

ABSTRACT

for the dissertation submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in the educational program 6D042100 – "Design" by Dinara Embergenova on the topic: "Visualization of spatial models in feature films of Kazakhstan"

This interdisciplinary study investigates the problem of spatial models visualization in Kazakh feature films, examined at the intersection of architecture and film studies. Originally, architectural concepts of space, which are characterized by physical tangibility and semantic significance, are transformed within cinematic representation into a plane of visual illusion, while preserving semantic conditioning by physical spatial forms.

Relevance and Significance of the Study. Cinema, as the most modern, mobile, and mass form of art, sharply and vividly reflects the ideological, political, and cultural states of society, shaping moral values and national stereotypes. The development of cinema has been uneven both geographically and technologically, resulting in the formation of industry leaders and their followers. Today, questions concerning contemporary Kazakh cinema are particularly relevant, as over its 85-year history it has undergone radical changes—from ideological-political propaganda during the Soviet era to the free expression of perspectives in Independent Kazakhstan. At the early stage of its development, Kazakh cinema was marked by secondary images based on Soviet ideological frameworks. Currently, there is a tendency toward the formation of a unique national image integrated into the narrative space, responding to the semiotic representations of nomadic worldviews.

In cinema, space ceases to function merely as a neutral background; instead, it operates as an expressive structure imbued with semiotic, aesthetic, and cultural meanings. Architecture plays a crucial role in this process, given its strong visual, functional, and symbolic potential. The architectural environment becomes not only the physical foundation of cinematic space but also a significant source for the representation of historical narratives and national identity. Architecture establishes the visual and semantic frameworks within which the action unfolds, consequently influencing frame composition, editing rhythm, and the audience's perception of images.

The transition from a traditional nomadic lifestyle to a sedentary existence under typical Soviet architecture was accompanied by profound changes in spatial concepts, which are fundamentally reflected in cinema. The mobile, open space of the yurt and the steppe was superseded by the linear, ordered structure of cities and apartments. These transformations of the architectural environment fundamentally influenced the visualization of space in cinema, thereby reflecting deep shifts in the cultural and social identity of the Kazakh people.

Contemporary Kazakh cinema increasingly addresses issues of personal and national self-identification, strategically utilizing space as an expressive tool. Architecture on screen serves as a bridge between tangible reality and artistic imagery, connecting collective memory and individual perception. The visualization of

architectural space reveals hidden connections between cityscapes, cultural memory, and the internal psychological states of characters.

The study of spatial visualization features in Kazakh feature films is highly relevant in the context of preserving and transmitting national cultural heritage, fostering national identity, and promoting a positive image of the country amid globalization and the reevaluation of cultural codes. To develop an independent cinematic trajectory, it is crucial to study the spatial models of Kazakh cinema that exist within the general trends of architectural and cultural development—a complex task that this dissertation undertakes.

Review of Related Literature. The theoretical foundation of this research is comprised of works dedicated to the formation of spatial models in architecture and cinema, alongside the broader investigation of visual space as a cultural and symbolic phenomenon. Particular attention is paid to the compositional principles of spatial organization, the mechanisms of visualizing national identity, and the semiotic strategies employed in architecture and film.

Within the Kazakh context, studies revealing the specifics of spatial transformations in the post-Soviet period are particularly significant—namely, the ideological and geometric shift toward symbolic and semiotic space. These sources enable the tracing of how new spatial models are formed in the architecture and cinema of independent Kazakhstan, reflecting the tension between aspirations for state representation and quests for national authenticity.

Foundational works on spatial formation in architecture include those by Norberg-Schulz K., Rapoport A.G., Frampton K., Vipper B.R., Ikonnikov A.V., Colomina B., Florensky P.A., Lynch K., Khan-Magomedov S.O., Samoilov K.I., Shimko V.T., Reskin D., Ginzburg M., Pallasmaa J., Sullivan L., Eco U., Chumi B., Lefebvre A., Koolhaas R., Lagodina E.V., and Aizerman P.

Research on spatial models in global cinema features works by Sadoul J., Razlogova K.E., Kuleshova L.V., Dobrenko E.A., Truffaut F., Fellini F., Balash B., Pasolini P., Skorik E.A., Deleuze G., Bresson R., Elsesser T., Foucault M., Malvey L., Mekhonoshin V.Yu., Metz C., Eisenstein S.M., Freulich S., Bazin A., Kracauer Z., and Agafonova N.A.

Studies on spatial models in national architecture and compositional solutions include Ahmedova A.T., Sabitov A.R., Samoilov K.I., Glaudinov B.A., Bartold V.V., Arnold M.Yu., Margulan A.Kh., Mendikulov M.M., Kapanov A.K., Karpykov A.S., Glaudinova M.B., and Amandykova D.A.

Research on the formation of Kazakh cinema and national narrative space is reflected in the works of Siranov K., Beumers B., Nogerbek B.R., Ainagulova K., Alimbaeva K., Abikeeva G.O., Mukusheva N., Baigozhina A.M., Smailova I.T., Nogerbek B.B., Aidar A.

In the realm of semiotics of spatial composition, key works include those by Eco U., Lotman Yu.M., Chertov L.F., Metz C., and Barthes R.

Fundamental studies by domestic historians, literary scholars, film critics, and designers were used as needed. Additionally, archival materials from newspapers, journals, and film studios contributed to the research. Likewise, Kazakh feature films

produced over various years and included in the national cinematic heritage served as primary sources for scientific analysis.

This study incorporates works by international theorists analyzing the contemporary cinematic situation, nation-building processes, and architectural space both prior to and following Kazakhstan's independence. In line with the research objectives, a specific corpus of films by Kazakh directors focusing on traditional culture, philosophy, and regional art were subjected to analysis. Nation-building is understood here as a structural metaphor, which implies the existence of active agents – i.e., the “architects” and “engineers” of society. However, this political science term encompasses not only deliberate strategies initiated by state leaders but also unplanned social changes occurring within nation-building programs, including the cultural and artistic spheres, where cinema rightfully plays a significant role.

Aim of the Study. The primary aim of this dissertation is to identify and theoretically substantiate the characteristics of spatial model formation in Kazakh feature films across different stages of development (Soviet period and the Independence era), in order to determine key trends and propose directions for its future evolution.

Research Objectives.

- to identify and classify the main types of space most commonly encountered in both architecture and cinema, and to formulate definitions for "architectural space" and "spatial model," based on the study of scholarly and theoretical works. to define the main stages of development of spatial solutions in feature films and identify typological similarities and differences between architectural and cinematic spaces conditioned by socio-cultural processes;

- to investigate the theoretical and methodological foundations of visual narrative (or visual rhetoric) in architecture and cinema as nonverbal forms of communication, thereby selecting the appropriate analytical methods and establishing the key criteria necessary for correlating the language of architecture with cinematic language;

- to reveal the specifics of the formation of cinematic space in Kazakh films, specifically examining its dependence on the ideological context as a crucial condition for the emergence of metaphorical language in Kazakh cinema;

- to analyze the process of creating symbolic space in Kazakh cinema from the 1930s to the 1960s, specifically examining its connection with the visual representation of power and the formation of national identity;

- to characterize the specific features of the formation of metaphorical space in Kazakh films during the period of 1960–1991;

- to analyze the transformation of spatial models in the cinema of independent Kazakhstan, investigating this process as a reflection of the transition from stagnation to reinterpretation, artistic exploration, and the adoption of new visual freedom;

- to identify the specific characteristics of the formation of cinematographic space in Kazakh films, focusing on the influence of the prevalent ideological context throughout the studied periods;

- to document and analyze the divergences in the trajectories and development of spatial modeling between architecture and feature cinematography in independent Kazakhstan, thereby revealing the emergence of new visual languages and imagery in both creative spheres;

- to analyze the formation of a neo-traditional spatial model in Kazakh cinema as a reflection of the search for new national identity and cultural self-organization, and based on this analysis, to determine the main trends in the development of spatial visualization in contemporary Kazakh feature films.

The Scope of the Study. The study is delimited to the feature film space in Kazakh cinema, specifically covering the period from the formation of Soviet cinematography through the third decade of independence, focusing on the evolution of visual solutions and spatial models..

Research Focus. Spatial Models in Modern Kazakhstan: A Technique of Figurative and Metaphorical Approach

The scientific **hypothesis** of the study is that semiotic ideas about the world order have a significant influence on the visualization of the playing space in the feature films of Kazakhstan, the specificity of which is determined by historical, cultural and regional factors.

Research methods: The research employs an interdisciplinary approach that integrates historical, comparative, compositional, and semiotic methods. Architectural objects are examined through formal-stylistic, functional, and spatial analysis, while the visualization of space in cinema is studied through visual and semiotic frame analysis, including composition, lighting, colour, and editing. The material is structured across two periods—1930–1991 and 1991–2025—taking into account the distinctions between authorial, independent, and identity-forming models. The study focuses specifically on visual space and therefore does not address genre, narrative, or acting components in full.

Research boundaries: The study is limited to the period 1960–2025 and is dedicated to a comprehensive study of the visualization of space in Kazakh feature cinema, covering compositional, semiotic, and other components that form spatial perception.

Originality and Contribution: The originality of the study lies in its integrated approach to space as a core category of the visual language of architecture and cinema. For the first time, the evolution of Kazakhstan’s architectural and cinematic spatial models is traced across their historical and ideological development – from theoretical foundations to contemporary forms of representation.

The research novelty is expressed in the following contributions:

- the development of an interdisciplinary typology of spatial models and clarification of key conceptual terms;
- identification of a periodization of screen space (1930–2025) aligned with architectural transformations;
- introduction of a unified analytical framework for examining visual narration in architecture and cinema;
- demonstration of the influence of ideological paradigms on the formation of cinematic space;

- formulation of the concepts of “symbolic space” (1930s–1960s) and “metaphorical space” (1960–1991);
- analysis of the transformation of spatial models in post-Soviet cinema;
- identification of the asynchronous development of architectural and cinematic space in independent Kazakhstan;
- justification of the “neo-traditional spatial model” in contemporary cinema.

The study reveals new forms of spatial representation that shape the visual identity of Kazakhstani cinema.

The dissertation **consists** of an introduction, three chapters – each divided into three subsections with corresponding conclusions – a general conclusion, a bibliography, and appendices.

Approbation of the work.

The main findings of the dissertation have been published in four articles in journals recommended by the Committee for Quality Assurance in Science and Higher Education (MOES RK), one article in a Scopus-indexed international journal with a non-zero impact factor, and were presented at international academic conferences.

The dissertation was reviewed and recommended for defence at the extended meeting of the Department of Film History and Theory of the Kazakh National Academy of Arts named after T. Zhurgenov.

Main Propositions Submitted for Defense

1. Within the research framework, the concepts of "architectural space" and "spatial model" were formally defined and elaborated, enabling the identification of their general and specific features concerning their formation and visualization.

2. The dominance of Soviet architecture in the spatial formation of Kazakhstan resulted in the creation of a distinct semiotic code which, despite its introduced nature, became an integral part of the visual environment and significantly influenced the early stages of the development of national cinema, thereby forming a specific foundation for Kazakh identity in film.

3. Semiotic and compositional analyses of spatial models in the architecture and cinematography of Soviet Kazakhstan demonstrate their commonality, which was conditioned by the centralized ideological control of the state, contributing to the formation of a unified vector of spatial development reflecting dominant sociocultural paradigms.

4. The period of relative ideological relaxation in post-Soviet Kazakhstan facilitated the emergence of a national form in spatial solutions within both architecture and cinematography; however, the substantive development of space largely continued along previous trajectories.

5. The "Kazakh New Wave" in cinema laid the fundamental groundwork for the contemporary cinematic language of Kazakhstan, transforming and reinterpreting previously established Soviet-era spatial models through the prism of new artistic and semantic objectives.

6. The current stage of spatial model development in Kazakh cinematography is characterized by a gradual shift from the dominance of the general toward the exploration of private space and the revival of certain traditional spatial archetypes, leading to the formation of a new "neo-traditional" spatial model.

7. The formation of a unique national aesthetic in the spatial realms of narrative cinema in independent Kazakhstan, through the appropriation and reinterpretation of traditional spatial models in a modern context, is key to positioning Kazakhstan as a visual brand on the global stage in the context of globalization. This process of neo-traditional cultural formation requires further methodological analysis.