Vengeance Trilogy, *Lady Vengeance* follows a story of revenge. Interestingly, *Lady Vengeance* is the first of Park’s films to feature a female protagonist. In an interview with Kim Young Jin prior to 2007, Park said:

> The title in Korean means *Kind Geum-ja*, but actually it’s *Ambiguous Geum-ja*. If I were to sum it up in a word, I would want to call it *Pitiful Geum-ja*. She’s a woman who tried but ultimately failed to find salvation for her soul…In my opinion, she has childish and reckless aspects and is unsophisticated in her thinking. She’s a person who moves blindly according to her own immature logic…It’s not important whether Geum-ja is an angel or a witch; she’s just a simple-minded woman.\(^{163}\)

Park’s demeaning description of the protagonist in this interview is problematic because it reinforces South Korea’s prevalent misogyny. Even in modern times, Korea operates under a conservative patriarchal society where gender bias causes brutal violence and discrimination towards women. A *New York Times* op-ed published in 2016 explained:

> Many men would rather not acknowledge that South Korea is an entrenched patriarchy and that toxic gender relations are taking a toll on society. Women’s status has stalled in the 21st century. Too many of them are treated like second-class citizens and suffer undue violence, objectification and discrimination…the reality for South Korean women remains bleak…Women made up 86 percent of all violent crime victims in 2013, according to police data…Women aren’t safe at home, either: Reports of violence against women perpetrated by their husbands have been rising in recent years.\(^{164}\)

Despite Park’s reductive description of the protagonist, an interpretation of Geum Ja in relation to architecture salvages the portrayal of femininity in the film. The character commands the spaces that she occupies by asserting physical and spiritual strength in her quest for revenge. In *Women on Screen: Feminism and Femininity in Visual Culture*, Lisa Purse contributed as essay titled, “Return of the ‘Angry Woman’: Authenticating


Female Physical Action in Contemporary Cinema.” She described the conceptions of
gender in Western films released in the mid-2000s, contemporaries to Lady Vengeance:

The active women in films like Monster (2003), Hard Candy (2005), and The
Brave One (2007) are angry transgressors, their behaviours and actions locating
them outside of dominant social norms, as well as outside mainstream codes of
cinematic female representation.\textsuperscript{165}

Purse argued that female physical aggression supports a feminist reading of these types of
films. In 2016, after he released The Handmaiden, Park provided a different account of
women in cinema. A journalist for Film Comment asked, “Starting with Lady Vengeance,
there has been a shift toward female protagonists in your films. How did this come
about?” Park answered:

In Oldboy, the lead female character, Mi-do…is somebody who is not privy to the
truth. That was something that didn’t sit right with me…So as I started to
develop Lady Vengeance, I got to think about this a little bit. In the film industry,
in the realm of the commercial feature-length films, we really haven’t had a lot of
female protagonists…And when you place a woman at the center of a film, it
makes the film that much more enriched, and it makes it feel much more
sophisticated. Also, I have one daughter, and as she grew older, I had more of an
opportunity to talk to her. Between my wife and my daughter, I have learned to
see the world through more of the female perspective, and I would call that
progress—I became more mature as a person.\textsuperscript{166}

According to Park’s responses, his conception of Lady Vengeance’s protagonist shifted
from one of unsophistication and degradation to one of enrichment and idealization. Park
cited his interactions with his wife and daughter as the motivations for his shift in
perspective. Despite the contradictions in his accounts, this chapter asserts that Geum Ja

\textsuperscript{165} Melanie Waters, Women on Screen: Feminism and Femininity in Visual Culture (Basingstoke; New

\textsuperscript{166} Topalovic, “Interview: Park Chan Wook,” https://www.filmcomment.com/blog/interview-park-chan-
wook/.
is not and has never been “simple-minded” because of her reclamation of architecture and space in the film through her ability to enact violence.

Park, who was raised as Catholic and later attended the Jesuit Sogang University, introduces Christian themes of salvation and some religious architecture and imagery in Lady Vengeance, such as a prison chapel and the shrine-like set-up of the protagonist’s apartment. Film critic and founder of the New York Asian Film Festival, Grady Hendrix, writes that Lady Vengeance is “marinated in kitsch Christian iconography.”

The film shows many different locations, both imaginary and real, for short intervals of time, making it rather untethered in its narrative use of space. As a result of the peripatetic jumps from location to location, the audience focuses on the symbolic and physical qualities of the abandoned schoolhouse at the end of the film. This chapter will examine three transient but important locations—the prison chapel, its living quarters, and Geum Ja’s apartment—and also analyze the extended location of the abandoned schoolhouse.

Synopsis

The narrative of Lady Vengeance focuses on the actions of two primary characters, Geum Ja and her former schoolteacher, Mr. Baek. The other characters of the film function as two ensembles: Geum Ja’s cohort of inmates at the women’s prison and the parents of kidnapped children who participate in Geum Ja’s revenge.


168 Played by Lee Young Ae.

169 Played by Choi Min Sik, who also played the role of the protagonist Oh Dae Soo in Oldboy.
While there are many secondary characters that support the narrative of the story, the film’s attention remains focused on the intertwined relationship between Geum Ja and Mr. Baek.

The story begins as Geum Ja starts her thirteen-year incarceration in a women’s prison for the murder of a young boy, which she did not commit. The perpetrator of the kidnapping and murder is Mr. Baek. A flashback reveals that in high school, Geum Ja became pregnant and left home to live with Baek, who forced her to help him when he kidnapped and killed a five-year-old boy. After she gives birth, Baek kidnapped her daughter and threatened to kill the girl unless Geum Ja takes the blame for the death of the boy. As a result, Geum Ja serves the prison sentence for the crime while her daughter is adopted by Australian parents.

During the prison stint, Geum Ja is a model prisoner, a devout Christian who helps others selflessly, which earns her the nickname, “Sincere Geum Ja.” After she is released from prison, she moves into an apartment and abandons her piety. Geum Ja becomes obsessed with her vengeance for Baek. Eventually, she finds Baek, kidnaps him, and transports him to an abandoned schoolhouse. She tortures him, but is unable to kill him. She discovers that Baek had not only kidnapped and killed the one boy, but a series of children. Geum Ja gathers the children’s relatives at the schoolhouse and they participate in the torturing and killing of Baek. The film ends with a reunion between Geum Ja and her daughter.
Architectural Analysis

INT/EXT. WOMEN’S PRISON - DAY

*Living Quarters*

![Figure 6-1](image1.jpg)

![Figure 6-2](image2.jpg)

The women’s prison where Geum Ja is incarcerated is not as foreboding as typical depictions of these places in television or film, where the cells and the public areas are places of wanton violence. Rather, the interiors of this prison are colored pastel pink, which complement the women’s blue uniforms. In the prison, the women lounge on the floor surrounded by multi-colored blankets and other items of domestic comfort. Later in
the film, the exterior of the prison complex is revealed as a series of brutalist rectangular blocks with uniform windows. While the exterior of the prison is stark, the interiors are warm and colorful. Film critic Jinny Choi analyzed the color palette of the prison interiors:

The general color palette and style of the film is similarly colorful and appealing. This stylistic amplification reflects an overarching theme of paradox in the story: a bright and flashy style that lightens the ugliness of its subjects. Director Park mainly plays with the film’s colors through the color or design of the walls inside each room. For example, the women’s prison wall is painted pink and is filmed in bright lighting—contrasting with some of the foul scenes that occur in the cell.\footnote{Jinny Choi, “Film Review: 2005 Crime Drama ‘Sympathy for Lady Vengeance,’” The Knockturnal, last modified July 9, 2016, https://theknockturnal.com/film-review-2005-crime-film-lady-vengeance/}

The pastel colors of the prison’s interior belie the dark reality of the prisoners, most of whom have been incarcerared for violent crimes.
In addition to his work on architectural color, Park Chan Wook’s father, Park Don Seo, also published an article on prison design in 1984 titled, “A Study on the Architectural Planning for Correctional Institutions.” In the abstract, he emphasized: “It is no doubt that the physical environment of the correctional institution has much effect on the rehabilitation of the offenders.” In the article, professor Park documented different layouts of correctional facilities around the globe, specifically detailing block plans and unit plans for individual cells. Four selected images from the article have been compiled and provided above. Professor Park’s comprehensive knowledge of prison design and his expertise on architectural color cannot be overlooked in terms of the film’s unique visualization of the women’s prison. One can imagine that the director drew from his knowledge of his father’s work or perhaps consulted his expertise in collaboration with the art department to make decisions about the prison’s architecture and interiors.

Prison Chapel

Figure 6-4

In the prison, the director introduces Geum Ja’s identity as a devout Christian. She prays obsessively in the chapel and presents seraphic sermons for her fellow prisoners at an inmate testimonial event in the prison’s auditorium. Both scenes are comprised of orderly compositions with symmetrical elements, which reinforce the idea of Geum Ja finding salvation through god during her incarceration.

In the nearly symmetrical chapel shot, Geum Ja sits in the foreground while the space extends to the focal point of the cross surrounded by a red curtain. The rectangular room is elongated by the camera’s placement and lens choice, suggesting the moral distance between Geum Ja, the sinner, and her god. The table at which she sits is bright green, and the shrine is bright red, while the surrounding walls are pastel pink. Two brightly lit rectangular windows flank the religious iconography in the room. The spiritual hierarchy and the distance established by the composition is reinforced by the colors red and green, which are opposite to one another on the color wheel. The symmetry and hues of the chapel’s architecture communicate the distance between the protagonist and her deity. Through her visits to the chapel, she yearns for salvation and exoneration from the accusation.
In the scene at the testimonial day presentation, the shot is composed symmetrically. In the center of the foreground stands a tripartite wooden pulpit, where Geum Ja delivers her story. In the background, the signage rests horizontally at the top of the frame: the *Hangul* text is flanked by two red crosses. Two other inmates dressed in grey sit on each side in the background. In the presentation, Geum Ja speaks of finding salvation for her sins through religion. The linear composition of the built elements in the scene—the pulpit, the chairs, and the stage—convey a commanding force: that of her redeeming savior.

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

![Figure 6-6](image1)

![Figure 6-7](image2)
After Geum Ja is released from prison, she settles into a small garden-level apartment. The room is eclectically decorated in red, black, and purple patterns. An exposed red brick wall sits behind Geum Ja’s vanity. Choi interpreted the apartment room’s decor:

Geum ja’s room is zebra-printed in red and black, and the lighting is usually dark. Perhaps this signifies something of Geum ja’s mind, a pattern that is a bit clashing, and disorienting to look at for a long time. The film and its characters are aware of this tension between the ugly and the beautiful…Her insistence on the beauty of things mirrors Director Park’s insistence on the contrast between the film’s beautiful images to the story’s physical and institutional violence.¹⁷²

Choi suggested that the room’s printed bedspread and wallpaper depict the chaos of the protagonist’s mind. Further, she implied that Park’s intentions for the film’s visuals were to contrast the beautiful with the violent. This claim is supported by Geum Ja’s physical transformation in the film. After she is released from prison, she changes her appearance by wearing tight, black clothing and crimson eye shadow. Her seductive appearance is both beautiful and dangerous. Thus, the dichotomy between good and evil, beautiful and ugly, are reflected in both the appearance of architecture and in the body of the protagonist.

While there are few moments when *Lady Vengeance* pauses at a single location, the culminating torture scenes of Mr. Baek occur at a dilapidated and abandoned schoolhouse, which serves as the focal architectural point of the film. The one-story, one-room deep elongated schoolhouse is painted white with large square industrial windows, a slate grey roof, and a protruding pedimented entrance. The schoolhouse as a place for Geum Ja’s retaliation is symbolic: Mr. Baek was Geum Ja’s former teacher and an English language instructor for young children until he was kidnapped by Geum Ja. Park capitalizes on the irony of the situation through his choice of architecture for the torture scene.
In a large dusty room with oxblood curtains, Geum Ja restrains Mr. Baek’s body with ropes in a chair. She assaults him with blows and the threat of a firearm. During the torture, the film cuts to a wide shot of the disheveled room, revealing debris on the floor with splintered chairs piled on the corners. Geum Ja walks to the window and pulls down the curtain, the windows overexposed with light. Geum Ja’s figure is centrally silhouetted in the frame. The composition of this shot references the scene in the chapel, where the cross was framed by two light sources. The shot in the prison chapel reinforced Geum Ja’s piety. However, this shot in the abandoned schoolhouse is suggestive of her newfound religion post-incarceration: violence and revenge. The light in the chapel scene
was small in size compared to that of the figure. However, the light in this shot engulfs Geum Ja. Geum Ja has been swallowed by her mission for revenge.

Conclusion

Through its architecture, *Lady Vengeance* depicts the evolution of Geum Ja’s obsessions as she transitions from imprisonment to freedom. In the beginning of the film, Geum Ja is possessed with religious piety, which allows her hope during her incarceration. The positive light of religion is infused throughout the prison scenes, which is reflected by orderly compositions and bright colors. After she is released from prison, Geum Ja becomes obsessed with a new religion: the faith of revenge. This turn in her personality is echoed by her physical surroundings, especially in her apartment’s decoration with its use of red and black undulating patterns. In the climactic scene, the abandoned schoolhouse serves as a form of symbolic irony for Mr. Baek’s crimes. In the film, architecture serves to echo the protagonist’s spiritual transformation and achieve a sense of closure for the protagonist’s journey. In *Lady Vengeance*, the architecture supports and enhances the character’s revenge narrative.
Chapter 7: I’M A CYBORG, BUT THAT’S OK (2006)

Context

After Park completed the Vengeance Trilogy in 2005, he directed his seventh feature film, I’m a Cyborg, But That’s OK (2006). The film, an eccentric and sanguine romantic comedy that wanders into magical realism, lies in diametric opposition in narrative and mood to his previous thriller and revenge dramas. In an interview, Park says of the film, “It’s a gentle, almost violence free, slightly relaxed movie.” With a sense of irony, Park situates the comedy in a psychiatric hospital and begins the film with a suicide attempt, prompting critics to draw comparisons to Miloš Forman’s comedy-drama One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest (1975) and Ken Kesey’s novel of the same name on which the film is based.

I’m a Cyborg, But That’s OK stars two notable actors: Im Soo Jung, who had received recognition for her acting in Kim Ji Woon’s horror film, A Tale of Two Sisters (2003); and the South Korean celebrity, Rain, a musician, producer, and actor. The film crew included frequent collaborators, director of photography, Chung Chung Hoon, and art director Ryu Seong Hui. Ryu was nominated for “Best Art Direction” for the film at

173 Korean Title: 셰이 보그지 만 케른 자야.
174 Kim, Park Chan-wook, 121.
175 Ibid., 65.

Steve Choe also makes the connection between Cyborg and Cuckoo’s Nest in the essay cited below:


the 2007 Blue Dragon Awards. Park co-wrote the script with Jeong Seo Kyeong.\(^{177}\) The film was produced by Moho Film and distributed by CJ Entertainment.\(^{178}\)

According to the 2006 Korean Cinema Yearbook, *Cyborg*’s production budget was $3 million. Box office reports document that the film ranked first during its opening weekend in December of 2006, grossing $2.4 million.\(^{179}\) However, the revenue dropped by seventy-five percent the following week, earning only $600,000. The film only recouped its budget, so it was not seen as a financial success. Nevertheless, the film received critical recognition when it was selected for the South by Southwest (SXSW) Film Festival\(^{180}\) and awarded the Alfred Bauer Prize at the Berlin International Film Festival.\(^{181}\)

Park’s decision to depict patients with psychotic illnesses within a mental institution in *Cyborg* is a bold one. In South Korea, mental illness is heavily stigmatized, despite its striking prevalence. An earlier chapter in the thesis discussed the uniquely Korean concept of *han* and its connection to mental health issues, such as depression. In 2006, the year *Cyborg* premiered, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), which is assumed to be a reliable source of data, documented that South Korea had the third highest suicide rate in the world, only coming in behind Russia

\(^{177}\) *Ibid.*


and Lithuania. In South Korea, suicide is reportedly the number one cause of death among young adults. The treatment rate of depression in Korea is about 30%, as opposed to almost 70% in Western countries. This underreporting of the symptoms of mental illness is especially critical because 15% of people with depression attempt suicide. The stigma of mental illness in South Korea contributes to the under treatment of mental health disorders, which can then lead to detrimental consequences. The reasons for the stigma lies partly in fundamental values of Korean culture, according to a social worker of Korean descent:

The individual who has the illness feels like he or she is responsible for the failure of the entire family. There is a sense of shame. It goes back to the Confucian ideal of filial piety and maintaining the family hierarchy as well. The ideal is one of a perfect family. Having a mental illness, of course, goes against what ‘perfect’ looks like.

In South Korea, many people with mental illness do not seek treatment because of fear of judgment from others as social psychiatry researcher Soowon Park and his team have noted:

Individuals with psychiatric illnesses are more frequently the targets of negative and stigmatizing attitudes than those with physical disabilities…Individuals labeled ‘mentally ill’ are often deprived of their rights and life

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While suicide can be a rational choice, one would be remiss to ignore the connection between suicide and mental illness because a prominent, and often fatal, symptom of depression is suicidal ideation and intent.


opportunities…they are tagged, labeled, and associated with negative characteristics, such as unpredictability and dangerousness and are consequently ostracized from society…To reduce suicide rates and increase treatment rates for depression, it is crucial to identify the causes of the negative perceptions of these disorders.\(^{186}\)

As described, the stigma of mental illness in South Korea can fall on individuals and their families based on simple association. Therefore, Park’s decision to dedicate a film to showing an individual’s recovery from a suicide attempt, psychotic episode, and an eating disorder through a blithe and vivacious lens is quite remarkable.

Other Korean films have depicted mental illness, such as Park Chul Soo’s 301, 302 (1995), a devastating film about anorexia and psychological torture; Jeong Yoon Cheol’s Marathon (2005),\(^{187}\) which is about an autistic athlete; and Bong Joon Ho’s Mother (2009), which depicts a relationship between a mother and her intellectually disabled son.\(^{188}\) However, Park’s Cyborg differs from these films because of its lack of “melodramatic codes,” as Steve Choe explained in his essay on the film in Simultaneous Worlds: Global Science Fiction Cinema.\(^{189}\) This lack of gravitas in the depiction of mental illness elicited a excoriating 2008 review from Peter Bradshaw of The Guardian, who criticized:

[There is] a long, long stretch in a psychiatric institution, whose inmates are condescendingly imagined…But with this softcore fantasy, Park appears to be taking very lightly the anger and alienation of people genuinely suffering from


mental illness, and the origins of Young-goon’s depression are not treated with any great dramatic depth…This is a frustrating and unsatisfying piece of work.\textsuperscript{190}

One could argue, however, that Park’s decision to depict mental illness with humor and levity is, in fact, revolutionary. When a serious, stigmatized subject is treated with mirth without derisive ridicule, it renders the subject socially acceptable for discussion. The comedy, then, perhaps comments on the absurdity of South Korea’s stigma on mental illness, transforming an unutterable shame into a subject of openness and normalcy.

The levity of the film is reinforced by Park’s choice of color palette for the spaces depicted in the film. Park explained in an interview, “The pastel color tones, mixing primary colors with white water paint…[are] suitable for this film.”\textsuperscript{191} Park’s father, as noted previously, is an expert in architectural color design and described the process of choosing a building’s palette in \textit{Color of Architecture, Color of Cities}.\textsuperscript{192} Park, the director, did not go to art or film school, so his knowledge of color theory can be speculated to have been, at the very least, casually absorbed from interactions with his father or a familiarity with his work on architectural color. For many of his narrative films, Park has utilized notable color configurations in the architecture and interiors.

As mentioned earlier, Park said that the film is, “almost violence free,” because, though it has a massacre scene, these violent actions occur predominantly in the protagonist’s imagination. Kim Young Jin explained:

They are not concerned with the space they belong to, because they all live in their own worlds. There their fantasies transcend the physical boundaries of

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\textsuperscript{192} Park, \textit{Color of Architecture, Color of Cities}, 29.
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space. Their transcendence is assured by the film’s fantastical escapism…the boundaries of consciousness and unconsciousness, of reality and fantasy collapse. The patients’ visions assume a physical reality.\textsuperscript{193}

In the film, categorical boundaries between reality and fantasy and human and machine disintegrate because of the film’s premise: Young Goon believes that she is a cyborg. The film takes place in two major locations: the initial scene in an electronics factory, where the narrative is catalyzed, and the Shinsegye Mental Hospital, where the protagonist, Cha Young Goon, is committed for the remainder of the story. This chapter will discuss four places in the film: the electronics factory, a rural Korean structure shown in a flashback, and the hospital’s public space, boiler room, and electroconvulsive therapy room.

**Synopsis**

The film begins as the protagonist, Cha Young Goon,\textsuperscript{194} experiences an auditory hallucination in the electronics factory where she works. As a result of obeying the hallucination’s orders, she slices her wrist, inserts wires into the cut, and plugs herself into an electrical outlet so she can charge her batteries, which results in her electrocution. The “suicide attempt,” or “self-harm,” results in her hospitalization in the Shinsegye Mental Hospital. There, Young Goon refuses to eat and grows progressively malnourished because of her delusion that she is a cyborg and the concomitant conviction that machines do not eat, a sort of delusional anorexia.

The film introduces Young Goon’s family’s history early in the narrative: Young Goon’s mother and grandmother also exhibit behaviors consistent with mental illness. The grandmother was seized from her home in the countryside and taken in an ambulance.

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\textsuperscript{193} *Ibid.*, 64.

\textsuperscript{194} Played by Im Soo Jung.
by medical professionals because of her dementia. Young Goon’s motivation in the film
is to become a ruthless cyborg, devoid of sympathy, in order to enact revenge on the
“white people,” the medical personnel dressed in white, who took her grandmother.

At the psychiatric institution, Young Goon meets a group of fellow psychotic
patients, including Il Soon, who has been hospitalized for antisocial behavior and the
“stealing” of people’s personalities. Young Goon and Il Soon forge a friendly and
somewhat romantic relationship, which develops during their rendezvous in the hospital’s
boiler room. Despite making a new friend, Young Goon continues to restrict her food
intake and undergoes electroconvulsive therapy, which is ineffective.

The unusual title of the film, *I’m a Cyborg, But That’s OK*, is taken from a line of
dialogue in the film spoken by Il Soon. In the scene, he attempts to convince Young
Goon to eat, pleading her to embrace dialectical reasoning: she is a cyborg, but it is still
okay to eat. Il Soon eventually convinces her to consume food by pretending to insert a
mechanical device into her body, the “Rice Megatron,” which converts rice into battery
power. Il Soon’s machine is successful, as Young Goon eats and regains her strength at
the end of the film.
Architectural Analysis

**INT./EXT. ELECTRONICS FACTORY - NIGHT**

The opening shot in the electronics factory serves as the narrative establishment of Young Goon’s mental illness and its main delusion: because she believes she is a cyborg, she desires to live in a mechanical reality through her synchronization with the
architectural surroundings. The establishing shot consists of a vast factory with jade green floors painted with yellow lines. Women in crimson uniforms sit at the tables that are arranged in three perfect columns, composed to form a perfect linear perspective that extends to a vanishing point.

In *Color of Architecture, Color of Cities*, Park Don Jin observed the interaction of the colors red and green in nature: “Green leaves and red flowers are complementary in color. The red flowers are small but strong in color and they become an accent within the green…Thus, there is a principle of color harmony in nature.” Analogously, the red-clad workers resemble small red flowers surrounded by a green floor. The colors are complementary and the lines are straight: the mise-en-scène and the cinematography establish the ordered, mathematical sensibility of the space, which reflects the protagonist’s desire to become a cyborg.

Figure 7-3

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Korean text:

“녹색입과 빨강꽃은 보색으로 대비조화가 되는 배색이다. 강한 색조인 빨강꽃은 명적이 매우 작아 녹색 속의 악색트가 되고 있으며 주조 색인 녹색도 빛을 받은 부분, 그늘진 부분, 새잎과 묻은 잎, 수종에 따른 차이 등 참으로 수없이 많은 색조의 변화를 보이고 있다. 이와 같이 자연 속에 색채조화의 원리가 있다.”
A brief foreboding external shot of the factory being struck by lightning flashes as Young Goon is electrocuted. In his review, Limbrick ridiculed the scene as having “Frankensteinian bravura…complete with crashes of thunder and lightning.” As she plugs herself into the wall, Young Goon becomes a part of the architecture as the battery power indicator on her toes light up, melding into the machine world.

Figure 7-4

Young Goon’s invisible illness is reinforced by her isolation from her fellow workers, as shown in the mise-en-scène and framing of the shot in which she falls on the floor after the electrocution, convulsing wildly, while her co-workers remain with their backs turned, focused on their work.

Kim interpreted, “In this scene, which could be called PARK’s version of Modern Times and Metropolis, the clausrophobia shown in the well-arranged mise-en-scène is linked to the following absurd actions of the patients scattered around the mental

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hospital.”¹⁹⁷ While the factory may appear “claustrophobic” because it is tightly spaced, the workers are like cogs in a machine that work in harmony with one another. Whereas claustrophobia implies an intolerable, stifling environment, the factory workers are productive in the space, which lacks a sense of panic and confusion even when Young Goon is electrocuted. Much like the products created on the assembly line, the factory is a space for order, organization, and rationality. In fact, one brief shot in the scene shows Young Goon’s workspace, where a circuit board is situated on top of a diagram.

![Figure 7-5](image)

The orderly, machine-like, and solid factory architecture is a reflection of the “cyborgian” world of the protagonist. The architecture of the factory plays an integral part in the narrative by amplifying and reflecting Young Goon’s psychological and physical transformation into a robot.

¹⁹⁷ Kim, Park Chan-wook, 64.
The factory scene is intercut with time jumps to the future and the past. As Young Goon’s delusional actions in the factory continue, a psychiatrist at the hospital sits with her mother, who speaks about the family’s psychiatric history. In a flashback to the past, the mother tells the story of how Young Goon’s grandmother raised and housed rats as though they were her children within her home.

In the mother’s anecdote about her childhood, she comes home from school and walks through the doorway of a vernacular wood structure that can be categorized as a
hanok, a traditional Korean architectural typology.\footnote{Ben Jackson and Robert Koehler, \textit{Korean Architecture: Breathing with Nature} (Seoul: The Korea Foundation, 2012), Introduction (no page numbers).} As the girl enters, the camera is set inside the structure looking outside; small sheds, green shrubbery, and onggi, traditional Korean earthenware vessels used to ferment food, are shown in the background, indicating that the home is located in the country. The camera moves behind the girl’s head as she peers at Young Goon’s grandmother. The rustic interior is crowded with onggi and woven baskets filled with various root vegetables. The grandmother sits on a wooden stool in a pit as she feeds radishes to a family of rats. After the flashback, Young Goon’s mother returns to the present in the doctor’s office and uses the story to illustrate the etiology of mental illness in her family.

The architecture of the rustic hanok featured in the flashback is reminiscent of that described in Gottfried Semper’s \textit{The Four Elements of Architecture} (1851).\footnote{Gottfried Semper, \textit{The Four Elements of Architecture and Other Writings} (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989).} In the book, Semper describes the four components: hearth, roof, enclosure, and mound. The mother’s family home is as rudimentary as these elements. In contrast to the commodious, modern structures of the factory and the psychiatric hospital, the hanok is small, simple, and without any mechanical equipment. The flashback is used to establish that mental illness in this family reveals itself through its surroundings. In the countryside hanok, the grandmother nurtures rats on a dirt floor. Two generations later, her granddaughter believes that she is a cyborg and chats with lights and electrical equipment. In the film, architecture is employed to depict the protagonist and her
family’s mental illnesses through their interactions with buildings and their environments.

INT. SHINSEGYE MENTAL HOSPITAL - COMMON SPACE - DAY/NIGHT

After the incident in the factory, Young Goon is committed and confined to the mental hospital. Instead of feeling trapped by the space, she believes that she is part of the architecture, existing within and between the architectural components. Young Goon converses with the hospital’s lights and vending machines. She interacts with the
technology of the building as if her friends and colleagues. In fact, she has a conversation with a light, saying, “So you’ve known from the beginning that you’re a light? I found out later in life that I’m a cyborg.”

The director emphasizes the architectural and electrical components, such as the light, by dedicating close-up shots of them. By showing the light to which the protagonist speaks, Park validates Young Goon’s fantasy, personifying the building’s technology. Park emphasizes the idea of architecture as a character through visual focus and the protagonist’s interactions with the building.

INT. SHINSEGYE MENTAL HOSPITAL - BOILER ROOM - NIGHT

_Becoming a Cyborg_

![Figure 7-10](image)

At the hospital, Young Goon meets Il Soon, a patient who was has the ability to “steal identities,” which the physicians determine is a symptom of schizophrenia and antisocialism. Young Goon requests a favor from Il Soon: to steal the sympathetic part of her personality so she can become a true cyborg and enact revenge on the people who seized her grandmother. This important development in Young Goon’s identity takes
place in the underground boiler room of the hospital. The room is a sequestered area with geometric yellow and pink pipes, where steam hisses and rises. Il Soon removes her sympathy through a bizarre ritual involving face paint. Mysticism and tension palpitate as the ritual occurs.

Figure 7-11

Figure 7-12
Transformed into a cyborg, Young Goon runs through a winding red-lit tunnel of pipes and concrete on a mission to seek and destroy the medical personnel who institutionalized her beloved grandmother. With her newfound machine strength, she flies up the stairs of the hospital and arrives at the ward, face green with paint, her mouth providing a supply of bullets, and hands transformed into guns as she shoots the doctors and nurses. Alas, her vengeance is a farce—the entire thought a fantasy in her imaginary machine space—as she faints from malnutrition, with Il Soon to catch her.

The architecture of the boiler room reflects Young Goon’s psychic transition from a human with sympathy into a machine with a taste for vengeance through her collaboration with Il Soon. The boiler room is transformative and secretive: its concealment enables Young Goon’s psychosis to develop. The machinery of the boiler room alludes to her physical transformation into a cyborg. As she becomes a robot through Il Soon’s ritual, Young Goon inherits the power to command space by flying up the stairs and apprehending her enemies. The various levels of the building—from the
boiler room, up the stairs, to the main hospital gathering space—allow the drama to unfold and reflect her transformation into a cog in the larger machine of the hospital.

In the essay, “Cinematic Experience, Film Space, and the Child’s World,” Annette Kuhn described the concept of liminality in both object-relations psychoanalysis and film studies:

A sense of liminality is apparent in the psychical investment in boundaries, borders, edges, and thresholds, and in the contiguity or the dislocation of spaces as they are negotiated in transitional processes. It is present as well in the sense of betweenness, of junction, separation, and bridging of spaces, in the object-world.200

The boiler room, then, functions as a transitional space that facilitates Young Goon’s transformation and reflects the undefined boundaries between cyborg and human, reality and fantasy, in her mind. The space of the boiler room remains an important “charging station,” a liminal space, for the protagonist throughout the film.

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INT. SHINSEGYE MENTAL HOSPITAL - ELECTROCONVULSIVE THERAPY ROOM - DAY

Figure 7-14

Figure 7-15
Because Young Goon refuses to eat and remains unresponsive to her prescribed medications, her psychiatrist recommends electroconvulsive therapy (ECT). In a procedure room lined with glistening white tiles on the floor and walls, the physicians connect Young Goon to various machines with wires. When the treatment starts, she begins seizing on the table in reality, which transitions into a fantasy.

Instead of waking up strapped to a laboratory table, Young Goon finds herself in a capsule-shaped incubator in the center of the room. The incubator is attached to the architecture by dozens of wires of various colors, sizes, and textures. Young Goon’s wish to become a cyborg is fulfilled through this fantasy: she has become a part of the building’s technology by conducting electricity from the ECT treatments. Park said in an interview on the film, “Young-goon’s desire for the machine is so great that she has come to think of how it would be if she were an industrial product, and I wrote (the script) thinking that the desire could be understood.”

Park communicates Young Goon’s longing to be a robot by drawing visual associations between her body, technology, and architecture.

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The Rice Megatron

In a later scene in the boiler room, Il Soon fabricates a story that puts Young Goon’s concept of herself as a machine at ease but also allows her to eat. He fashions a “Rice Megatron” out of one of his family keepsakes, claiming that the device is a magical orb that converts food into battery power. In an intimate scene, Il Soon acts as if he is slicing a door-like incision into her back as he inserts the Rice Megatron. In reality, he simply draws a door on her back with a black crayon. In response to the drawing, Young Goon says, “It’s no wonder. I get itchy there sometimes. It’s because that’s where you open the door.”

The door is drawn with architectural accuracy. The left line is dashed, indicating the hinges. He draws a doorknob on the opposite side. This act of drawing a door on Young Goon’s skin signals her bodily identification with architecture and machinery. The pretense of opening of the door in her robotic body is analogous to the opening of a physical door: as the rice megatron passes the threshold of her flesh, she is transported
into another place, another identity. Young Goon becomes part of the physical plant of the psychiatric hospital; she becomes an architectural body.

**Conclusion**

In the film, Park uses architecture and building technologies—the factory, the Shinsegye Mental Hospital’s common space, boiler room, and ECT room, and lights, doors, and pipes—to draw analogies between the built environment and the body. The spatial environments of the film reinforce the protagonist’s robotic identity. In his interpretation of the film, Kim Young Jin declared that the protagonist “positively [accepts] her physicality as a machine.” One could argue that Young Goon becomes *edificized* in that she becomes a part of the physical plant of the psychiatric hospital. The scene in the factory reveals her desire to integrate into the architecture and become a cyborg that feeds off the building’s mechanical and electrical systems. The boiler room in the hospital functions as a transformative space, where Young Goon mentally processes her robotic transition and becomes an architectural body when Il Soon draws a door on her back. The scene in the electroconvulsive therapy procedure room shows her lying in a futuristic incubator that is connected to the architecture by a tangle of wires. The protagonist is inspired by the technology of the building, and, eventually, she becomes at one with it. In *I’m a Cyborg, But That’s OK*, the protagonist and the architecture exist in symbiosis.

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Chapter 8 : THIRST (2009)

Context

_Thirst_ (2009)^203^ was the eighth feature film Park directed, and the last one he produced in South Korea before making his Hollywood debut with _Stoker_ (2013). In an interview with the _Hollywood Reporter_, Park described the connection between his previous film, _Cyborg_, and _Thirst_ through simile:

“I’m a Cyborg, but That’s OK” was like a sweet dessert served at the end of a full course meal. I feel that the film marks the end of a chapter in my career. Would that mean that “Thirst” is the first film in a new chapter? I’m not sure yet. I think perhaps “Thirst” is a film that is like getting the bill after you’ve finished the dessert.^204^

_Thirst_ delves into the supernatural world by following the transformation of a Catholic priest into a vampire. This theme had its roots in Park’s personal experience with religion. In a video interview at Comic-Con, Park recounted:

I went to church every week until I was in high school. And that’s when this local priest came to my father and said, ‘You got to send this boy to the seminary. He’s going to be a bishop one day.’ I got scared right then and basically stopped going to church because I like women…And that’s when I started thinking about the…sexuality of a priest. That’s when I started having respect for people in the priesthood, a group of people who sacrifice everything in servitude of others.^205^

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^203^ Korean Title: 박쥐, which literally translates to “bat.” The working title of the film was _Evil Live_.


Park chose to give the film the English title of _Thirst_ since Hollywood films titled _Bat_ and _Batman_ had already been released. He did not want audiences coming in with preconceived expectations.


Thirst was not the first film in which Park explored religion, as Lady Vengeance had addressed some Christian themes. Thirst however focuses specifically on Catholicism and grew out of Park’s exposure to the church during his formative years. In other interviews, Park emphasizes his familiarity with Catholic life, including its rituals, architecture, and leadership.206

Thirst marked many industry milestones for Park. The film was Park’s first to have a theatrical release in the United States.207 Thirst was also the first South Korean film with a pre-production investment from an American film distributor, Universal Pictures; the film was distributed internationally through Focus Features, a production and distribution company which specializes in independent and foreign films.208

The protagonist, a Catholic priest, was played by Song Kang Ho, who had key roles in Park’s JSA, Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance, and a minor one in Lady Vengeance. According to The New York Times, the film was “a freehanded literary adaptation of Émile Zola’s Thérèse Raquin.”209 The screenplay was co-written by Park and Jeong Seo Kyeong.210 As with his past few films, Park worked with cinematographer Chung Chung

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209 Thérèse Raquin is both a novel (1867) and a play (1873). The source does not specify which inspired Thirst.


Hoon and production designer and art director Ryu Seong Hui.\textsuperscript{211} The film’s budget was estimated at $5 million and grossed $9.2 million worldwide.

Kyu Hyun Kim in his essay in \textit{Korean Horror Cinema}, “Park Chan-wook’s \textit{Thirst}: body, guilt, and exsanguination,” argued, “There should be no conflict between reading \textit{Thirst} in the context of Korean culture, history, and society, and assessing its merit and power in terms of its relation to the horror film genre.”\textsuperscript{212} Catholicism was introduced to Korea in 1784 when the first Korean Catholic was baptized, since when the “Catholic church and lay Catholics have been a powerful minority in the political and social sphere throughout Korean history.”\textsuperscript{213} The vampire archetype has an extensive background in literature and film; novels include \textit{The Vampyre: A Tale} (1819) by John William Polidori and \textit{Dracula} (1897) by Bram Stoker; films include Hungarian lost film \textit{Dracula’s Death} (1921) directed by Károly Lajthay, German expressionist film \textit{Nosferatu} (1922) directed by F.W. Murnau, and many modern adaptations. The archetype has been associated with the gothic and romantic traditions. However, in the essay, Kim insisted that \textit{Thirst} did not intend to meet this common expectation:

The film is not really interested in presenting its vampires as inheritors of the gothic tradition. Sang-hyun’s predicament may be construed as an ironic statement about the impotence of the religious authorities. However, there is little that is derogatory or facile about Park’s presentation of the priest’s agonies over his vows of celibacy that come into conflict with the sensual pleasures newly available to him. Moreover, the film scrupulously avoids any concrete

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textit{Ibid.}
\item \textit{Ibid.}, 201.
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manifestation of the spiritual authority of the church, or any scene in which a particularist theology or religious worldview is confirmed.\textsuperscript{214}

Instead of critiquing religion, Kim argued that the film, with its use of blood, medical imagery, and clinical spaces, commented on AIDS and other contact diseases like syphilis or Ebola:

In \textit{Thirst}, Park draws upon this parallel between vampirism and AIDS or other diseases transmitted through bodily contact. Sang-hyun contracts the somewhat pretentiously named Emmanuel virus, which only affects males who have refrained from sustained sexual contact with females. His intention to transcend his corporeality and attain spiritual enlightenment is outlined in his prayer seeking the devastation of his body so that his spirit will be free from temptation by corporeal sins.\textsuperscript{215}

Through \textit{Thirst}'s associations with Korean culture and history, Park indicates a nuanced familiarity with contemporary issues and an opportunity for social commentary.

\textit{Thirst} presents a unique combination of medical, religious, and domestic architecture, which can be seen as embodying the themes of disease, Catholicism, and the horror genre discussed above. Several locations are shown more than once in the narrative, which provides an opportunity for comparison as the priest transforms into a vampire. Two of these places, the monastery’s hospital ward and an apartment above a store in Seoul, are analyzed in this chapter. In addition, several interior and exterior locations that aid in characterization and enhance the narrative—such as the grounds of the monastery, the Emmanuel Memorial Biochemical Labs, a large exterior staircase, and an urban cityscape—are discussed.

\textsuperscript{214} \textit{Ibid.}, 203.

\textsuperscript{215} \textit{Ibid.}, 204.
Synopsis

The main character of the film is Sang Hyun, a dedicated Catholic priest. While caring for patients at the monastery hospital, Sang Hyun becomes frustrated that he is unable to save their lives and volunteers for a medical experiment in Africa to discover a cure for the fatal Emmanuel Virus (EV) at the Emmanuel Memorial Biochemical Labs. The virus does not infect people of African descent, but only infects Caucasian and Asian single men. The disease causes bloody blisters starting at the limbs to the face to the middle of the body through the respiratory and digestive tracts. Death is caused when internal blisters in the muscles burst, causing the victim to hemorrhage; there is no cure. The symptoms of the fictional Emmanuel Virus bear a close resemblance to those of Ebola hemorrhagic fever, commonly known as the Ebola Virus. Sang Hyun is willingly infected with the virus. He manifests the symptoms and begins coughing up blood. He is rushed into emergency surgery, where he is given a blood transfusion, and flatlines. However, after he is declared dead on the operating table, he is magically resurrected. Later in the film, Sang Hyun discovers that he was given vampire blood.

After Sang Hyun returns to South Korea, his parishioners believe that he has a gift for healing, nicknaming him “The Bandaged Saint.” While visiting sick patients at a hospital, Sang Hyun reunites with his childhood friend Kang Woo and his family,

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216 Played by Song Kang Ho.

217 Ebola Virus and Emmanuel Virus even have the same acronym: “EV.”

218 Played by Shin Ha Kyun. Shin was also cast as Ryu in Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance.
including his mother, Lady Ra, and his wife, Tae Ju. Kang Woo and his family invite Sang Hyun to their home for weekly Mahjong games and drinks, and they develop a close relationship. Sang Hyun finds himself shamefully attracted to Kang Woo’s abused and neglected wife.

Sang Hyun begins exhibiting the symptoms of the Emmanuel Virus once again and finds that the only antidote is drinking blood, which he siphons from the tubes of a patient at the monastery’s hospital. He begins to experience sexual urges, despite his vow of chastity, and finds himself engaging in an uncontrollable sexual relationship with Tae Ju. Because he is now a vampire, Sang Hyun can no longer be exposed to sunlight and remains indoors during the day, traveling only at night.

Sang Hyun leaves the monastery and moves into Kang Woo’s house. After hearing rumors of domestic abuse between the husband and wife, Sang Hyun drowns Kang Woo during a fishing trip; the couple is then haunted by his ghost. Lady Ra, already bordering on alcoholism, drinks herself into a catatonic state on hearing of her son’s death. When Tae Ju admits that she had fabricated the story of abuse, Sang Hyun kills her at her own request and drinks her blood. Overcome with guilt, Sang Hyun transfuses his own infected blood into Tae Ju and she is resuscitated as a vampire. Lady Ra, now unable to speak, witnesses the vampiric exchange and realizes that her son was murdered. The two vampires completely redecorate the apartment by painting it in bright white and keep Lady Ra captive in the house.

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219 Played by Kim Hae Suk.

220 Played by Kim Ok Bin.
In contrast to Sang Hyun, who has been somewhat of an “ethical vampire” by only feeding on the blood of comatose patients or suicidal parishioners, Tae Ju is violent and murders people without remorse to satisfy her thirst for blood. During a social gathering at the house, Lady Ra attempts to communicate to her friends that Sang Hyun and Tae Ju killed her son. After allegation of murder, Sang Hyun and Tae Ju escape. Sang Hyun drives Tae Ju and the immobilized Lady Ra to a cliff, where there is no shelter from the sun. As the sun rises, Sang Hyun and Tae Ju commit suicide, being burned to ash in the sunlight as Lady Ra watches.

Architectural Analysis

INT. MONASTERY - HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Figure 8-1
The film opens with a slow fade in of a medium shot of a centered white medical door flanked by white walls on both sides. Superimposed on the door and walls is a square of light with a rounded edge with shadows of branches, suggesting the presence of a large window and exterior vegetation. Sang Hyun, clothed in a full-length black cassock enters to greet a patient, who soon goes into cardiac arrest and becomes comatose.

The hospital room is bathed in a soft blue light that complements the pastel blue curtains and electronic equipment. The colors are pale and unobtrusive, which is typical of the palette of a hospital room. However, the shadows of the branches on the door and wall interrupt the purity of the architecture: the clean lines become obscured by shadows. Analogously, while the nurse and the patient in the hospital room are both dressed in white, Sang Hyun alone wears a dark color. Visually, through color and shadow, Park subtly characterizes Sang Hyun and, one may argue, alludes to his future transformation into a vampire.
During a walk around the grounds of the monastery, Sang Hyun discusses his religious future with a senior priest by asking if he can volunteer for a medical experiment in a martyr-like gesture. The monastery grounds are planned like a college campus. Paved, wide, intersecting sidewalks are surrounded by green benches, green shrubbery, and thick trees. Solid academic brick buildings surround the gardens: one is bare while another is covered in lush vegetation. Monks wearing traditional habits walk the area. The campus suggests the hierarchical nature of monastic life. In contrast to this order, the presence of lush vegetation on one building’s façade reflects an unruly side of
nature, suggesting the presence of uncontrollable human urges, such as sexuality. During his request to begin the medical experiment, Sang Hyun stands with his mentor in the garden, framed by a bare, brick building, and an adjacent building that is overgrown with ivy. The architecture reflects the two extremes of his identity and suggests his eventual transition from good to evil.

EXT./INT. EMMANUEL MEMORIAL BIOCHEMICAL LABS - DAY

Exterior
After Sang Hyun leaves Korea, he arrives at the Emmanuel Memorial Biochemical Labs in Africa. In an establishing shot, the camera captures a wide view of a rustic vernacular one-story symmetrical building that sits at a slight angle to the camera. The building is situated in a grassy area with a large tree in the foreground on the left side of the screen. The main body of the building is white with an inset centrally arched entrance. On either side of the entrance, narrow arched windows are set deep in square blocks. The structure’s side wings, in mottled brown brick punctured with irregularly placed rectangular windows, extend to create a walled area around the small campus. On the inside of the wall, the camera sits at a high angle, making the men playing volleyball appear as if they are in a pit.

Like the scene in the monastery, the architecture communicates a dichotomy in the use of materials and components of its façade. At the monastery, the contrast was between a clean façade and an overgrown one; here, the variance is seen in the different materials and forms. The white central block of the building displays a cleanness and purity through its uniform color and symmetry; the wings and walling are irregular in color, rustication, and orientation. The men playing volleyball, surrounded by the mottled and uneven brick, will all themselves become mottled with the blisters and lesions of the Emmanuel Virus as they succumb to its ravages in time.
Interior

Figure 8-7

Figure 8-8

Figure 8-9
Sang Hyun meets with Father Emmanuel, the leader of the experiment, in a small, dark room where he describes the symptoms and bleak prognosis of the virus. He is then led by a nun, dressed in stark white, into a long hospital room, where rows of beds with white canopies frame the central aisle. Again, Park utilizes the contrast between the white interior and the priest’s black clothes to imply a contrast between light and dark, good and evil.

Sang Hyun is given his own modest quarters in the building. The room is high ceilinged with a recessed arch in one of the walls; here Sang Hyun sits at his desk and plays the recorder. For weeks, Sang Hyun remains healthy and plays volleyball outside with his fellow patients. One day, however, as he plays the recorder, he begins spouting blood and is taken to an operating room, where he is given a blood transfusion. The operating room, like Sang Hyun’s own room and the entrance to the building, is framed by a large arch with walls of white plaster and tile. During the surgery, he is declared dead, but moments after the doctors call the time of death, Sang Hyun awakes and begins muttering a prayer. A miraculous, or, as Sang Hyun later discovers, supernatural, event has occurred in the operating room. The various types of spaces in the Emmanuel Labs function to reflect Sang Hyun’s journey in the narrative and signal his physical transition.
After Sang Hyun is “cured” from the virus, his parishioners hear of his miraculous journey. En route to the monastery, he descends a large concrete staircase situated in the open. A group of diseased and sick religious fanatics beg Sang Hyun to pray for their healing at the bottom of the steps. The character’s downward descent of the monumental staircase indicates his progressive spiritual decline. Using the architectural declivity as a symbol of physical transition, Park represents both the protagonist’s descending transformation into a vampire and the vacuous rise of his celebrity.
As described earlier, the film begins with a daytime shot in the monastery’s hospital ward. The movie returns to the same location, but now at night, after Sang Hyun undergoes his dark transformation. After Sang Hyun experiences a return of the symptoms of the Emmanuel Virus with blisters re-appearing on his skin, he develops a thirst for fresh human blood. Still accustomed to his pious habits, he refuses to kill the living to satisfy his thirst, and instead “borrows” blood from the comatose patient. The patient was seen speaking animatedly at beginning of the film, but now lies in a coma. In
this nighttime scene, the architecture assumes a static, dead quality, unlike its dynamic nature in the initial scene.

The hospital room is sheathed in a dark blue evening light. The patient lies on the bed, which is situated horizontally in the lower half of the frame. Sang Hyun lies on the floor, his body facing in the opposite direction from that of the patient. He removes a tube from the patient and siphons fresh blood into his throat. The reversed directions indicate the transformation in the protagonist’s reality: once a priest who cared for his patients, he now feeds off them. The visual contrasts of light and dark and opposing orientations reinforce the film’s theme of diametrical conflict in the priest’s identity.

Feeling immediate guilt after his actions, Sang Hyun races towards the window and jumps to the parking lot below in an attempt at suicide. He is forced to accept his transformation into a vampire as he rises, groaning, from the smashed car in the lot. As we have seen in previous films, Park has used architecture as means through which his characters attempt or commit suicide.

Park returns to the hospital room in the monastery several times in the film. First, at the beginning of the film, the room is bathed in soft, gentle white light. The second time, after Sang Hyun has mutated, the room is now filled with harsh blue and black light. Sang Hyun is no longer praying for the patient, but rather preying on the patient. The hospital room was once filled with life and light, but now it is occupied by death and dark. The director uses the contrast of colors and mood between light and day, and human and vampire, to advance the narrative and to allude to the looming descent into chaos.
EXT. CITY - NIGHT

A supernatural power that Sang Hyun develops is the ability to jump down from and up to high places without injury or sustained effort. When Sang Hyun reveals his full vampiric state to Tae Ju, she tests his ability to fly by asking him to jump off a tall building in the city. While Sang Hyun must stay indoors during the daytime because he cannot tolerate the sunlight, at night the architecture of the city becomes his playground. The protagonist, thus, has a dichotomous relationship with architecture. Park allows the character to interact with architecture according to his needs: during the daytime, he remains inside; at night, he flits from building to building.
EXT./INT. KANG WOO’S RESIDENCE - NIGHT

Family and Friends Mahjong Nights

Figure 8-14

Figure 8-15
After they reunite in the beginning of the film, Sang Hyun frequents his childhood friend Kang Woo’s home, which is situated above the family’s hanbok store. An exterior shot reveals the building’s rounded corners and the lower-level store’s neon lights. Inside, the apartment is simple but spacious, indicating the family’s middle-class status. The walls are paneled in mahogany. The kitchen is entered through a narrow corridor from a generous living area with a set of stairs leading to the ground-floor store. The kitchen is cluttered with plants, urns, cooking equipment, and figurines. In the center of the linoleum floor is a round table, where the family and their guests gather to play Mahjong.

In an interview, a journalist noted the significance of the house in the film: “Much of the action takes place in a single room. It [sic] this another visit to Oh Daesu’s prison, Lady Vengeance’s lock-up or the mental asylum from ‘Cyborg?’ What is it with you and incarceration?” Park responded:

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221 A hanbok is a traditional Korean dress worn for traditional or formal events. The store’s name is “행복한복,” a pun that translates to “Happy Hanbok.”
It’s not a single room, but a single house, and in “Thirst,” incarceration is psychological rather than physical. It is probably true that I like the motif of incarceration. That’s because these places are miniaturized universes. These are the spaces where existential circumstances that people face are more clearly revealed.\footnote{Empty \textit{sic}, “Q&A: Park Chan-wook,” http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/qampa-park-chan-wook-83872.}

The house effectively functions as a microcosm for Sang Hyun and Tae Ju when they transform this warm, welcoming family space into a retreat to accommodate their needs as vampires.

\textit{Vampiric Transformation}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{image}
\caption{Figure 8-17}
\end{figure}
Near the end of the film, the walls are painted over in bright white. Evidence of the transformation of the rest of the home is seen in a shot when Tae Ju walks up the stairs: the top of the staircase is covered with blindingly white paint; below, the dark wood remains. In another shot, fluorescent lights hang haphazardly from the ceiling. The now-white walls reflect the bright lights, creating an eerie, ethereal illumination that penetrates the interior. While unable to be exposed to sun, the vampires have claimed artificial light for themselves. There are no shadows lurking in this renovated and redecorated place. Instead of a comfortable nest, the house has been turned into a haunting white vessel, recalling the scene in the sterile operating room at the lab. The
residence no longer houses human beings, but monsters, and this is reflected in the extreme architectural transformation of the space. The vampires are confined to the interiors, but they exert control by manipulating the architecture.

Conclusion

In *Thirst*, Park employs architecture to reflect and echo a character’s ethical struggle and physical transformation. Light and dark colors are symbolic devices for good and evil. Park reinforces this literal transformation by showing several sets and locations repeatedly, but within different narrative contexts: the monastery’s hospital ward and Kang Woo’s residence are seen before and after the character’s transition into a vampire. The change of identity is clearly communicated through the treatment of architecture and its interiors.
Chapter 9: STOKER (2013)

Context

In 2013, Park released his first and, to date, his only Hollywood feature film, Stoker. With the tagline, “Do not disturb the family,” the film addresses the themes of family dysfunction, violence, incest, and mental illness, topics that Park explored in earlier films such as Oldboy (2003), I’m a Cyborg. But That’s OK (2006) and Thirst (2009). Park had previously been approached to direct a Hollywood film, a Western starring Samuel L. Jackson, but the project was not realized.

After Park released Thirst, which, as noted in the previous chapter, was given pre-production investment from Universal Pictures, he commented on the possibility of directing an American movie:

The issue of Universal’s investing in “Thirst” doesn’t seem to have too much to do with the issue of my going to work in Hollywood. The issue of whether I make a Hollywood film or not is only related to the question of whether I can find a good enough script.

Stoker’s script was written by Wentworth Miller, who had starred in the television series Prison Break, which, incidentally, had been very popular in South Korea since its first


224 Interestingly, Samuel L. Jackson did play a role in Spike Lee’s 2013 adaptation of Park’s Oldboy (2003).

225 Kim, Park Chan-wook, 11, 126.

Park had also been given an offer to direct a segment in an omnibus film about New York, though that project was not produced as well.

season in 2005. The film’s cinematographer was Chung Chung Hoon, who had worked on all of Park’s films since Oldboy (2003). The production designer was Thérèse DePrez, who had received wide recognition for her work in Darren Aronofsky’s Black Swan (2010), and Wing Lee was the art director. Stoker was filmed primarily on location in Tennessee in the cities of Murfreesboro and Nashville.

In addition to being Park’s first Hollywood film, Stoker was also Park’s first fully English language film. The Stoker cast was filled with celebrities including Nicole Kidman, Mia Wasikowska, Dermot Mulroney, and Matthew Goode. In an interview, Kidman said she was concerned that Park did not speak English: “But when I met with him, he had such a strong vision of the film already, which was fantastic…he just said he wanted to make a film about bad blood. It sounded very Korean!” Kidman, and the rest of the cast and crew, were prepared to communicate with Park through a translator. The director himself also experienced trepidation about making an English language film and

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232 Wasikowska is an Australian-Polish actress who starred as Alice in Tim Burton’s Alice in Wonderland (2010).

revealed that the experience of working in the United States with a primarily American cast and crew was difficult and isolating because of the language barrier. He confided that he found comfort in working with his longtime collaborator, director of photography Chung Chun Hoon: “In a situation where you can imagine I’d find myself very lonely; to have somebody I was close to was a very reassuring thing.”

Stoker was produced by Fox Searchlight Pictures in association with Indian Paintbrush and Scott Free Productions. The film had a world premiere at the Sundance Film Festival and also screened at the Rotterdam Film Festival, among others. Stoker had its theatrical release in March of 2013. It had a budget of an estimated $12 million and had grossed nearly $9.5 million worldwide by May 2013. However, the domestic gross was only $1.7 million. Despite its celebrity cast and crew, Stoker did poorly in the box office. One student critic crafted an argument that film’s failure was a result of the awkward dialogue between the characters: “Stoker has a great director, a terrible script.”

Stoker is significant within the scope of this thesis because of the architectural information available about the primary location of the film, the Stoker family residence. In addition, the film’s eponymous deceased character, Richard Stoker, was an architect. Various critics and journalists have compared the film to Hitchcock’s oeuvre not least because the villain in Shadow of a Doubt (1943) is also named Uncle Charlie. The

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235 A British film and television production company founded by Ridley Scott and the late Tony Scott. The film was also produced in association with Dayday Films and Ingenious Media.

236 Matt Grippi, “‘Stoker’ has a great director, a terrible script,” last modified March 19, 2013, http://www.daily49er.com/artslife/2013/03/20/stoker-has-a-great-director-a-terrible-script/.
staircase scenes in Park’s film echo some of Hitchcock’s scenes. India’s shower masturbation scene in Stoker is analogous to Marion Crane’s shower murder scene in Hitchcock’s Psycho (1960). Finally, Stoker has references to taxidermy and ornithology, especially in Richard’s study, which invites comparison to Norman Bates’ motel decor in Psycho.

In her article, “The Elements of Mise-en-scène in Park Chan-Wook’s Stoker,” professor Kim Gyung Ae of Youngsan University analyzed space in the film. Kim applied a similar frame of analysis from her article on Oldboy, arguing that, like Oh Dae Soo’s room of solitary confinement, the Stoker house functions to restrain its inhabitants. She posited:

The spatial composition in Stoker is similar to Park’s previous works, Oldboy and Thirst. In Oldboy, [Oh] is confined to the closed space for 15 years and then released to the outside world, but eventually becomes trapped in the “bigger prison of the world”…The space in Stoker is set as a limited space, like a theater stage, a house for the dark and closed Stoker family. The interior space of the dense residential house is separated by walls, curtains, and stairs, which allow the characters to monitor each other.


Korean text:

“<스토커>의 공간구성은 박갑득의 전작 <올드보이>, <박쥐>와 흡사 하다. <올드보이>의 오대수는 15년간 폐쇄공간에 감금되어 있다가 세상 밖으로 풀려나오지만, 결국 “세상이라는 더 큰 감옥”에 갇히게 된다…<스토커>의 공간 또한 언극무대처럼 제한된 공간, 즉 어둡고 폐쇄적인 스토커 가문의 집으로 설정되어 있다. 절식할 만큼 밀도 높은 저택의 실내 공간은 벽, 키튼,계단 등으로 분리되어 동선이 단절되어 있으며, 서로 감시받는 공간으로 제시되고 있다.”
Segments of Kim’s article that hypothesize about the theme of incarceration in *Stoker* will be discussed in the chapter. The Stoker mansion offers many opportunities for symbolic interpretation because of its carefully crafted architecture and interiors. Another significant location in the film is the Crawford Institute, a psychiatric hospital. The domestic residence and psychiatric institution are architectural typologies that Park has used in previous films. This chapter describes and analyzes key locations in the Stoker residence, including the spiral staircase, India’s bedroom, and the living room in the house, and the Crawford Institute.

**Synopsis**

The film begins with the death of Richard Stoker. His eighteen-year-old daughter India lives with her mother, Evelyn. India’s purportedly globe-trotting Uncle Charlie, whom she has never met, arrives after his brother’s death to live with the mother and daughter in the Stoker house.

Charlie and Evelyn begin a suggestively intimate relationship, which troubles India. Sinister events start to occur after Charlie moves into the residence. The head housekeeper, Mrs. McGarrick, has an argument with Charlie, but then mysteriously disappears. India’s great aunt Gwendolyn comes to visit the family and attempts to tell India about Charlie’s murky past, but Charlie strangles her in a phone booth before she

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240 Played by Dermot Mulroney.
241 Played by Mia Wasikowska.
242 Played by Nicole Kidman.
243 Played by Matthew Goode.
can disclose any secrets. Later, India discovers Mrs. McGarrick’s body in the freezer in her basement and deduces that Charlie is a murderer.

India, quiet and sensitive, is bullied at school. She befriends a boy named Whip, but he later tries to rape her. During the rape scene, Charlie intervenes and breaks Whip’s neck with a belt. The two bury Whip’s body in the Stoker estate’s garden. India begins realizing her own taste for violence and masturbates to the memory of Whip’s murder in the shower.

In her late father’s office, India discovers a stack of letters addressed to her by Charlie. The letters claim to chronicle his travels throughout the world over the years, but on a dramatic scene on the staircase, India realizes they were all sent from the Crawford Institute, a long-term mental institution. India confronts Charlie about the discovery and he reveals his murderous past: when a child, Charlie had murdered their younger brother in a fit of jealousy, and had been committed to the Crawford Institute. After several decades, Charlie is released to his older brother Richard on India’s 18th birthday. Richard gives Charlie a car, cash, and a rented apartment in New York City, on the condition that Charlie stays away from his family. Unable to cope with what he perceives as betrayal, Charlie bludgeons Richard to death with a rock and stages a car accident.

Despite these disturbing revelations, India and Charlie seem to develop a close, nearly intimate, relationship, which is witnessed by Evelyn. Charlie feigns to seduce Evelyn but then attempts to strangle her in the bedroom. India intervenes and shoots Charlie dead with a rifle. She buries his body in the garden and departs for his rented New York City apartment. En route to her new home, she is pulled over by the town sheriff. During a flirtatious questioning, India suddenly plunges a pair of gardening
shears into the sheriff’s neck; as he stumbles away, she follows him into a field and shoots him.

Architectural Analysis

The Stoker Residence in Tennessee

![Google maps aerial view.](image_url)

*Figure 9-1* Google maps aerial view.
Figure 9-2 Google maps aerial view.

Figure 9-3 Google maps street view.
The Stoker residence is not a built set, but part of an existing estate in Nashville, Tennessee. The crew scouted over eighty locations in the city to find the best location for the film. The estate is located on the west side of Nashville and contains, based on

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244 The estate’s address is: 101 Hillwood Boulevard, Nashville, TN 37205. The Stoker residence is a secondary house on the estate.

the google map images (figures 9-1 to 9-4), several houses with garages and a vast verdant lawn with trees and vegetation. One of the houses on the property, which had been vacant, was chosen as the Stoker residence. According to a journalist’s report of a visit to the set, the property they filmed at:

[is] a rather gothic-looking estate…The house isn’t exactly a mansion, but it has a strong southern Gothic feel to it. In fact, Park’s initial vision for the Stoker house was a stone-heavy Gothic mansion, but the present house just has that “it” factor that simultaneously feels both welcoming and sinister.

While the wild nature of the landscape alludes to the literary Southern Gothic style, the architecture lacks identifiable features of the Gothic or Gothic Revival style, such as pointed arches. Instead, the Stoker house is rather conventional: the white bricks are remarkably clean, the vegetation on the facade is trim, and there is little evidence of decay on the surface.

The 1920s French-style house consists of a central three-bay rectangular two-storey block with a single-bay pavilion projecting forward on either side. A single-storey sun room extends to the left; on the right, a porte-cochère connects to a service wing. The steeply-pitched roofs have terracotta tiles; the bricks and quoining are painted white; the main entrance is framed by a rusticated arch with a segmental pediment in stone. The tall,


247 Ibid.

narrow windows have wrought iron balconies on the second floor and shutters on the ground floor.

The organized, clean, and polished nature of the house contrasts the strangeness and violence of the family that it envelops. The house acts as a façade, concealing the evil nature of its inhabitants, its conventionality dissembling the dysfunction that courses throughout the family. While Park had envisioned using a true “Gothic mansion” for the film, the chosen residence is perhaps more effective because it adds a level of complexity to the family’s characterization through camouflage. A gothic mansion would have immediately signaled the nature of the family, this sophisticated French-style house conceals the truth, contrasting normalcy with deviance and forcing audiences to reckon with the disparity. Though the house was built in the 1920s, the production designer said that the interior decor was chosen to “make the film feel timeless.”

Figure 9-6

The choice of a light-colored house opens possibilities for different nighttime and daytime interpretations. The difference in the appearance of the house during the day and the night present metaphoric possibilities because of the white surfaces’ reflection and

249 Ibid.
absorption of light. In the sunlight, the house reflects the sun and stands bright, cheerful, and composed. At night, such as in the image above that presents the porte-cochère, the whiteness absorbs blue tones and the relationship between voids and solids are emphasized by the unlit and the lit. By day, the family appears perfect; by night, a more sinister nature reveals itself and permeates their actions and appearances.

INT. STOKER HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY/NIGHT

Because the house had been vacant when it was chosen as the set of the film, the production designer, Deprez, carefully designed the interiors. The walls of the Stoker residence’s living room were painted pale green, which Park and DePrez chose to allude to themes of nature and hunting in the film. The living room houses the family’s grand piano, which acts as a visual device for the developing relationships between Charlie and each of the two women. A large, gold-framed mirror, above the Louis XV marble

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fireplace, reflects the spiral staircase, the architectural element of the house which is most effectively used in the film to dramatize points of the narrative.

Beside the piano and a few decorative objects, the room is largely empty. In this scene, India sits isolated at the piano. No one else is seen or heard. The vastness of the space reinforces a feeling of isolation and quiet fear. The height of the ceilings, the emptiness of the room, and the camera’s roving movements within it suggest the architecture’s lucidity: the viewer has an ineffable sensation that the house itself is aware of the events that unfold within it, witnessing, but not intervening. It is significant that the film opens with death of India’s father, Richard Stoker, which throws the narrative into motion when Charlie enters the Stoker women’s lives. Richard is only shown in memorial images and a flashback scene later in the film, but his identity as an architect is reinforced by the drawing tools in his study. While the film does not articulate whether Richard built the Stoker residence, one could argue that the house can represent the deceased architect who was the connection between India, Charlie, and Evelyn. The camera’s fluid movement in and out of rooms suggest a spiritual, omnipresent, entity familiar with the circulation of the house and its inhabitants. The house seems alive, even sentient, infused with an architect’s knowledge and identity. The deceased character is not communicated through corporeal presence, but through the house’s structure.
As noted in the introduction to this chapter, *Stoker* contains architectural and decorative references to Alfred Hitchcock’s work. Staircases hold particular significance for Hitchcock. Steven Jacobs writes in *The Wrong House: The Architecture of Alfred Hitchcock*:

[A] favorite Hitchcock architectural motif is the staircase…. Dynamic and spatially fragmented structures, staircases are often places of crisis and their perspectival effects seem to isolate and confine characters. A central spine of
domestic space, the staircase presents itself as an arena for psychological tensions.\(^{252}\)

*Roker* echoes Hitchcock’s use of staircases as seen in two significant events in the film’s narrative. In the first, early in the film, India attempts to avoid talking to her Uncle Charlie. After she believes she has escaped him, India, relieved, sits at the foot of the stairs. Suddenly, she hears a voice from above: “Hello again,” says Uncle Charlie. With a sudden cut, the camera moves to a high angle, peering down at India on the stairs, her fingers grasping the staircase, frightened. The curved staircase and its balustrade form a pattern of skewed verticals on the frame, which surround and contain India. Her position on the staircase imprisons her, caught by Uncle Charlie, looking down on her from the landing.

In her article on *Stoker*, Kim Gyung Ae described the grid as a recurring pattern in Park’s films that reinforce a character’s physical and psychological incarceration. She analyzed:

> The interior of the mansion is filled with imprisonment-like images…The main image that dominates the space is the grid. The walls of the mansion, moldings, curtains, lights, carpets and duvets, kitchen walls and floor tiles, and windows all have distinct and repetitive grid patterns that create a frustrating and overwhelming spatial atmosphere. The grid symbolizes “confinement,” “obsession” and “control.” In *Oldboy*, the repetitive pattern of grid was [the reflection of] 15 years of horror and suffocating daily life that [Oh] had to endure. It also was a symbol of his psychological imprisonment to past memories. Similarly, *Stoker* reveals India’s suppressed psychological structure as a prisoner through objects with gridded patterns.\(^{253}\)

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Korean text:

“저택의 실내공간은 감옥 같은 느낌을 주는 감금이미지로 가득 차 있고…공간을 지배하는 주요 이미지는 격자무늬이다. 저택의 벽지와 옷딩, 커튼, 조명, 카펫과 이불, 부엌의 벽과 벽과
At this moment, India is caged by her position on the staircase, which is reinforced by the camera’s framing of a gridded composition. Then Charlie asks, “Do you want to know why you feel at a disadvantage right now?” She says, “Because I didn’t know you existed until today?” Charlie responds, “Because you’re standing below me.” At this verbal cue, the film cuts to a medium shot, the camera within the living room where the funeral reception is being held. The guests drink wine and converse in the foreground as India climbs the staircase. The camera follows her, revealing more of the staircase and Uncle Charlie’s body as India slowly ascends. She approaches her uncle until she is level with him on the staircase.

Their dialogue reinforces the physical hierarchy inherent in the staircase. Charlie’s rhetorical question highlights the relationship between height and power, a familiar theme in architecture. However, as Charlie brings the height disparity on the staircase to her attention, India takes action, standing up and ascending the stairs until she stands face-to-face with him. While India was visually caged in the first shot involving the staircase, in the second, wider, shot, she ascends progressively to confront her uncle. The architecture initially restrains her, but then allows India to move, grow, and find her way.
A character’s bedroom, when dressed for a film, is often intended as a reflection of their personality. The scenes showing India in her bedroom reinforce the motif of her physical and psychological incarceration. Kim Gyung Ae described the décor of India and Charlie’s bedrooms:

In particular, the rooms of India and Charlie are full of gridded items. These objects have brutal instincts deeply embedded, which contain the meaning of suppression. The fact that Charlie and India share the killing instincts of the Stoker family suggests that they cannot escape their fateful unity like the tight frame of a gridded pattern.  

India’s bedroom is symmetrical and bathed primarily in yellow. In this scene, India is curled in fetal position on the patterned quilt on her bed, enclosed by a series of shoe

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Korean text:

“특히 인디아와 찰리의 방은 격자무늬를 가진 소품들로 가득하다. 이런 오브제들은 이들의 본능에 깊이 새겨진 근원적이고 잔혹한 본능을 억누르는 통제와 억압의 의미를 담고 있다. 찰리와 인디아가 스토커가문의 살해본능을 공유한다는 점에서 격자무늬의 짝 짝인 돌처럼 이들의 운명적인 결속력을 빚어낼 수 없다는 것을 암시하기도 한다.”
boxes containing her signature saddle shoes from childhood to adulthood. On either side of the bed are hexagonal nightstands with square lamps. The large triangular headboard is yellow and was chosen to resemble a bird’s nest, supporting Kim’s claim that the images in film show how “the characters are trapped in [the house] like birds trapped in bird nests.”


Korean text:

“인물들은 새 동지에 갇힌 것처럼 그 안에 갇혀 있다.”
Charlie stays in the house’s guest room. In one scene, Evelyn curiously explores his room when he is not home. The camera is placed outside the window and looks into the room through the grid formed by the pane. Inside the room, a television shows a crow picking at a carcass. As Kim asserted, the grid patterns and bird references in India and Charlie’s bedrooms can be interpreted as reflecting the characters’ inability to escape their inherited antisocial natures.

**INT. STOKER HOUSE - RICHARD’S STUDY**

![Figure 9-13](image)

Throughout the film, Richard Stoker’s study remains largely untouched and helps maintain his presence in the family’s memories. The office, full of warm tones, is a
mélange of hunting memorabilia and architectural drawing tools with stencils, triangles, and scaled rulers laid out meticulously on the desk. The office’s décor of stuffed animals makes reference to Hitchcock’s *Shadow of a Doubt* and *Psycho* (1960) as noted above.

India explores her father’s desk, finding a bundle of letters from Charlie stowed in a locked drawer. As she reads, black and white architectural sketches are assembled into a montage. These drawings could not have been sketched by Richard, since they were inside the unopened letters sent by Charlie. However, the fantastical nature of the montage indicates that the drawings may have been imagined by India as she read. One can speculate that during India’s close relationship to her father, he introduced her to these types of architectural drawings.
INT. STOKER HOUSE - STAIRCASE - DAY

The staircase appears again in order to articulate an important plot twist when India realizes that her Uncle Charlie has been institutionalized in a psychiatric hospital for most of his life. After finding the letters in the study, India ascends the stairs with them in hand. She drops two letters, bends down to pick up the first one, then goes back down the stairs to retrieve the second, noticing as she does so the name of the Crawford Institute and its address printed on it. She sees that each of the letters has the same imprint, shuffling through them desperately one by one causing them to flutter down the stairs and across the floor. A shot from above the curved staircase, with the chandelier interrupting the frame, shows India frantically picking up and then discarding each letter.

The staircase bears witness to India’s dawning realization of her uncle’s madness. The stairs prompted India’s discovery as it is only when she drops two letters while ascending that she noticed the Crawford Institute logo. The architecture seems to have guided her discovery of her uncle’s past, participating like an actor in the narrative.
EXT./INT. CRAWFORD INSTITUTE - DAY

Figure 9-17

Figure 9-18

Park has featured a mental institution in a previous film, *I’m a Cyborg, But That’s OK*. The circumstances of the psychiatric hospitalization are quite different however: the playful delusion in *Cyborg* has been replaced with murderous psychopathy in *Stoker*. In the flashback scene when Richard visits his brother in the Crawford Institute, the doctor on staff says that the Stoker family had donated this building to the institution, though there is no suggestion that Richard designed it. An exterior shot shows a rusticated stone building with an arcaded base, which resembles a university or academic building.
The interior’s halls are lined with shiny white tile and blank linoleum floors. When Richard and the doctor meet Charlie in his room, he says, “Welcome to my home,” dramatically pausing for a beat, then adds, “away from home.” Charlie’s room, which he has likely occupied for decades, is painted with soft yellow paint, evoking the color scheme of India’s bedroom. Next to a simple wooden bed in the corner of the room stand three bookcases of meticulously arranged academic volumes. The room is remarkably organized and simple, but perhaps deceivingly so. As communicated throughout the film, Charlie’s psychopathy is difficult to accept because of his charm and suave appearance; the Crawford Institute and his room contribute to this dissimulation.
Conclusion

The role of architecture in *Stoker* is consistent and clear throughout the film. The architecture serves to drive the narrative and help portray the characters and their emotions. The theme of a façade concealing a darker truth applies both to the Stoker house and the Crawford Institute. Architecture in Park’s earlier South Korean films plays an important role in characterization and symbolism, though in those films, different pieces of architecture within the same film serve different functions and have different meanings. In *Stoker*, the architecture supports a more cohesive, unified theme, which perhaps can be attributed to the demands and limitations of Hollywood and its audiences.
Chapter 10: THE HANDMAIDEN (2016)

Context

After his Hollywood directorial debut, Park returned to South Korea to film his tenth film, *The Handmaiden*, a lesbian erotic thriller adapted from Sarah Waters’ 2002 novel, *The Fingersmith*. Park and Jeong Seo Kyeong wrote the screenplay. While Waters’ novel is set in Victorian Britain, Park situates the film in Japanese-occupied Korea in the 1930s. The transplantation of the story from its original time and place was necessary because the BBC had already created a mini-series based on *Fingersmith*. Park explained that, “producer Syd Lim came up with the idea that we move the setting to 1930s Korea, since it was also a period of transition, as the country was going through modernization.” The film was shot in Japan and South Korea. The bold and innovative adaptation was greeted with approbation from many critics.

The budget was the highest of Park’s South Korean films at $9 million, nearly doubling that of his previous Korean film, *Thirst*, which had only $5 million. *The Handmaiden* succeeded financially with box office earnings of nearly $30 million. In the

257 Korean title: 오지의 별, which literally translates to “Miss,” the handmaiden’s name for Lady Hideko.

258 The Japanese occupation of Korea was from 1910-1945.


Introduction to the 2016 Korean Cinema Yearbook, *Handmaiden* is showcased for its international success and accolades. The film was in competition at Cannes and production designer Ryu Seong Hui won the festival’s Vulcan Award of the Technical Artist. The film also garnered Best Art Direction from the Chicago Film Critics Association and Best Production Design from the Los Angeles Film Critics Association. The film was sold to a record 175 territories, enjoyed a respectable release in North America (grossing $1.8 million) and was named one of the top five foreign language releases of the year by the National Board of Review.262 The film was produced by Moho Films and distributed by CJ Entertainment.

The relationship between Korea and Japan in the early and mid 1900s was contentious. The consequences of Japanese annexation resulted in many Koreans struggling with their cultural identity, often internalizing their feelings of subjugation. Park explained:

There’s a Korean term, *sadaejuui*, that is used to uniquely express this notion, where the people of a smaller nation are so drawn to the power of a larger nation, and become subservient to that power. They internalize it so much that they are not worshiping the bigger power by force, but are doing it voluntarily.263

While the film focuses on romance, the heart of the narrative lies in explorations of identity, commenting on social issues and the tensions between Korea and Japan.

*The Handmaiden* is filled with references to the idea of incarceration and confinement, like many of Park’s earlier films. This theme is yet again explored as much through architecture as through plot. Here, architecture is an established, inescapable

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character and plot device. The design of the mansion reflects the Korean identity crisis during the Japanese occupation: the architecture is hybrid, incorporating both Western and Eastern styles. The architectural character of the mansion’s exterior was constructed through computer-generated imagery (CGI)\textsuperscript{264} in order to allow Park to manipulate and visualize the architecture with the greatest degree of precision. The CGI will be discussed in a section in this chapter.

A whole scene of the film is dedicated to introducing the grand architecture which is its setting; as the characters expound on the lavishness of the hybrid mansion, the camera weaves effortlessly in and out of the house’s windows and doors, framing perspectival views of the building. In the film, architecture is used to its full potential to establish a sense of place, develop character, and create a suspenseful ambiance. This final chapter will examine the exterior, library, and circulation spaces of the Kouzuki estate, and the mental institution.

**Synopsis**

*The Handmaiden* is divided into three overlapping parts. Part 1 introduces a family of con artists led by “Count Fujiwara” who teams up with the protagonist Sook Hee.\textsuperscript{265} Sook Hee becomes the handmaiden to Lady Hideko, a Japanese heiress who lives in a vast estate with her eccentric Uncle Kouzuki, in order to convince her to fall in love with and marry Count Fujiwara. After the marriage, the two con artists planned to commit Lady Hideko to an asylum and steal her inheritance. As Sook Hee becomes


\textsuperscript{265} Played by Kim Tae Ri.
closer to Lady Hideko, however, they fall in love. In spite of this, Sook Hee remains committed to the plan and convinces Lady Hideko to marry the Count. When Hideko’s uncle leaves for an extended trip, she and the Count elope. After acquiring her inheritance, Hideko, Sook Hee, and the Count head towards the asylum, but in a sudden twist of events, Sook Hee is admitted into the institution instead of Hideko. The Count and Hideko had duped Sook Hee and convinced the medical staff that she was the delusional Lady Hideko.

In Part 2, the film travels to the past when Lady Hideko was a child. She is taught to read by her aunt, who later commits suicide. Kouzuki possesses a large library of antique erotic literature, which he forces Hideko’s aunt to read for his aristocratic guests. After her aunt hangs herself, Hideko takes her place and reads the books to Kouzuki’s male friends who purchase the books at auction. Kouzuki hires Count Fujiwara to replicate the missing art from the erotic books. Fujiwara meets Hideko and offers her an escape from her strange, abusive life. Fujiwara and Hideko plan to find a poor, illiterate Korean girl who will pose as Hideko’s handmaiden and will assist them in the marriage. They plan to commit the handmaiden to a mental asylum under Hideko’s name once they have claimed the inheritance. Hideko will then live under the identity of the handmaiden.

During the course of the plot, Sook Hee and Hideko begin a sexual and emotional relationship. Unable to cope with the pressure of the situation, Hideko attempts to hang herself from the very same tree which her aunt had used to commit suicide, but she is saved by Sook Hee, who confesses the plan. Hideko reveals her side of the plan as well. The two women vow to get revenge on Kouzuki and Fujiwara. They go to Kouzuki’s library and destroy all of his coveted erotic books.
In Part 3, Sook Hee is confined to the mental asylum but eventually escapes due to a planned fire heist by the con artist family. Hideko slips an opiate into Fujiwara’s drink and leaves to meet with Sook Hee. Hideko disguises herself as a man and the couple leave the country. Kouzuki finds Fujiwara and tortures him, but Fujiwara poisons the air with cigarettes laced with mercury. They both die. Sook Hee and Hideko escape on a ferry to Shanghai to begin a new life as a couple.

Architectural Analysis

Computer-generated Imagery

The mansion’s CGI was created by Korean visual effects (VFX) studio, 4th Creative Party. The team used techniques like green screen to superimpose architectural details onto the exteriors of the rather nondescript original buildings on set. In an online video, the company compiled footage of its CGI work in The Handmaiden. The video shows images of the buildings’ exteriors before and after the visual effects were applied. Below are stills taken from the video and stitched together by Photoshop: the original building is on the top and the CGI-rendered architecture on the bottom. By using CGI to dress the exteriors, Park transformed the original buildings on set and added layers of meticulous architectural detail that contributed to the narrative.


The company had also produced the VFX for Oldboy and Stoker. In addition, the company has created VFX for Park’s contemporary and collaborator, director Bong Joon Ho, for his films Snowpiercer (2013) and Okja (2017).

EXT./INT. KOUZUKI ESTATE - NIGHT

Figure 10-5

Figure 10-6

Figure 10-7
Early in the film, the audience is introduced to the grandeur of the Kouzuki estate when Sook Hee arrives there by motorcar. The four-storey mansion is built of striated red brick, articulated by horizontal white bands. The asymmetrical tripartite mansion has large pedimented windows and a stout hexagonal tower. The house matron of the estate, named Sasaki, stands outside of the arched entrance. Her small figure is dwarfed by the scale of the entrance arch and the verticality of the building. Sook Hee, the newly-hired handmaiden, introduces herself as Okju. Sasaki renames Okju as Tamako, which will be her Japanese name.

Figure 10-8

Figure 10-9
The two women walk through the winding corridors of the house in pursuit of Okju’s living quarters. The camera tracks the women’s figures as they move through white-screened windows, different openings revealing various parts of their bodies as they pass. Sasaki describes the architecture as they walk:

This property has three buildings. A Western-style wing by an English architect, and a Japanese wing from the main house…Not even in Japan is there a house combining two styles. It reflects Master’s admiration for Japan and England, so he asked them to build the house this way. Next is the annex, which Master has furnished as a library.

Park addressed the complexity of Korean identity under the Japanese occupation in an interview:

There are those people in Korean society, found among the intellectuals in the upper class, who during the Japanese occupation would worship the Japanese. These days, they could be worshiping the Americans, and some of them might be worshiping the French or the Germans…Through the character of Uncle Kouzuki, I wanted to paint a portrait of these poor, sad, and pathetic individuals…who become a big threat and a serious danger for the other people of their nation.\textsuperscript{268}

Park uses an artificially constructed architectural style to express Kouzuki’s eclectic identity.

Tamako and Sasaki enter the Western-style section of the house. Musical bells chime as Tamako looks around in wonder: elaborate candelabras everywhere, cherry wood-paneled ceilings, blue and white floral wall paper, and classical portraits. The camera roves around, exhibiting the exquisite architecture. A wide shot reveals the matron and handmaiden ascending the stairway, a chandelier hanging in the center, the diagonal line of the staircase’s balustrade cutting across the middle of the frame. The modest Japanese-style wing of the house is communicated through screen doors and walkways covered with pagoda roofs. The more lavish spaces are all in a traditional Western style, indicating Kouzuki’s identification with the West.

The circulation through the Asian-style winding halls of the house is reminiscent of a labyrinth, and perhaps even recalls the design of Park’s own Jahajae residence. In this scene, the style of the architecture proclaims the complex identity of its patron. Park emphasizes this by dedicating extensive screen time to showcasing the building’s interiors.

INT. KOUZUKI ESTATE - LIBRARY - DAY/NIGHT

*Childhood Scene*
Brought to Kouzuki’s estate when she was a young child, Lady Hideko lives there in captivity until her adulthood. Imagery of incarceration is evoked in a childhood scene set in the grand library. The library is entered through a hallway flanked by bookshelves housing Kouzuki’s extensive collection of pornography. Hideko and her aunt enter Kouzuki’s teaching area by descending two large steps into a common area covered with tatami mats. The power dynamic between Kouzuki and the females is powerfully evident here, his physical violence towards them reinforced by a heavy table that slices horizontally through the frame. When Hideko and her aunt giggle at the mention of genitals in one of the texts, Kouzuki slaps his hands on their faces and smothers them
violently. The women are unable to leave the library at their will and when Hideko’s aunt attempts to escape by running up the stairs and through the hallway to the library’s exit, Kouzuki orders Sasaki to pull a lever and a caged door slides across to stop her. Kouzuki imparts Hideko with a fear of unknown horrors if she ever attempts to escape. The women’s oppression and confinement are implied by physical and emotional barriers in the library.

*Adult Scene*

![Figure 10-14](image)

![Figure 10-15](image)
When Hideko matures to adulthood, she performs erotic readings of Kouzuki’s pornographic literature to his wealthy male audience. As the space is re-arranged to accommodate its new function as a theater, Kouzuki stands at the front of the room, in front of the “stage,” and watches workers arrange and remove the mats, inserting natural elements like bonsai trees and stones in the spaces between them in an attempt to sensualize the space for the erotic readings.

During the performance, Lady Hideko sits on the stage with a reading stand in front of her. The steps leading down to the room from the library’s hallway function as seats for the guests. A group of featureless men in identically tailored black suits quietly listen to Hideko act out the passionate stories of sexual adventure and violence. The library is transformed from a place of instruction to a place of entertainment with the simple re-organization of the tatami mats. Both of these types of spaces are organized by hierarchy: the first between teacher and student, and the second between the performer and audience. The library’s transformation continues to reinforce Lady Hideko’s confinement and subjugation by Kouzuki.

**EXT./INT. MENTAL INSTITUTION - DAY**
When Sook Hee is committed to the mental institution in place of Lady Hideko, she is restrained by medical staff in an oddly shaped space framed by the exterior walls of the building. A bird’s eye shot emphasizes the narrowness of the route and the jagged shape of the space through which Sook Hee is dragged. A later shot shows the interior of the mental hospital, a narrow rectangular room cluttered with tables and chairs and lacking any comfortable refinements. One wall is punctured by windows that are set high up, above the patients’ heads.

As seen previously, Park features mental institutions in several other of his films, such as the Shinsegye Mental Hospital in *I’m a Cyborg, But That’s Okay* and the
Crawford Institute in *Stoker*. Here, the hospital is extremely rudimentary and austere compared to the depictions of similar institutions in the other films. Because *The Handmaiden* is set in the 1930s, when the understanding and treatment of mental illness was still developing, the hospital depicted is quite different from a modern example. In this location, the adult patients are crowded in a narrow hall, fed porridge from metal vats, and shackled at the ankles like criminals. Through showing varying levels of sophistication in three different psychiatric institutions, Park traces a history and diversity of these types of places.

**Conclusion**

In *The Handmaiden*, Park uses architecture to a far greater extent than his previous films. With CGI, Park carefully chose architectural details to add to the mansion’s exterior, thereby exerting strong control of every aspect of the building’s appearance. The Western and Eastern-style architectural features are explained by the characters of the film. In the scenes set in the library, the architecture is used to reinforce themes of confinement and incarceration, which Park has used in many of his previous films. Finally, the film depicts the power of a patron of architecture: Kouzuki commissioned and designed the estate to reflect and reinforce his sense of identity. Architecture becomes a monumentalization of a character’s identity and a tool of self-promotion. In Park’s last film to date, architecture plays a strong role in enhancing the narrative and characterizing Hideko and Kouzuki.
CONCLUSION

Through examining Park’s feature-length narrative films, this thesis documented patterns in the representation, role, and use of architecture throughout his directorial career. For Park, architecture and location are of great importance because he hinges dramatic action, emotional expression, and tension through them. Many segments of the narratives in his films center around his characters’ interactions with the built environment. Architecture has both symbolic and practical uses in Park’s films, and throughout his oeuvre, it is polysemic and multifunctional. On the most basic level, architecture aids in the characterization of its inhabitants and echoes, enhances, or heightens the film’s narrative. In some of his later movies, architecture claims an identity of its own and commands the lives of the characters in the diegeses, itself becoming a character and, at times, a protagonist. This concluding chapter will go film by film and summarize and discuss the research findings on the role of architecture in Park’s oeuvre.

*The Moon is…the Sun’s Dream* (1992) establishes Park’s first use of architecture in film. The primary setting is Ha Young’s live and work studio. Initially presented as a photography studio at the beginning of the film, the space is transformed into a home for all three of the characters. The changes in the interior throughout the movie communicate narrative progression and its concomitant character development. In Park’s feature film debut, architecture is clearly reflective of a character’s interests, vulnerabilities, priorities, and transformation.

For *JSA* (2000), Park built a realistic replica of the DMZ for the film’s set. Park not only successfully recreated architecture, but also manipulated and stylized space and time through specific architectural components, like the window in the suicide scene.
Further, Park showed a surreal depiction of architecture that departed from the real DMZ in the scene in which the two soldiers interact at the demarcation line. In *JSA*, architecture is both replicated and manipulated as a stylistic and communicative device.

In *Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance* (2001), all the characters are victims of various conditions in the film’s world; this is reflected in their interactions with the built environment. Ryu and his sister are bound to the factory and their apartment by poverty and disability. Park Dong Jin is haunted by memories of his drowned daughter in his home. Finally, the bridge at the river is the cause of and witness to the death of two of the characters. In this film, architecture and manmade structures restrict and trap the characters.

In *Oldboy* (2003), architecture is inextricably connected to the tension and motivation of the narrative, as seen in the protagonist’s imprisonment in a single room for fifteen years. Architecture serves as a method of surveillance and control. Mechanical and decorative components of the architecture—such as the pipes and vents in Oh Dae Soo’s prison room and the concrete and water elements in Lee Woo Jin’s penthouse—aid in characterization and enhance narrative. In *Oldboy*, architecture binds, controls, and enervates its inhabitants.

*Lady Vengeance* (2005) continues with the theme of incarceration through the women’s prison. The film also makes use of the symbolism of religious architecture. Architecture is employed to express narrative and symbolic irony, for example when Mr. Baek, the murderous schoolteacher, is tortured and killed in an abandoned schoolhouse.

In *I’m a Cyborg, But That’s Okay* (2006), Park introduces a new type of building, the psychiatric institution. The protagonist, Young Goon, desires to become an
architectural component by transforming into a robot, another mechanical device, like the lights or boiler room, in the Shinsegye Mental Hospital. The film draws comparisons between the body and architecture: in her imagination, Young Goon becomes a part of the hospital’s physical plant. By virtue of her interaction with it, the architecture becomes a significant character within the narrative.

In *Thirst* (2009), the architecture reflects and abets a character’s transformation into a vampire. Several locations in the film, such as the hospital room and the house above the *hanbok* store, are shown before and after the Catholic priest’s descent into vampirism. The theme of incarceration is seen again in this film because Sang Hyun is unable to leave the house’s interior during the day. When Sang Hyun infects his girlfriend with vampire’s blood, the two drastically redecorate the house by painting the wood walls and floors bright white and hanging fluorescent lights from the ceiling. Architecture is manipulated and outfitted by the vampires to accommodate their physical and spiritual transformations.

The French-style mansion in Park’s Hollywood debut, *Stoker* (2013), serves as the film’s primary location and has a unique identity and presence throughout the movie. Richard Stoker, who dies at the beginning of the film, was an architect and his drawing tools remain untouched in his office. Several key moments in the narrative are dramatized by their location on the house’s spiral staircase. In the scene when India discovers that Charlie had been institutionalized, the staircase seems to play an active role in the discovery, like a character giving the protagonist a clue. Park also introduces a different kind of psychiatric institution from that in *Cyborg*. Both the Stoker mansion and the Crawford Institute have appealing exteriors which hide the insidious truths within.
Therefore, architecture is used to conceal the characters’ true natures, acting as a dissembling façade for a murderous and psychopathic family.

Finally, in *The Handmaiden* (2016), one sees a marked development in the role of architecture because the increase in discretionary budget and advances in the availability and quality of computer-generated imagery allow Park to be supremely creative with the Kouzuki mansion. The house’s design, which combines Eastern and Western architectural styles, reflects its patron’s identity. The theme of confinement is also seen in the film, especially in the scenes set in the library. Architecture serves to dramatically enhance the film’s narrative and describe the characters.

Other than increased interest or proficiency in architectural knowledge, another factor that presumably affected Park’s use of architecture in his films is budget. As traced in the thesis, Park’s reputation has grown exponentially throughout his career. This increase in popularity, namely through critical acclaim, box office rankings, and film festival accolades, earns a higher budget and the use of reputable cast and crew members. It is apparent that Park used the increased budgets and privileges to invest in the visualization of architecture in his films.

Architecture functions in various ways in Park’s films: as an expression of a character’s identity, a device to progress or heighten narrative, a symbol of psychological incarceration, an active character, or a dominating force. The biographical data discussed in chapter one and throughout the thesis establishes Park’s fascination with and immersion in a culture of architecture for much of his life. It is unlikely to be incidental that some of the concepts discussed in professor Park Don Seo’s published works about residential and prison design and architectural and urban colors are reflected in the
director’s films. In addition, many of the architectural themes in his films, such as confinement and incarceration, can be imagined as growing out of Park’s experience of living in the Jahajae duplex with his family. One could argue that the house subjects its residents to the level of confinement present in Park’s films. At the very least, the house must exert a psychological effect on its inhabitants through its very conscious and unconventional design with its narrow, winding corridors and lack of color. To a researcher, there is a relationship between the role of architecture in Park’s films and that in his personal life that cannot be overlooked.

In conclusion, architecture plays a fundamental role in the way that Park frames and drives his film’s narratives. As observed in the research, architecture is an integral part of Park’s method of filmmaking, reaching beyond mere presentation or incidental meaning. The highly personal way in which he makes use of architecture to heighten psychological drama and drive the narrative of his films is Park Chan Wook’s mark of auteurship, his unique signature that flourishes each film in his oeuvre.
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Cinematography: Kim Sung Bok
Art Direction: Kim Sang Man

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Production Company: CJ Entertainment
Cinematography: Kim Byeong Il
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Production Company: Egg films, Show East
Cinematography: Chung Chung Hoon
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